HOW TO EVALUATE LITERATURE FOR PRESCHOOLERS AND CHILDREN

Preschool/Children Literature Characteristics

1–Strongly Disagree  2–Disagree   3–Neither Agree nor Disagree   4–Agree   5–Strongly Agree

On a scale of 1-5, rate whether the literature...

___ has a Bible-based foundation
___ has doctrinally sound information
___ has authentic learning activities
___ has educationally sound content and activities
___ has a variety of learning methods
___ guides conversation
___ encourages critical thinking
___ has the child at the center of learning
___ has age appropriate content
___ has life application statements that connect with Bible passages

Total Score: ___ / 50
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>DOES THE LITERATURE COMPLETE THIS CHARACTERISTIC?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHILD CENTERED</td>
<td>□ YES □ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this activity-based learning?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are children in an atmosphere of learning?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do activities have a purpose?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
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<td>Do children have a choice of activities?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
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<td>Are the activities age-appropriate?</td>
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<td>Does the child have ownership of learning?</td>
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<td>AGE APPROPRIATE</td>
<td>□ YES □ NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the literature relate the biblical passages to the child’s everyday, common experience?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
</tr>
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<td>LIFE APPLICATION CONNECTED WITH BIBLE PASSAGES</td>
<td>□ YES □ NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the child understand the connection between everyday activities and the Bible?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
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**How to Evaluate Literature**

Churches have many choices in lines of literature in order to teach children about God. But, is every literature line the same? What are considerations to think about when choosing a literature line? Does it make any difference to the children?

Yes, it makes a difference to the child!!

Some considerations of literature would be:

- Evaluating the purpose of the teaching goal
- Background materials for teachers
- Biblical values to be taught to the child

The church will need to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of each line. After an evaluation is completed, an informed decision can then be made.

What characteristics do teachers and parents want to see strengthened in children each year as they participate in church activities? It can be summed up in Matthew 22:35-39.

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:35-39 (NAS)

Loving God entirely and loving others are the greatest attributes taught to children, and should be the first attribute sought in curriculum. Every other attribute can then be categorized into two sections, creating a spiritual foundation and building on that spiritual structure.

### Creating a Spiritual Foundation

Important aspects of the spiritual foundation would include:

- Knowing God
- God created everyone
- God loves each child
- Personal relationship with God
- Having friendships with others
- Foundation of knowing God

Our spiritual foundation rests on knowing God.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8 (NAS)

- Foundation of knowing that God created everyone

God is the creator of the universe and of mankind. And God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:27 (NAS)

### Characteristic | Does the Literature Complete This Characteristic?
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VARIETY OF LEARNING METHODS UTILIZED | Yes | No
There are both cooperative and individual learning objectives. | Yes | No
There are hands-on investigations of the Bible and other materials. | Yes | No
There is availability of the following:
- Commentaries
- Different versions of the Bible
- Dictionaries
- Concordances
It is inclusive of all cultures in written and visual illustrations. | Yes | No
There is a balance of active and quiet activities. | Yes | No
There is a balance of guided conversation and engaging listening activities. | Yes | No
GUIDING CONVERSATION | Yes | No
Teachers lead in guided learning instead of the role of dictator or lecturer.
Questions are "Tell me about..."; "What if..."; "How does that make you feel?"; "Tell me what the Bible says." | Yes | No
ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THINKING | Yes | No
Use "thought questioning" to stimulate thought and deepen understanding.
Examples of these would be:
- Determining solutions to problems
- Discussion of advantages/disadvantages of solutions
- Open discussion about the solutions
- Choosing the best solution

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○ Foundation that God loves each child
Every child is loved completely by God.
For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16 (NAS)

○ Foundation of having friendships with others
God loves us so completely and totally that He sacrificed His own Son in order for each to have eternal life with Him. No greater love has ever been experienced than that of God’s Son, Jesus. Because our spiritual foundation is the realization of this agape love toward us, teachers and parents will model the personal growing, thriving friendship they experience with God. They become the models of God’s love with the children and others.

And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.
1 John 4:14 (NAS)

○ Foundation of a personal friendship with God
God desires to have a personal relationship with every child and for each one to have a personal relationship with Him.
Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13 (NAS)

CHARACTERISTIC

AUTHENTIC LEARNING
Teaching methods are authentic occurrences in the child’s life.
It relates to the child’s real world.
Symbolic language is not used through third grade.
Examples of being authentic in actions and thoughts are age leveled.
People are interacting with real objects and real people.
There is knowledge that animals do not talk.
There is knowledge that animals do not make decisions.
Fantasy and cartoon characters are not used.

EDUCATIONALLY ON TARGET
Age-level learning
Learning objects are obvious
Obvious connections to the learning activities
Balanced emphasis on both genders

DOES THE LITERATURE COMPLETE THIS CHARACTERISTIC?

