

What Makes It Quality Nonfiction?

(Based on KT Horning's chapter on informational books in From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books. New York: HarperCollins, 1997, 22-45.)

General Questions:

What would make me understand this information? What is missing? What would I already need to know about the subject before reading the book?

Authority:

Is the author an expert in the field or worked with experts in the field? Is back matter included and is it appropriate for the reading level and content of the book? Is it easy to use? Is it clear what is opinion and what is fact, ideas or theories?

Subject:

Is it a great choice of subject? Is the item timeless or dated? Highlights one aspect of the subject? Is the subject in context with the times? Do we get a sense of context in the book for that time? Is this an introduction or an exhaustive study of the subject or between? Is it a neglected subject or common?

Text:

Accessible vocabulary: everyday words? Factual and humanistic perspectives? Use of primary resources and how? Static or active characters? Do they show movement? Are the examples selected appropriate to illustrate the character/time? Are the characters' perspective/direction clear?

Illustrations:

Cut across pages? Washed out or blend in? Structured or not? Illustrations/layout parallel the topic? Does the gutter distract: Illustrations or text cut off? Does it matter?

Do the illustrations suggest a particular artistic style? Artist? Rhythm of illustrations, text and layout work together? Appropriate use of white space? Deliberate or distracting?

Picture credits?

The Design/Layout:

How is the book arranged? Order of chapters make sense? Flow? Is the scale of book and format add to the meaning? To the book's depth? Are there contrived designs or does it work? Are the table of contents thorough or complete? Is there careful attention to detail? Do colors flow throughout the book? Do they symbolize something?