GUIDE TO GOOD BOOKS
Criteria for selecting quality children's books

PREFACE

Choosing 'good' books for children has always been a challenging task. Choosing them on a mass scale is daunting since enormous funds, rules and procedures are involved. One of the consequences of the Right to Education Act of 2009 is that in every state and district, officials in the government educational establishment are required to select books for libraries that are now mandated by law in each of the 13.6 lakh schools. This is a tough task! On what grounds should one book be preferred over another? A multicolour book with big font may still be unsuitable, while another that looks plain, and is only in black and white, may hold fascination for children. Some books seem designed to support children's learning or to get them 'do' things, while others are important because they have something very 'unique' about them.

> *So, given that only a few hundred titles may be selected from thousands on offer, exactly how is one to choose a good book, year after year after year?*

It was to focus on this question that a national consultation involving experts from institutions, authors, editors, publishers, librarians, educators and those working to further the interests of children in governmental as well as non-governmental sectors, was organized by the National Book Trust, India, with active involvement of the Publishers' Action Group (PAG-E), at Sonapani (Village Satauli, Near Mukteshwar, Dist. Nainital, Uttarakhand), from 26 to 29 September 2012. (The list of participants attached as an annexure.) Building on the efforts made earlier, the group came together to address the need identified and develop a contemporary document. Subir Shukla, Principal Coordinator at IGNUS-erg, facilitated the discussion and drafted this report.

The primary objective was to attend to the immediate and urgent need of those – officials, experts and teachers – charged with the responsibility of procuring books for thousands of schools using limited and precious public resources. The discussion was informed by a consideration of the *likely readers* – in the form of government school children, usually from less privileged sections of society, and with a different kind of exposure than that assumed by many writers. In addition, the curricular framework and the pedagogical requirements – both of which are also mandated in RTE and need to be supported – were also taken into account.

The Role of a Library as envisaged under the RTE

Before examining the criteria for books to be included in the library, it would be useful to look at the question:

> *Why does the RTE include a library as a*
> *mandatory requirement for every school?*

A library is, of course, useful in itself – but in the case of government schools it is even more so. Our children often come from backgrounds where they do not have sufficient educational support at home. Thus one of the first roles of the library is to *help children overcome the disadvantages they face* – by providing them access to plenty of reading and learning material other than the textbooks.

Such access would empower children through exposure, learning, and the holistic development of their personalities. This is why the RTE sees a library as an intrinsic part of the school. The following points elaborate on how a library will further the education of children:

Enabling and supporting the learning of reading

- The development of reading requires more than just the primer and the textbooks. The ability to read grows only if there is exposure to a variety of worthwhile reading material.
- Reading aloud from books is the best way to expose children to the world of books when, at the age of 5 or 6, they join class 1. They have fairly limited reading ability but their vocabulary, imagination and thinking capacity are significant. Thus, they can enjoy, understand and engage with wide variety of books if these are read aloud to them.
- As children begin independent reading, a library provides the opportunity to connect meaning, sound and shapes, thus enabling children to make the vital breakthrough that sets them on to the road to reading. (At this stage they need material with plenty of pictures and interesting, easy-to-grasp text that incorporates elements such as repetition.)
- Later, as children encounter more and varied material, they become fluent readers and learn to handle different kinds and levels of text. This naturally feeds into their ability to understand other subjects such as science and social sciences. The library thus emerges as a crucial resource towards making quality education possible.

Exposure to and connecting with the wider world

- Children are full of curiosity, always seeking answers to their numerous questions – many of which can actually be answered through books in the library! By using a library well, a teacher can help children become independent learners, who seek out their own learning and even construct their own understanding (as mandated by the NCF 05).

- However, extensive reading goes beyond this by helping children connect with the wider world beyond their immediate environment. A well-selected collection of books balances between 'the local and the global', and exposes children to the finest reading material from different parts of the country and, indeed, the world. Different geographies, cultures, realms of inquiry – and other worlds beyond the known and the immediate – are set open before them. (This of course does not mean bringing in 'general knowledge' type of books about the world beyond one's experience.) Along with that, books stimulate the affective domains, the world of 'imagining' beyond one's experience so critical to the development of creative processes.

Enabling all-round, holistic development of children

- Finally, a carefully identified set of books can help develop many faculties in children that are emphasized in the curriculum but are difficult to formally work upon in the classroom. As already mentioned, books provide children an opportunity to imagine and fantasize, empathize with the views of those very different from themselves, understand problems and learn to solve them, develop the ability to think and reflect, and become sensitive persons – in other words, well-rounded human beings.

In this manner – by facilitating the learning of reading, providing exposure and enabling all-round growth – a library helps fulfill the basic goal of education. Selection of books – and their use – should naturally be informed by this understanding!

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Chapter 1

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

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Section 1: Main Considerations

Any discussion on how to identify and select a 'good' book leads to literally hundreds of points, but making the correct choice on the basis of numerous factors is almost impossible! Therefore, for selecting books, it seems necessary to apply only a *limited* number of significant considerations, and apply only the most crucial criteria within those.