□ YES □ NO
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If these are the aspects of the spiritual foundation that are to be built for children, what are specific characteristics of literature that need to be emphasized?

**The Literature Structure**

Being Bible based, doctrinally sound, using authentic learning methods, being educationally on target, using a variety of learning methods, guiding conversation, and encouraging critical thinking are vital characteristics of literature that need to be considered.

- **Bible based**
  - Direct reference to Bible passages
  - Personal application as related to the Bible passages
  - Biblically accurate
  - Biblically accurate teaching objectives
  - Correct sequence of events
  - Correct background setting
  - Strong Bible background for teachers
  - Balance of Old and New Testament studies

- **Doctrinally sound**
  - Literature matches what the teacher and the church agree to be doctrinally sound.
  - Literature gives equal importance to gender and cultural setting.

- **Authentic learning**
  - Teaching methods are authentic actions in the child’s life.
  - Literature gives opportunities to discuss how the learning outcomes can apply to everyday life.
  - Literature is written in terms of the child’s real world.
  - Symbolic language is not used at all through the third grade.
  - Verbalization and visualization are authentic and in balance.

- **Educationally on target**
  - Age-level learning
  - Learning objectives are obvious connections to the learning activities.
  - Learning is balanced with the emphasis on both genders.

- **Variety of learning methods utilized**
  - There are both cooperative and individual learning activities.
  - There is hands-on investigation of the Bible and other materials.
  - There is availability of the following:
    - Commentaries
    - Different versions of the Bible
    - Dictionaries
    - Concordances

- **Guiding Conversation**
  - Teachers demonstrate interest in the children.
  - Questions should be “Tell me about...”; “What if...”; “How does that make you feel?”; “Tell me about the Bible truths.”

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**Building on the Foundational Structure**

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Encouraging critical thinking
Use “thought questioning” to stimulate thought and deepen understanding. Examples of these would be:
- Determining solutions to problems
- Discussions of advantages/disadvantages of solutions
- Open discussion about the solutions
- Choosing the best solution

Leading in guided learning
The child is the center of learning and everything in the environment is directed toward the child. The teacher is there to guide in learning and discovery instead of the role of dictator or lecturer.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS

The second aspect of the literature would be to ensure that the child is the center of the literature. Teachers are to teach the child by using the literature. This means that the spiritual development of the child is reason literature is written and the reason teachers devote their time to teaching. A person who loves and respects the child guides activities and the child learns when a relationship is built with that teacher. If a relationship is not built with the child, it doesn’t matter how good the activities are because learning will be diluted.

Some of the aspects of building on the structure are: child centered, activity based, age appropriate, and evangelistically appropriate.

Child centered
The child is the center of learning. Every activity, every song, every picture, every game is focused toward the child’s comprehension.

Activity based
What are they learning?
Do activities have a purpose?
What do the activities teach?
Do children have a choice of activities?
Are the activities age-appropriate?
Does the child have ownership of the learning?
Is it interesting, challenging, engaging and relevant to the child’s life?

Do the activities encourage a setting of independence as well as a setting of working with others?
Are the children given opportunities to explain and display their work?
Are they given opportunities to discuss application of what they have learned?

Age appropriate
Does the literature relate the biblical passages to the child’s everyday common experience?
Does the reading difficulty match the level of the child? Some of the levels of reading would include:
- At the beginning of kindergarten, no reading.
- At the end of kindergarten, very simple words.
- At the beginning of first grade, very simple words, then a gradual increase in difficulty throughout the year.
- At all other grades a variety of reading difficulty to include all learning levels of children.
- The reading captures and holds the child’s attention.

Life application
Children must experience the connection between the Bible and their everyday lives. Guided conversations, problems and solutions, and present-day dialogue must be directed toward the child to help them make the important connections with what the Bible is teaching and their everyday life. If this connection is not made, then the teacher has wasted valuable time. Connection is made when the child is able to verbalize and personalize how the Bible relates to them. This is one attribute that must be consciously done each time learning is accomplished. Unfortunately, it is also the attribute that is most often left out. The teacher must deliberately make the connection and help the child to discover that connection.

CONCLUSION
Choosing literature reflects the educational and philosophical beliefs of the church. Through prayer, understanding of the needs and characteristics of the learner, and making sure the doctrines of the church are emphasized, literature can be chosen that meets these standards. Good luck in the venture of choosing literature!

CHART OF LITERATURE CHARACTERISTICS

As you select literature, use this chart as a guide in that process. Look at the characteristics which are important to you and make sure it is included in the literature.

CREATING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

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<td>Foundation of knowing that God created every child</td>
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