This is a simple guide to choosing new picture books for teachers, parents, carers and librarians. Mary Northrup lists annotated bibliographies of recent picture books, grouped under broad subject headings such as My Family and Myself and In My Community. Each entry has a half-page description of the book with details of the themes and descriptions of the illustrations and text. Most of the titles examined are aimed at four to eight-year-old children and published after 2006. Picture books included in this volume are suitable for reading at home, in the library or classroom and encompass fiction, poetry and folktales or fairy tales. International picture books and non-fiction (informational) picture books have not been included, although several alphabet books appear in the reviews. Picture books were selected to cover a wide range of authors with a diversity of subjects and themes, including many award-winning titles.

The volume commences with a valuable introduction to picture books and a guide on how to evaluate them effectively. Picture books adhere to a standard format, usually 32 pages and fewer than 1000 words. The placement of the illustrations in relation to the text is ‘the essence of the picture book’ according to the author and encourages a child to appreciate art, books and reading. To evaluate a picture book it is necessary to examine text, themes, language use, colour, line and shape. The most popular subjects at present are pirates, penguins, barnyard animals (cows, chickens and pigs), cartoon art and anything to do with the colour pink. There is a brief discussion on the role of e-books, apps, e-readers and tablets; however, the main aim of this book is to explore published hardback picture books.

The book concludes with a list of suggested reference resources, including websites such as the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc) and the Earl Carle Museum of Picture Book (www.carlemuseum.org). Appendix 1 outlines a range of picture books with themes related to art and artists. Appendix 2 is a list of picture books where the authors or characters speak directly to the reader, such as Chester by Melanie Watt where a fat cat tells the story and Do Not Open This Book! by Michaela Muntean that uses the character of a pig to talk to the reader.

The author is reference librarian at Metropolitan College in Missouri with many years’ experience in reviewing children’s books in addition to writing on library- and literature-related topics, and she is well qualified to assess picture books. Northrup’s work is a compact and useful guide to recent children’s picture books and would be helpful for childcare workers, parents, teachers and children’s librarians in selecting books to read at story time sessions.

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