We followed this approach in the guidelines here as they are intended to be *practical* and *reliable*. The guidelines also take into account the situation of the government schools, the system and the needs of those involved in the selection.

This section informs you of the following main considerations while the subsequent sections detail them out:
- Forms and genres covered
- 'Avoidables'
- Criteria for selection
- Cross-cutting considerations
- Reading levels

Forms and genres covered: These guidelines have been designed to help you select appropriate *fiction, poetry, and non-fiction* across reading-levels. However, these do not include all the forms and genres, and during the selection process you might also want to look at:
- Picture books without words, and comics.
- More descriptive material, activity books, and collections – especially for 11-14 year olds (or Level 3 as indicated ahead).
- Collections, e.g. of poems, but of the required level, yet with variety.
- Magazines.

Avoidables are the undesirable elements that should disqualify any book from being selected! Since you have to go through hundreds of books in a short time, it might be easier to begin by deciding what to weed out – and this can be done quickly and without much difficulty, following the list of avoidables. These are common sense points that are easy to spot and it would be best to short-list the books using these before moving on to the criteria for selection.

Five-point criteria for selection were found to be most useful for picking the right books. These criteria need to be applied when the books have been short-listed after weeding out the 'avoidables':

1. Theme, contents and the degree of engagement
2. Plot (including characters) and structure
3. Language used
4. Illustrations, Design and Production
5. Values

These are the *key criteria*, and for any book selected the answer to each of the following questions must be 'Yes':

1. Are the theme and contents child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?
2. Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?
3. Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?
4. Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?
5. Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?

You'll agree that you need more details and information before you can answer these questions. That's why, what these categories include and why they are important is explained in the Section 2 ahead. And, the details to be considered are explained in Chapter 2, along with examples of books that meet the desired criteria – most of these are well-known books and you will be able to see in them the qualities highlighted. Going through these, and applying them on a few books, will help you answer the five questions quickly, without taking much time.

Cross-cutting considerations are those that run across these five categories, and include:
- Whether the material will work in the context of the child, and whether it is culturally sensitive (that is, it does not disrespect any social group).
- At the same time, the intention is not that children should remain limited to their context – they deserve to be exposed to the best in the world. Many books contain material that can be understood and related with by children across different cultures and geographies.
- The degree to which a book enables children to make connections is important (e.g. takes them from the known to the unknown, without a gap; or introduces children to other parts of the world beyond the known world, in a manner in which she can connect and compare).

These considerations have been embedded in the five key criteria.

Reading levels: Three broad levels have been thought of and indicated wherever appropriate, to help selectors identify appropriate books according to the level of children they are meant for:
- Level 1: Early Readers – Classes 1 to 3
- Level 2: Fluent Readers – Classes 3 to 5 (Class 3 included here as well)
- Level 3: Advanced Readers – Classes 6 to 8

(<u>Note</u>: These are indicative levels and children within these might have different reading levels and preferences.)

Section 2: Key Categories of Criteria – What and Why

1.   Theme, contents and the degree of engagement

What the book contains – the theme, the topic and the contents – are obviously the first aspects to be looked at. If the contents are such that children cannot relate with or understand, or find too easy or boring, the book should certainly not be selected!

The material should appeal to children and attract them, help them form a connection with the book. The themes and contents should be such that let children engage with the book and learn new things, including going beyond their own geographical area. Interesting contents tend to trigger children's imagination, and help them relate with a variety of characters and even a whole new world that enlarges their horizons. This goes beyond and helps in the emotional development, enabling children to look at their world with care and concern; generate rich relationships, and ability to see *from others' point of view, or go beyond one's own limited perspective.*

What would help children relate with the book easily and increase the degree of engagement? Chapter 2 contains the criteria in detail and answers this question.

> *Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':*
> *Are the theme and contents child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?*

2.   Plot (including characters) and structure

The manner in which the contents are sequenced and arranged has a very important role to play for the book to make sense, generate curiosity and interest, and 'satisfy' the reader.

In the case of fiction, a clear 'beginning', 'middle', and 'end' help children understand the flow and relate with the book. While the beginning arouses curiosity, the middle part of the book presents twists and turns and generates suspense, and the end then ties everything together in a satisfying manner. The presence of a character that children can identify with, interesting dialogue, humour, evocative descriptions and exciting action, all combine to make a book that children love to read again and again.

In the case of non-fiction, it is not merely a list of facts that is desired (as is often the case with 'general knowledge' books). The topic needs to be treated from the children's point of view and its relevance established. The structure is therefore crucial in non-fiction, too, in order to ensure that the reader's curiosity is aroused,

with interesting facts presented in a linked manner, leading to understanding and insight.

> ### *Key question 2 that must be answered as 'Yes':*
> *Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?*

3. Language used

When a child engages with a book, she is learning to make meaning out of all that it contains – the printed words, the pictures, the design, and the various ways in which the writer and illustrator have tried to communicate. The text contains thoughts, feelings and descriptions expressed in words, and the goal is that children should experience the pleasure of recreating these in their minds, being able to think about them, and have their own views.

