

HOW TO CHOOSE HIGH QUALITY PICTUREBOOKS

5 ACTION STEPS FOR CHOOSING HIGH QUALITY PICTUREBOOKS:



1. Start By Reviewing Your Library!

Whether it's your classroom library or a bookshelf at home, **ask yourself:**

- **Who is represented in my library?** Consider the characters in the book itself, and the author/illustrator, too!
- **Is this a GOOD BOOK?** Do I enjoy reading it? Will kids enjoy reading it? Whose story is centered and how? Is it a joyful story?
- **What is my purpose in owning/reading this book?** Is it to teach myself or kids something? Does it focus on a certain topic or skill? Is this something my audience needs/wants to know?
- **Where are the gaps?** Once you've reviewed your library, consider whose voice is **not** present and why.

2. Always Pre-Read Books.

We recommend judging a book by its cover and its contents! **Ask yourself:**

- **What is my first reaction when reading this book?** Is it joy? sadness? anger? confusion? Why?
- **If and how are characters from non-dominant identities portrayed in the illustrations and plot?** Are they the hero or the villain? Are they tokenized or central? Do I see their full selves - their talents, strengths, and joy?
- **Is it a book that moves toward change?** Does the story empower the characters and/or the reader? Is it actionable? Do readers connect to the story? Does it encourage them to act against injustice?

3. Consider What You Know...

...and what you don't know.

- **Don't ignore your gut.** If you have a reaction to a book, spend time with those feelings to understand why. It could mean you need to do some thinking, learning, and planning before you're ready to read with kids
- **Who is the story for?** Who are you reading the book to? What do they already know about the topic? What do they need to know? How old are they? Does this change if and how you read?
- **Do you know your history?** Will you know if a book is historically accurate? Does the book reflect lived experiences, even if it is fictional?

4. Look Across Your Library.

How does each book fit into your collection? **Ask Yourself:**

- Are all your history narratives rooted in oppression?
- Are different identities represented across lived experiences?
- Do all your books featuring characters from nondominant identities tell the same story or do they vary?
What is your **JOY** ratio?

For every 1 book about oppression, there should be 19 about JOY!

5. Do YOUR Work.

Always prioritize your own readiness and learning (or unlearning) needs before choosing books for change.

