



CRITERIA

BAOBAB BOOKS evaluates the representation of different worlds in books for children and young adults. The following set of criteria and questions are applied in drawing up the appraisal.

Cultural diversity versus ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism describes an attitude in which one's own feelings, thoughts and behavior and one's own lifestyle, culture or religion are not only placed at the center of the world but are also perceived as superior to other ways of life. Ethnocentrism can help sustain the coherence of a group and safeguard the existence and identity of its members. But it can also be associated with condescension and prejudices shown toward other groups. Ethnocentrism is an expression of the difficulty to engage with the unknown and the different in an open and non-judgemental manner. The strange and the unfamiliar are perceived as threatening and are dismissed as being inferior. We recommend books that convey a diversity of values.

Parity versus paternalism

Paternalism has its roots in the patriarchal value system. Well-meaning and with protective sentiments, the "strong" make the decisions for the "weak," instead of facilitating independence and encouraging self-awareness. Paternalism is revealed for example in the attitude and behavior of members of consumer societies toward those in so-called developing countries. The "developed" are said to be helping the "underdeveloped" progress along the path to economic prosperity.

We recommend books that show different societies and classes as equals.

Respect versus racism

Racists consider their own group's biological, i.e. innate, characteristics as placing them above other ethnic groups or peoples. The arrogance inherent to racist thinking and racist systems often leads to the repudiation and repression of other ethnic and cultural groups. Power and economic advantage are the goals of such attitudes. In a racist paradigm, the mixing of ethnicities and cultures is condemned.

We recommend books that depict foreign ethnicities with respect, and whose situations and stories allow the reader to experience other human beings as individuals with feelings, needs and abilities.

Gender versus sexism

Sexism is characterized by the stereotyping and discrimination of others on the basis of their sex. As in racism, biological factors are asserted to support claims for the superiority of one sex over the other.

Gender, in contrast, describes culturally assigned differences that mold the behavior and social position of boys and girls, men and women, and that can lead to discrimination. "Women are caring" or "boys don't cry" are examples of such codifications.

We recommend books that portray boys and girls on a par with one another, with their own independent personalities.

Dialog versus fundamentalism

The term fundamentalism can be used in several different ways. In general today, it denotes the tendency within religious communities to interpret holy texts literally and to declare them as absolutely binding and infallible. This position is often accompanied by the rejection of a democratic and emancipatory society. When fundamentalism transforms into fanaticism, violence is often adopted by the group or individuals to achieve their goals. As in the past, fundamentalism continues to promote the marginalization or indeed the annihilation of entire populations.

We recommend books that contribute to dialog and understanding between the religions.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

The reviewers for "Fremde Welten" base their evaluations on their own experiences and their own cultural perspective. To appraise publications on the basis of the above-mentioned criteria, they may consult a list of questions. These can assist them to resolve uncertainties and to reflect on their own point of view.

Characters

- Which are the main characters?
- Characters of minority group: which role do they play?
- What do have people to do in order to get recognition?

Relationships

- How are characters from another social group shown? (E.g.: Stereotypes such as «The good», «The bad»)
- How is the relationship between ethnics shown? (Or between native people and migrants)
- Is there a hierarchy between social classes or man and women (boys and girls)?

Different forms of life

- Which forms of life and which social values can be found in the book?
- How is cultural identity expressed?
- How does the book help to learn about other values that my own?

Recognition

- Are members of (different) social groups recognized in there identity?
- How are problems solved? (E.g.: Are certain characters just needy and helpless?)
- How are conflicts solved? Do you find fairness in the book?

The illustration

All the questions above are important for illustrations as well.

- Do the pictures connect with the cultural identity described in the text?
- Is there a connection between the story and the images?
- What is the relation between members of different social groups, ethnics, class etc.? (Size, position on the page, colours etc.)

Language and style

- How is language used? (Phrase, structure of the text)
- Which vocabulary is used? Does it match the characters and the cultural identity described?
- Moral message: is it accessible and relevant for children?

© 2011 Baobab Books, Basel