All this begins when the child actually holds the book in her own hands. We can help children in this journey by providing graded literature, suited to their levels, which would generate reading. To keep things simple, we have graded readers into only three categories at present – early readers, fluent readers, and advanced readers.

The guidelines look at the richness and diversity of language used, the degree of innovation and the manner in which the language makes itself 'easy to understand' for the reader at that level.

> ### *Key question 3 that must be answered as 'Yes':*
> *Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?*

4. Illustration, Design and Production

Illustrations are an inseparable element of the books for children and are the first thing that appeals to children. Visually attractive, these help pre-school children 'read' the book even before they learn to read. Once the child begins to read, the illustrations help 'decode' the text, complementing, supplementing and expanding it. In fact, illustrations are critical in enabling the child to enter the world described. Nicely illustrated and designed books also draw children, making them want to go through them, thus sowing the seeds of a life-long relationship. But, as children grow older and become advanced readers (Level 3), their dependence on illustrations reduces and they are able to enjoy a wide variety of books with longer texts.

Production, of course, determines whether the book is affordable (high production quality at low cost being the desired goal), durable, as well as readable / legible.

> ### *Key question 4 that must be answered as 'Yes':*
> *Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?*

5. Values

Books have a profound influence on the development of values and morals in children. The kind of world that they portray, what they appear to value, and what they get children to think about – are the aspects that impact on children's development.

There is a need to realize that many groups – and their world-view and perspectives – are often ignored in children's literature. For instance, girls, tribal or *dalit* children, children with special needs, working children and those living in urban slums, don't get adequate / proper coverage in the mainstream literature. Therefore, it would be important to include books that do incorporate their world and are inclusive in nature. On the other hand, books that display any kind of bias or contain anything against Indian Constitution should naturally be avoided.

Moral development does not take place simply by being told what is right and wrong, but by being given the opportunity to think about the issue. The collection of books in the library, as a whole, should therefore reflect diversity – different kinds of environments, peoples, events, issues and points of view. This will truly help our children develop a sense of right and wrong, along with the ability (and the courage) to take the right decisions when the time comes.

> ***Key question 5 that must be answered as 'Yes':***
> *Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?*

THE OVERALL COLLECTION

Should comprise the following:
- Sufficient fiction and non-fiction for different age groups, and a balance between fantasy and realistic material.
- Variety in the nature of books selected, including an assortment of the forms (genres) and language usage. The non-fiction should include biographies, travel books, activity books, etc.
- Plays, poetry, and information & reference books such as dictionaries, atlases and encyclopedias.
- 'Read-Aloud' books and 'BIG' books for introducing early readers to books.
- Material for special needs children, e.g. braille books, or audio books that can be used with mobile phones, for children with limited sight.
- Some books with positive portrayal of girls, tribal or *dalit* children, children with special needs, working children and those living in urban slums.

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Chapter 2

THE CRITERIA IN DETAIL

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How to Use the Criteria

You don't need to go through the entire list given here every time you assess a book. In the beginning, you need to understand each of the sections and sub-sections, and later, you can use the SELECTION TOOL provided later. In fact, with practice, you will find that using the list of avoidables to sift through the books, and then asking just the *five key questions* serves the purpose. This is because there are only *three steps* in ensuring reliable yet rapid selection.

Step 1:	Check books against 'avoidables' to weed out the substandard / unwanted titles.
Step 2:	Use the five key questions to decide whether the shortlisted books are desirable: • Most of the five key questions must be answered as 'Yes'. • And for that, most of the points under each question must be answered as 'Yes'.
Step 3:	Finally, examine the desirable books against the criteria for the *three levels* to decide whether the books are appropriate for the level you are making the selection.

The following sections detail these out.

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Step 1: Remove 'Avoidable' Books

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In every selection process, you are faced with thousands of titles when only a few hundred need to be selected. To deal with this, in the first instance, it would be advisable to quickly weed out the substandard / unwanted books. For this, we present below a list of shortcomings that need to be avoided. The presence of these deficiencies implies that the book is unsuitable for children. Therefore, even if a book has a few of these, it should be rejected. This will leave you with a much smaller list of shortlisted books to make a proper selection.

The sub-points under each avoidable will help you make the right decision.

*1. Do the theme and contents contain any **bias**? If yes, avoid the book.*
- Bias which results in an act of discrimination: rural-urban, class, caste, colour, religion.
- Negativity that is glorified: violence, revenge, ridicule, cruelty, (ridicule and stereotyping of) community / professions.
- Stereotyping or glorification of any specific groups.

- Derogatory portrayal of the gender, social-status, region, religion, caste, etc. in the illustrations.

*2. Is the **plot weak or illogical**? If yes, avoid the book.*
- Plot lacks suspense and has very predictable outcome.
- Illogical events / sequence that make comprehension difficult.
- Stereotyped characterizations and formal or unrealistic dialogue.
- Inappropriate events for the readers' age.

*3. Is the **language** used **inappropriate** for children? If yes, avoid the book.*
- More emphasis given to 'purity' of language rather than comprehensibility.
- Artificial and stiff language, rather than language that has a 'flow'.
- Language not engaging, and in fact, quite boring.
- Mismatch in the levels of the reader and the language used.

