

Ideas for Writing Book Reviews

Book reviews don't need to be a big deal. They can be brief and conversational, although more thorough pieces of writing are welcome as well. Here are some tips and ideas to help you write a book review.

1. If you are having a hard time starting, try writing down what you would say if you were telling a friend about the book or giving a book talk to students. You could even record yourself and then transcribe it. (One of the best reviews we ever received was just a transcription of a 4th-grader talking enthusiastically about a book he liked.)
2. Our main purpose in reading and writing reviews is to share and find out about the best books to purchase for our libraries and to recommend to students and teachers, so the review should give an opinion as to whether the book is worth someone's reading time or budget funds.
3. Ideally, a review should answer one or more of the following questions. Just writing down your answer to one or two of these questions could make a great review.
 - a. What is appealing about this book?
 - b. Who might be interested in this book? (*or not interested*)
 - c. Why should I read/purchase/recommend this book? (*or not read/purchase/recommend*)
 - d. What is the quality of the writing, illustrations, and/or information contained in this book?
 - e. What other books are similar to this book? How does it compare to them?
 - f. What is interesting, unique, original, humorous, or touching about this book?
 - g. How might this book tie to curriculum or be useful in a classroom setting?
 - h. How might this book be useful as a research source?
 - i. What reactions to this book have you heard from students?
 - j. What cues (such as an appealing cover, a jacket blurb, a recommendation, an award, or publicity) led you to read this book in the first place?
 - k. What other books, movies, music, video games, etc. would you place on a RIYL ("Recommended If You Like...") list for this book?
 - l. What are potential problems or failures of this book? (Example problems: unappealing or mis-marketed cover art; slow start; poor writing; morally questionable content; obscene language; reading level too high or low for age group; etc.) Why is the book of value despite its problems, or do the problems lead you to not recommend it at all?
4. A teaser or summary is a great and effective hook to get potential readers interested in a book, but a good review is not just a summary; it should evaluate or recommend the book in some way.