 **HOW TO WRITE A BOOK REVIEW!** 

1. **HOW DO YOU CREATE A TITLE?**

The title of the review should convey your overall impression and not be overly general. Strong titles include these examples:

* "Full of action and complex characters"
* "A nail-biter that will keep you up all night"
* "Beautiful illustrations with a story to match"
* "Perfect for animal lovers"

Weak titles may look like this:

* "Really good book"
* "Three stars"
* "Pretty good"
* "Quick read"

### HOW SHOULD IT BEGIN?

Although many reviews begin with a short summary of the book (This book is about…), there are other options as well, so feel free to vary the way you begin your reviews.

* **Quote:** A striking quote from the book *("It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.")* can make for a powerful beginning. This quote begins George Orwell's novel *1984*.
* **Interesting Fact:** For nonfiction books in particular, an interesting fact from the book may create a powerful opening for a review. In this review of *The Middle East* by Philip Steele, Zander H. of Mid-America Mensa asks, "Did you know that the Saudi Arabia's Rub' al-Khali desert reaches temperatures of 140 degrees Fahrenheit in the day and plummets to the freezing point at night?"

## **Process: What should I write about?**

Deciding what to say about the book can be challenging. Use the following ideas as a guide, but remember that you should not put all of this into a single review — that would make for a very long review! Choose the things that fit this particular book best.

#### **T.A.G. IT:** **Title, Author, Genre**

#### Don’t forget to mention the **T**itle of the book, the **A**uthor and what **G**enre(s) it best fits in to.

#### **PLOT: What happens?**

Writing about the plot is the trickiest part of a review because you want to give the reader a feel for what the book is about without spoiling the book for future readers. The most important thing to remember is that you must never give away the ending. No one likes a spoiler.

One possibility for doing this is to set up the premise (A brother and a sister find themselves lost in the woods at the mercy of an evil witch. Will they be able to outsmart her and escape?). Another possibility is to set up the major conflict in the book and leave it unresolved (Sometimes the waiting is the hardest part or He didn't know what he stood to lose or Finding your purpose in life can be as easy as finding a true friend.)

Try to avoid using the tired phrase "This book is about…" Instead, just jump right in (The stuffed rabbit wanted more than anything to live in the big old house with the wild oak trees.)

#### **SETTING: Where are we?**

The setting is the time and place the story occurs. When you write about the setting in a review, include more than just the location. Some things to consider:

* Is the book set in the past, present or future?
* Is it set in the world we know or is it a fantastical world?
* Is it mostly realistic with elements of fantasy (animals that can talk, for example)?
* Is the setting unclear and fuzzy, or can you easily make the movie in your mind?
* How much does the author draw you into the setting and how does s/he accomplish that?

#### **CHARACTERS: Who lives in the book?**

Reviews should answer questions about the characters in fiction books or non-fiction books about people. Some possible questions to answer include:

* Who are the main characters? Include the protagonist and antagonist.
* What makes them interesting?
* Do they act like real people act or are they too good or too evil to be believable?
* Are they human?
* What conflicts do they face?
* Are they likeable or understandable?
* How do they connect with each other?
* Do they appear in other books?
* Could you relate to any of the characters in the story?
* What problems did the main characters face?
* Who was your favorite character, and why?
* We learn about characters from things they do and say, as well as things other characters say about them. You may wish to include examples of these things.

#### **THEME: What is the book about at its heart?**

What is the book really about? This isn't the plot, but rather the ideas behind the story. Is it about the triumph of good over evil or friendship or love or hope? Some common themes include: change, desire to escape, facing a challenge, heroism, the quest for power, and human weaknesses.

Sometimes a book will have a moral — a lesson to learn. If so, the theme is usually connected to that moral. As you write about the theme, try to identify what makes the book worth reading. What will the reader think about long after the book is finished? Ask yourself if there any particular lines in the book that strike you as meaningful.

#### **OPINION & ANALYSIS: What do you really think?**

This is where the reviewer shares his/her reactions to the book that go beyond the essential points described above. You may spend half of the review on this section.

Give it a rating. How many stars out of five would you give it? Make sure to give some explanation as to why you’ve given it that rating. See ideas below to help you.

* Why do you think other readers would enjoy it? Why did you enjoy it (if you did) or why didn't you (if you didn't).
* What ages or types of readers do you think would like the book?
* How does it compare with other books that are in the same genre or by the same author?
* Does the book engage your emotions? If a book made you laugh or cry or think about it for days, be sure to include that.
* What do you like or dislike about the author's writing style? Is it funny? Is it hard to follow? Is it engaging and conversational in tone?
* How well do you think the author achieved what s/he was going for in the writing of the book? Do you think you felt what the author was hoping you would feel?
* Did the book feel complete, or did it feel as though key elements were left out?
* How does the book compare to other books like it you've read?

Are there parts that are simply not believable, even allowing for the reader's understanding that it is fiction or even fantasy?

* Are there mistakes?
* Would you describe the book as for entertainment, self-improvement, or information?
* What was your favorite part of the book?
* Would you have done anything differently had you been the author?
* Would any reader enjoy this book? If not, to what ages or type of reader would it appeal?

**NOTES:**