

Carol Crane's Method of Reviewing Books

I have been reviewing books for 35 years. On this page you will see the methods I use to give a book an autopsy. It is sometimes very painful to love a story and see the illustrations not match the language or to love the narrative and I am not able to understand the illustrations.

In reviewing, I try to stay away from trendy stuff, but look for the meat and potatoes of good literature. I review between 300-400 picture books a year. This is NOT a foolproof agenda, I use. There are sleepers that can get by the most experienced eye. Picture books are for all ages and all grade levels. *Let's start dissecting. Start on the Outside*

Examine the cover. Are there clues on the front to give a hint as to what the book is about? Open the book so that front and back look like one continuous sheet. Can you guess what or who the book is about? Can you guess the mood of the book? Are the illustrations whimsical? Heavy? Historically correct? Fun? Does the title give you clues? Is the title catchy?

Examine the Spine Turn the book sideways and look at the spine. With all the books spined out on a shelf, would you pick that book out? Is the title easy to read sideways?

Examine the Insides Take a look at the flap copy just inside the front cover. Read it. Does this information spark some interest in the book? Now read the back flap. Are you familiar with the author or illustrator? Do you like their style of writing and illustrating? Do you want to read their new book? Why? Is it the tricky title? Do they team together to write other genre that you can use? My method is read every book an author writes as sometimes one story can be flat, or, if one might be part of a going theme it can be just ho-hum. Most illustrators have a style that is consistent. Remember, they paint only from the words they are given.

The Nerve Center This is the copyright page. Learn who the publisher is. Is the publisher consistent in quality? Or do they go for the quick cash register sales? See what year the book has been published. Is it a reissue? How many printings has the book had (The lowest number or letter in the code is the print number)

Sometimes you will see the text font or what medium the artist used for the pictures. Look further, is there an author's note. (really helpful if there is) an illustrator's note? An index? What can be learned by reading these?

What additional information can be shared with your class?

Often, the story begins well before the words in a picture book

Pay attention to the art on the end pages. Turn the page.

Next is the half-title page. Are there clues in the art? Turn the page.

The full title page comes next, are there more clues here? Turn the page and the journey begins.

By observing all that comes before the words, we are treated to a richer story. In my sessions, I still like to demonstrate the old tried and true titles; reveal little tricks in books you may not know about; then show some of the newer titles. *I love children's literature.*