*4. Are the **typescript and type-size inappropriate,** and the **illustrations and design unsuitable or of poor quality**? If yes, avoid the book.*
- Typescript should be reader-friendly; type-size should neither be too small, nor unnecessarily very large.
- Illustrations / photographs should not
- Be static, crowded, crude, gory
- Have any inconsistency with regard to the size, proportion, placement, colours.
- There should be no overlapping of the text and illustrations / ground colour that compromises with the legibility.
- Text should fit-in within the inner pages, not flowing over to the covers.

*5. Are there major **faults with the production**? If yes, avoid the book.*
- The printing of the text and illustrations should not be smudged, diffused, or have uneven inking.
- The trimming of the book should not be crooked, cutting into the margins.
- In saddle-stitched books, the pins should be well-placed at the fold, and should not stick out so as to hurt the young reader.

*6. Does the book **preach morals** without giving the child a chance to think?*
Books that have a 'moral of the story' overtly stated should be avoided. Books that 'preach' in an overt fashion should also be avoided. This is because moral development is a complex process. Children learn through observation, experience, reflection, and not by being 'told'. Therefore, the books need to give the child opportunity to question, enquire and learn.

*7. Does the book **misrepresent** or **look down upon marginalized groups**?*
Avoid books that deal with characters / settings from the marginalized communities in a patronizing, superficial manner. Such books end up reinforcing stereotypes and invoke pity or patronage, which is the very opposite of what is intended.

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IN SUMMARY

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

Avoid a book if you find yourself answering 'Yes' to any of the following:

> *1. Do the theme and contents contain any bias? If yes, avoid the book.*
> *2. Is the plot weak or illogical? If yes, avoid the book.*
> *3. Is the language used inappropriate for children? If yes, avoid the book.*
> *4. Are the typescript and type-size inappropriate, and the illustrations and design unsuitable or of poor quality?*
> *5. Are there major faults with the production?*
> *6. Does the book preach morals without giving the child a chance to think?*
> *7. Does the book misrepresent or look down upon marginalized groups?*

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Step 2: Identify 'Desirable' Books

The five key criteria mentioned below should now be used to decide whether a book is fit to be included in your library collection. The sub-sections here would help you understand the key questions in some detail.

1. Theme, Contents and the Degree of Engagement

> *Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':*
> ***Are the theme and contents child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?***

The following will help you answer this question:

*1. Can the children **in your region** relate with the book?*
- Does it connect with the level of awareness that the children have?
- Is it possible to relate with it immediately?
- Does it have local relevance along with universal appeal, i.e. is it a theme that can be understood (and related with) by children in other places as well? (<u>Note</u>: Local relevance / context should not be interpreted in a narrow way. If a good book deals with authentic childhood experience in an engaging way, children from multiple backgrounds can relate to it. Example: *Idgah* by Premchand.)

*2. Does the book **stimulate curiosity and engagement**?*

- Does it **arouse curiosity** in the reader and sustain it for most part?
- Does it tell something new to children?
- Does it trigger imagination?
- Will it make children readily **laugh**? Does it contain a sense of fun?
- Does it contain **adventure** (action), a spirit of discovery, or an element of wonder and surprise, of finding something new?
- Does it encourage a spirit of inquiry?

*3. Does the book **generate emotional engagement** in the reader?*
- Does it arouse sensitivity, care and concern about their immediate surroundings (friends, animals, family, nature, environment)? Or even beyond the immediate environment?
- Does it have aspects related to emotional bonding with the family and friends?

Some **examples** of books that meet these criteria: Premchand's *Idgah, The Talkative Tortoise, Kajari Gai* series of picture books, *Pehalwan ji, Khichdi, Pippi Lambemoze* (picture book), *Mahagiri, Bonu aur Salim, Beej – the Seed, Amma – Sab ki Pyari Amma, Kabuliwala, Kitni Pyari Hai Ye Duniya.*

Non-fiction: While the above criteria would apply to all books, in the case of non-fiction, you should also check the following:
- *Is it **correct** and **factual**?*
- *Is it supported by means that make it **interesting** as well as **easy to understand**?*
- engaging illustrations or photos, visual support;
- small chunks, information density appropriate (not overloaded with information, or technical jargon);
- information conveyed in different formats – drama, travelogue – avoiding contrived presentation through a story (it is neither fiction nor non-fiction).

IN SUMMARY

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

Are the theme and contents child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?

*1. Can the children **in your region** relate with the book?*
*2. Does the book **stimulate curiosity and engagement**?*
*3. Does the book **generate emotional engagement** in the reader?*

Non-fiction
*1. Is it **correct** and **factual**?*
*2. Is it supported by means that make it **interesting** as well as **easy to understand**?*

2. Plot and Structure

Key question 2 that must be answered as 'Yes':
Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

*1. Is there a **clear plot structure** and has it been **well-utilized**?*
- Does the **Plot** generate pleasure, involvement and thinking on issues?
- Does the **beginning** generate curiosity, and introduce characters and the main issue?
- Does the **middle** bring in greater suspense? Does it lead to a **climax?**
- Does the **end** provide a satisfying resolution?
- Is there a **logical** sequence in the plot?

