Unit: Writing a Book Review

Overview of the Unit

In this unit, your student will write a book review. A book review goes a step further than just reporting on what a book is about. It introduces the element of personal opinion, backed up with reasons and evidence. Your student will have the chance to judge what he likes and doesn't like in a novel, and learn how to express his judgment.

Your student will learn to:

- Read a sample book review
- Choose a book to review
- Summarize the book for his book review; gather information about the author; and evaluate the plot, characters, and setting to help him plan his writing
- Create an outline of what he will write, and write a first draft of the review
- Revise and edit his book review

By fourth grade, some students may resist the idea of a “book report.” Point out that this is not simply a report, but a review, in which your student will practice supporting his opinions with reasons, and learn how to express those reasons in a convincing way. If possible, find reviews of children's books, which are printed in many Sunday newspapers. Read these with your student.

You can also find reviews online at www.bookhive.org/bookhive.htm, the child-oriented website of the public library of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, or the Ann Arbor, Michigan library's website at www.worldreading.org. While these reviews are much shorter than the one your student will be writing, they will give him some models of good writing from his peers. Both these sites accept reviews by children. Your student can submit a shortened version of his book review and perhaps see it published on the Web.
Lesson 1: What Is a Book Review?

Analyze a sample book review. Select a book to review.

Objective
Understand the typical format and conventions of a book review.

Materials
Writing in Action, Level C, pages 56-59

1. Discuss Book Reviews

After your student reads the introduction to this lesson, discuss how book reviews can be both helpful and entertaining: helpful because they help us identify books we might like to read; entertaining because it’s fun to read good writing about good (or bad!) books. Discuss with your student what you both find helpful in a review.

2. Read and Discuss the Review

Ask your student to read the sample review and then answer the questions about them. He should understand that *The Twenty-One Balloons* is a fantasy. Point out how the review offers enough information for your student to decide whether this is a book he wants to read, while it avoids giving away *everything* about the book. That will be your student’s goal as well when he writes his review. Analyze the review with your student. What elements does it have? Your student should understand that there is an introductory paragraph, a middle, and a concluding paragraph.

3. Choose a Book to Review

To review a book, your student, of course, has to read the book. Moreover, he has to think carefully about the book and really focus on what he reads. For this reason, it will probably help if he reviews a book he enjoys, perhaps a favorite from his recent reading. Have your student read and answer the question on the Choosing a Book to Review page in the workbook.

Here are some tips to help reluctant readers choose a book. You might have your student use a couple of these methods, make a list, and circle the book that sounds the most intriguing.

- Ask a friend. Your student may have a friend or sibling who likes the same sorts of books. Your student can ask for a recommendation.
- Ask a librarian. Have your student detail his interests and ask for a recommendation.
- Read a book review. Your student can access www.bookhive.org/bookhive.htm or www.worldreading.org to read other students’ suggestions.
- Read another book by a favorite author. If your student has enjoyed a book, have him consider other books by the same writer.