*2. Are there **devices** that make the reader identify with the book and enhance their **interest**?*
- Are the **characters** interesting to the reader? Are they lively, and can the reader connect with them?
- Are the characters credible? Does the main character achieve his or her goal through own efforts?
- Have **humour**, evocative **descriptions** and / or exciting **action** been used?

*3. If the book is **non-fiction**, is it **structured** so as to enable **involvement** and **understanding**?*
   (In non-fiction too there is a 'plot' in the sense of a **structure.)**
- Does the non-fiction text **generate curiosity**?
- Is there a **sequence** which provides a **flow**, and makes the reader turn the page?

IN SUMMARY

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

*1. Is there a **clear plot structure** and has it been **well-utilized**?*
*2. Are there **devices** that make the reader identify with the book and enhance their **interest**?*
*3. If the book is **non-fiction**, is it **structured** so as to enable **involvement** and **understanding**?*

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3. Language Used in the Book

Key question 3 that must be answered as 'Yes':
Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

*1. Is the **language** used such that makes the book really **interesting** for the reader?*
- Does the use of language feel natural? Does it have a flow? Does it feel communicative?
- Are there newness / freshness of expression, usage, of 'telling' of the story? Is there innovative use of the language?

*2. Is the language used likely to help **develop the child's language**, expand her vocabulary?*
- Does the language promote the possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary?
- Does it give new words in context?
- Does it relate pictures with the words?
- Does it give word meanings?
- Does it make it possible for the reader to understand new words on her own?
- Are higher literary devices such as idioms and metaphors used?
- Does the language – occasionally – include local words?
  [This can enrich the language; please don't remove a book on the ground that it doesn't have 'standard' language.]

*3. If the book is meant for those learning to read, is it designed to **enable learning of reading**?*
  This is one of the more difficult things to assess! To find out if this is the case, look at the following. If some or more of these are visible, the answer would be 'Yes'.
- Children learning to read, need a lot of cues and support to help them *successfully predict / guess* what is printed. The pictures used, a degree of repetition, familiar vocabulary, use of new words in such a way that the familiar words help understand them – are some of the means used to enable the learning of reading.
- Natural and short sentences, which cannot be further broken down into smaller meaningful units, with minimum use of punctuation signs, help greatly.
- Repetition is good, at various linguistic levels – word and phrase levels, at the consonant-vowel combination.

*4. If the book is meant for early readers (Classes 1 to 3) does it take into account their **level and needs**?*
- Is the vocabulary age- and/or level-appropriate? E.g. are the longer words supported by illustrations to enable guessing?
- Are the sentences short and simple?
- Is the grammatical construction simple?
- Does the language flow naturally?
- Is there repetition of words, structures, sentences?
- Is there word play, rhyming, or sound play?

- If the book is in the second language (such as English), are the verbs in present tense?

*5. If the book is meant for fluent readers (Classes 3 to 5), is it designed to enable them to reach the **next level** in their reading?*
- Does the book have more robust vocabulary? Are the new words introduced related in some ways with the words they already know (e.g. synonyms)?
- Has care been taken to ensure that not too many ideas or new things are introduced all at once? That is, the idea density (ratio of concepts to words) is something that readers of this level will be able to manage.
- Does the complexity of the plot match the language supporting it?
- Does the book challenge the reader through the use of higher literacy devices (e.g. idiom), or does it make interesting use of language where there's a gap between apparent meaning and actual meaning? Will the reader experience the beauty of language on reading the book?

A very good **example** of such qualities is *Sahaj Paath* of Rabindranath Tagore.

*6. If the book is meant for advanced readers (Classes 6 to 8), has it been designed to **expand** their language awareness and usage?*

Many of the earlier points would apply here as well, though of course at a level that is more advanced.
- Is the language natural, does it have flow, and is it communicative?
- Is there newness of expression, of usage, of 'telling' of the story? Is there innovative use of the language?
- Is there is a possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary (through means mentioned earlier)?
- Have higher literary devices, including idioms, similes and metaphors been used?
- Once again, if a few local words (common in the region) have been used, please don't remove the book on the ground that it does not have 'standard' language.

For Non-Fiction
- Is the vocabulary according to the theme and content?
- Are new concepts explained in a way that the intended reader can understand?
- Are new concepts and ideas introduced gradually and in a logical sequence?

Note: Along with fantasy, one form that is very valuable for young children has to do with humorous word-play and 'whimsy' – often described as 'nonsense'. This does not mean nonsense in the usual sense! Instead, it refers to a specific way of writing that stretches both meaning and language, and is very, very vital for children! If you come across a book that has deliberately been written in this style, please do value it.

Some examples of books with excellent language usage:
Early readers: *Naav Chali, Billi ke Bachche, Roopa Hathi, Mita aur Uske Jadui Joote, Tota*

Fluent readers: *Mahagiri,* Safdar's poems*, Vinod Kumar Shukla's *Chhapparvali Jhopadi, Bauna Pahad,* Prayag Shukla's collection of poems *Dhoop Khili*

IN SUMMARY

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

*1. Is the **language** used such that makes the book really **interesting** for the reader?*
*2. Is the language used likely to help **develop the child's language**, expand her vocabulary?*
3. If the book is meant for
- *those learning to read, is it designed to **enable learning of reading**?*
- *Early readers (Classes 1 to 3), does it take into account their **level and needs**?*
- *Fluent readers (Classes 3 to 5), is it designed to enable them to reach the **next level** in their reading?*
- *Advanced readers (Classes 6 to 8), has it been designed to **expand** their language awareness and usage?*

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4. Illustrations, Design and Production

Key question 4 that must be answered as 'Yes':
Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

1. *Is the book **well-illustrated and designed**?*
   - Books in picture book format: Do these have illustrations, preferably in colour?
   - Are the illustrations detailed, imaginative and relevant to the text, complementing, supplementing and enlarging it?
   - Is there a proper balance between the text and illustrations, with the illustrations placed in such a manner so as not to disturb the flow of the text?
   - Does the page also provide visual relief, with white space or light / pastel colours?
   - Chapter books: Do these have at least one line drawing / sketch in each chapter?

   Examples: *Kajari Gai* series of picture books, *Why-Why Girl, Lali aur Usaka Ghoda, Gaon ka Bachcha, Adiyal Gaya, Rangon se Mujhe Pyar Hai, Mangu ka Lattu, Rang hi Rang*

2. *Are the illustrations for **non-fiction** books **authentic** and **supportive**?*

- Books for information and knowledge (on sports, science, etc., and books of knowledge and encyclopedias) must have illustrations, photographs, sketches and / or diagrams that are authentic and accurate support to the text.

Examples: *Time-to-Discover* readers, *Usborne First Encyclopedias*

3. *Are the typescript, type-size, setting and layout of the **text appealing and reader-friendly**?*
   - Are the typescript and the type-size appropriate for the young readers, and the theme/content?
   - Does the text have sufficient inter-word and inter-sentence spaces?

4. *Are the **paper / card / board** of the required quality and GSM?*
   Paper for illustrated books (minimum for reasonable production):
   - Inner pages, 80gsm white paper / 90gsm art paper, no see-through.
   - Card cover, 220-250gsm coated board or art card.
   - Thermal lamination – matt or gloss – on the card cover.

5. *Is the **binding** strong and appropriate?*
   - Binding:
   - Below 64 pgs, saddle-stitched, 2 staples
   - Over 64 pgs, central-stitched, and perfect binding
   - Reference books such as dictionaries and encyclopedias may have hardback binding with board and paper paster.

IN SUMMARY

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

*1. Is the book **well-illustrated**?*
*2. Are the illustrations for **non-fiction** books **authentic** and **supportive**?*
*3. Are the typescript, type-size, setting and layout of the **text appealing and reader-friendly**?*
*4. Are the **paper / card / board** of the required quality and GSM?*
*5. Is the **binding** appropriate and strong?*

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5. Values

Key question 5 that must be answered as 'Yes':
Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?

1. *Does the book **encourage** a child to **think**, question, discover, examine values, assumptions for themselves?*
   Examples: *Roopa Haathi, Chintu ki Topi*

2. *Does the book handle the issues involved in a **sensitive** manner?*
   - Does it deal with difficult themes (e.g. death or conflict) in a sensitive manner, from a child's perspective?
     Examples: *Emperor Akbar, Aditi ki Sahas Kathaen, Panchhi Pyara, Mukund and Riaz, Barasta Tarbooj*
   - Does the book recognize struggle and dilemma children go through as part of their growing up, and development of the sense of right and wrong?
     (Books which recognize temptation, greed, jealously and struggle children go through are likely to be far more impactful than books that tell children that being greedy is bad.)
     Examples: *Apni Apni Pasand, Amma Pyari Amma, Juee Masi ki Beti, Sweetest Mango*

3. *Does the book deal with the **marginalized communities** in **authentic, non-patronizing** and **non-stereotypical manner**?*
   - Does the book question / challenge stereotypes that are disempowering for the marginalized communities? Is stereotyping of roles, communities, relationships avoided or challenged in an engaging way? Does the book help a child see things from multiple perspectives, some which challenge conventional beliefs?
     Examples: *Bonu aur Salim, Sorry Best Friend, Bhimayana, Pippi, Pappa ki Mu*, Few from *Girlstar* series, *Ten, Why Are You Afraid to Hold My Hand?, Hamare Samaya me Shram ki Garima*
   - Does the book reflect authentic, lived reality of children from diverse backgrounds?
     These children are present in government schools even though curriculum and children's literature does not always reflect their presence. We do need to include such books as they can be a powerful tool to help children understand the experiences of others very different from themselves, to relate to the plurality around them, and learn that there isn't only *one* kind of child and childhood that may be seen as being normal and desirable.
     Examples: *Barish ka Ek Din, I Am a Cat, Tilling the Pot, My Friend the Sea, Ju's Story*

IN SUMMARY

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

> *Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?*
>
> *1. Does the book **encourage** a child to **think**, question, discover, examine values, assumptions for themselves?*
> *2. Does the book handle the issues involved in a **sensitive** manner?*
> *3. Does the book deal with the **marginalized communities** in **authentic, non-patronizing** and **non-stereotypical manner**?*

Step 3: Select According to the Level

Now that you have shortlisted the desirable books, the final step is to see if they are appropriate for the level they are intended. The following section points out the differences between the three levels for which you will be selecting.

Key question that must be answered as 'Yes':
Is the book appropriate for the <u>level</u> for which it is being selected?

1. **Theme, Contents and the Degree of Engagement**

-   The themes suggested below are illustrative, and by no means exhaustive.
-   With levels, the themes may not change, but would get broader.
-   Coverage will go on widening with level, starting from close to home and immediate environment.
-   The depth of treatment and complexity, too, would change.

Note: Activity books are not workbooks, but those that suggest activities to be done (e.g. experiments, origami, etc.)

Level 1 – Classes 1 to 3	Level 2 – Classes 3 to 5	Level 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Lot of activity books; more animal stories, family, home, community; rhyme and rhythm based poetry Picture books: - Themes around self, home, family - Familiar themes of comfort - Stories that can be 'told'	Activity books; descriptive poems Stories which encourage reflection; themes spread out in expanding circles Themes of - Relationships - Humour - Adventure and Mystery	Chapter books on more challenging and diverse issues; raising questions, inviting enquiry Themes of - Adolescence, gender, sexuality - Conflict and resolution - Friendship - Humour

- Myths, simple fantasies - Rhyme and Rhythm - Stories with themes of care, affection - About animals, nature - Which respond to their curiosity - Song books Non-fiction: - About sun, moon, stars, mountains - Environment - Simple plays, based on small stories - Stories with role play - Funny books	Scary Stories Stories based on real life with greater complexity - Historical themes - Simple geographies Non-fiction: - About cultural heritage - Dictionaries for self-use - Atlases - Reference material to begin project work	- Nature - Emotional turmoil - Ghosts - Heroes - Suspense Non-fiction: - Reference books and related books to enhance and enrich curriculum - Biographies - Travel - Adventure - Environment The focus on emotional engagement would change from the family to friends.

2. **Plot and Structure**

Level 1 – Classes 1 to 3	Level 2 – Classes 3 to 5	Level 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Basic characters from immediate surroundings, fantasy, animal characters Simple, single incident plots related to self-experience	Children as characters Greater number of complications Other issues / concerns brought in More real life and adventure comes in (leaving the family to go beyond)	More than one sub-plot possible Larger number of characters, more varied More plot devices used (e.g. foreshadowing, twists) Open ended, more ambiguous or gray May have many locations, time zones, greater spread

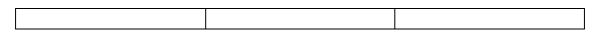|		over geography and time.

3. <u>**Language used**</u>

<u>Level 1 – Classes 1 to 3</u>	<u>Level 2 – Classes 3 to 5</u>	<u>Level 3 – Classes 6 to 8</u>
Must have - age- / level-appropriate vocabulary - longer words supported by illustrations to enable guessing - short and simple sentences - simple grammatical construction - natural language flow - repetition of words, structures, sentences - word play, rhyming, sound play	Must have - language natural, with flow, communicative - use of idioms, metaphors (higher literary devices) - possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary - newness of expression, usage, 'telling' of the story, innovative use of the language Desirable to accommodate local / child's own words Books in English, the verbs should be in present tense.	Must have - language natural, with flow, communicative - use of idioms, metaphors (higher literary devices) - possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary - newness of expression, usage, 'telling' of the story, innovative use of the language Desirable to accommodate local / child's own words The collection of books should expose to a wide variety of nuanced language usage through a wide variety of forms and genres.

<u>Levels 2 & 3 Non-Fiction</u>
- The vocabulary should be according to the theme and content.
- New concepts should be explained in a way that the intended reader can understand.
- New concepts and ideas should be introduced gradually and in a logical sequence.

4. <u>**Illustrations, Design and Production**</u>

Level 1 – Classes 1 to 3	Level 2 – Classes 3 to 5	Level 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Illustrations should occupy 75% or more of the space Type size: English 16pts / Hindi 18pts, or more Number of pages: - Picture books Min. 12pp / Max. 32pp + Cover Examples: *Rangon se Mujhe Pyar Hai, "Time-to-Discover"* series	Illustrations should occupy 60% or more of the space Type size: English 14pts / Hindi 16pts, or more Number of pages: - Picture books Min. 24pp / Max. 64pp + Cover - Chapter books Min. 48pp / Max. 96pp + Cover Examples: *The Mystery of Blue, Ayesha*	Limited illustration required as grown up children find too much of it childish. Type size: English 12pts / Hindi 14pts, or more Not possible to specify the number of pages as children at this age read just about anything. Examples: *Harry Potter, Vritton ki Duniya, Tasviron me Gandhi, Narmada, My Facebook Friends*

5. **Values**

Levels are not indicated – values may be considered to be embedded in the aspects above. At no age books which are attempting to teach or preach values are desirable. More complex treatment of values is more suitable for older children.

SELECTION TOOL

| Step 1: Remove Avoidable Books |
| Avoid a book if the answer to any of the following questions is 'Yes'. |

1. Do the theme and contents contain any bias?	2. Is the plot weak or illogical?	3. Is the language used inappropriate for children?	4. Are the typescript and type-size inappropriate, or the illustrations and design unsuitable or of poor quality? 5. Are there major faults with the production?	6. Does the book preach morals without giving the child a chance to think? 7. Does the book misrepresent or look down upon marginalized groups?

Step 2: Identify 'Desirable' Books

1. **Theme, Contents and the Degree of Engagement**: Are the theme and content child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?

1. Can the children **in your region** relate with the book?	2. Does the book **stimulate curiosity and engagement**?	3. Does the book **generate emotional engagement** in the reader?	4. If non-fiction, is the information **correct** and **factual**?	5. If non-fiction, is the text supported by means that make it **interesting** as well as **easy to understand**?

2. **Plot and Structure**: Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

1. Is there a **clear plot structure**	2. Are there **devices** that make the reader identify with the book and enhance their **interest**?	3. If the book is **non-fiction**, is it **structured** so as to enable **involvement** and

and has it been **well-utilized**?		**understanding**?

3. **Language used:** Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

1. Is the **language** used such that makes the book really **interesting** for the reader?	2. Is the language used likely to help **develop the child's language**, expand her vocabulary?	3. If the book is meant for - those learning to read, is it designed to **enable learning of reading**? - Early readers (Classes 1 to 3), does it take into account their **level and needs**? - Fluent readers (Classes 3 to 5), is it designed to enable them reach the **next level** in their reading? - Advanced readers (Classes 6 to 8), has it been designed to **expand** language awareness and usage? 4. If the book is non-fiction - Is the vocabulary according to the theme and content? - Are new concepts explained in a way that the intended reader can understand? - Are new concepts and ideas introduced gradually and in a logical sequence?

4. **Illustrations, Design and Production**: Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

1. Is the book **well-illustrated and designed**?	2. Are the illustrations for **non-fiction** books **authentic** and **supportive**?	3. Are the **typescript, type-size, setting and layout** of the **text appealing and reader-friendly**?	4. Are the **paper / card / board** of the **required quality and GSM**?	5. Is the **binding strong** and **appropriate**?

5. **Values**: Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would make the children think?

1. Does the book **encourage** a child to **think**, question, discover, and evaluate values and assumptions for themselves?	2. Does the book handle the issues involved in a **sensitive** manner?	3. Does the book deal with **marginalized communities** in an **appropriate manner**?	

Step 3: <u>Select According to the Level</u>

Key question that must be answered as 'Yes' –
Is the book appropriate for the <u>level</u> for which it is being selected?

1. **<u>Theme, Contents and the Degree of Engagement</u>**

- The themes suggested below are illustrative, and by no means exhaustive.
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- About animals, nature - Which respond to their curiosity - Song books Non fiction: - About sun, moon, stars, mountains - Environment - Simple plays, based on small stories - Stories with role play - Funny books	geographies Non-fiction: - About cultural heritage - Dictionaries for self-use - Atlases - Reference material to begin project work	- Reference books and related books to enhance and enrich curriculum - Biographies - Travel - Adventure - Environment The focus on emotional engagement would change from the family to friends.

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3. **Language used**

Level 1 – Classes 1 to 3	Level 2 – Classes 3 to 5	Level 3 – Classes 6 to 8

Must have	Must have	Must have
- age- / level-appropriate vocabulary - longer words supported by illustrations to enable guessing - short and simple sentences - simple grammatical construction - natural language flow - repetition of words, structures, sentences - word play, rhyming, sound play	- language natural, with flow, communicative - use of idioms, metaphors (higher literary devices) - possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary - newness of expression, usage, 'telling' of the story, innovative use of the language Desirable to accommodate local / child's own words Books in English, the verbs should be in present tense.	- language natural, with flow, communicative - use of idioms, metaphors (higher literary devices) - possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary - newness of expression, usage, 'telling' of the story, innovative use of the language Desirable to accommodate local / child's own words The collection of books should expose to a wide variety of nuanced language usage through a wide variety of forms and genres.

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Level 1 – Classes 1 to 3	Level 2 – Classes 3 to 5	Level 3 – Classes 6 to 8
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		Hindi 14pts, or more
Number of pages: - Picture books Min. 12pp / Max. 32pp + Cover Examples: *Rangon se Mujhe Pyar Hai*, *"Time-to-Discover"* series	Number of pages: - Picture books Min. 24pp / Max. 64pp + Cover - Chapter books Min. 48pp / Max. 96pp + Cover Examples: *The Mystery of Blue, Ayesha*	Not possible to specify the number of pages as children at this age read just about anything. Examples: *Harry Potter, Vritton ki Duniya, Tasviron me Gandhi, Narmada, My Facebook Friends*

5. **Values**

Levels are not indicated – values may be considered to be embedded in the aspects above. At no age books which are attempting to teach or preach values are desirable. More complex treatment of values is more suitable for older children.

Annexure

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