Sample All Types

Catherine Bowles
Because reading adds to our intellectual, emotional and social development, and remains pleasurable while doing so—it's an important human activity. Books can stimulate multiple interests, provide models to evaluate, and offer solutions to problems. But the key to good reading for any age is the wide and wise selection of books.

It is not enough to read both prose and poetry. Reading must be balanced. Books should come from all areas, for each type has specific values. "Literature" can be subdivided until it is classified into seven genre as seen in the following chart:

```
      Literature
       /    \
      /     \
     /      \\   \
    /       \\    \\
   /        \\   \\   \
  /         \\  \\  \\  \\  \\
 Poetry (1)   Non Fiction
             /    \
             /     \
             /      \\   \
             /       \\    \\
             /        \\   \\  \
             /         \\  \\  \\  \\  \\  \\
       Prose    Informational (3)
             /    \
             /     \\
             /      \\  \\
             /       \\  \\  \\
             /        \\  \\  \\  \\  \\  \\
     Fiction    Historic (4)
                   /    \
                   /     \
                   /      \\  \\
                   /       \\  \\  \\
                   /        \\  \\  \\  \\  \\  \\
    Fantasy    Contemporary (5)
                   /    \
                   /     \
                   /      \\  \\
                   /       \\  \\  \\
                   /        \\  \\  \\  \\  \\  \\
    Traditional Literature (7)

Poetry (1) is a consideration of an inner feeling or experience. Eve Merriam says poetry is like a can of frozen orange juice. When three cans of water are added, we have prose. In addition to the feeling and experience, poetry offers a musical quality, powerful words, figurative language and vivid imagery. The Falling Star exemplifies this:

I saw a star slide down the sky,
  Blinding the north as it went by,
  Too burning and too quick to hold,
  Too lovely to be bought or sold,
  Good only to make wishes on.
  And then forever to be gone.

—Sara Teasdale.

Non-fiction is concerned with facts. More books in this category are being published than ever before because of the emphasis on a return to basics. More children and adults are reading these books. Non-fiction is divided into two genre, biography and informational books.

Biography (2), according to the Oxford English Dictionary is "the history of the lives of individuals as a branch of literature." Biographies are worthwhile because they provide heroes and heroines for children to follow. It helps them realize that through honest
effort they can achieve. From Amos Fortune, by Elizabeth Yates, the reader gains an awareness of the importance of freedom. Carry On Mr. Bowditch, by Jean Lee Latham, tells of a man who succeeded far beyond his time and still influences the world today.

Informational books (3) are available on every subject. Their primary purpose is to inform and instruct. They increase the reader's knowledge, answer questions that arise, increase vocabulary, widen understanding and broaden interests. Informational books often help young people to determine their life's work, or introduce them to hobbies which enrich life. How to Turn Lemons Into Money, by Louise Armstrong, is a valuable introduction to principles of economics. Herbert Zim's Golden Guide Series provides an aid for the identification of insects, birds, trees, etc.

Realism is that prose which is true to life but not necessarily true. It can be broken down into fiction concerned with the past, historical fiction, and the present, contemporary fiction. Realistic fiction is popular with most readers.

Historical fiction (4), makes the past come alive, and makes the facts of history more meaningful. It sheds light on the problems of today and shows that people are more alike than different.

The Bronze Bow by Elizabeth George Spears presents a memorable picture of the life in Palestine at the time of Christ. A fourteen year-old boy with hate and revenge in his heart finds a new conflict when he learns of Christ's message to love your enemies.

Contemporary fiction (5) deals with today's life and problems, allowing the reader to better understand family, friends, minorities and people from other countries.

A Taste of Blackberries, by Doris Smith, tells of the thoughts and feelings of a boy who is faced with a friend's death. Sam, by Ann Herbert Scott, is the story of a little black boy whose family is always too busy to spend time with him. These and many other everyday issues are to be found in contemporary fiction.

Fantasy contains some element which is unreal, something which could not actually happen. There are many benefits to be gained from reading fantasy. It gives release from tensions, is good entertainment and is full of imagination which is a rich source for creativity.

Traditional literature (6) includes stories handed down orally as folktales, fables, and myths. It broadens understanding of both oral and written language. Readers who are familiar with this genre understand phrases such as "the Midas touch," and "sour grapes." They know the source and background for the names of the space flights and planets.

Modern fantasy (7) is able to teach effectively many ethical truths because it is impersonal. It shows the conflict of good and evil in an unreal world as in The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis. The older reader will recognize the lion as Christ and the Witch as Satan. The book is not really religious but is an interesting story which has an effect though not didactic message.

To obtain the full value from the printed page children should sample generously from all genre. Through reading widely, they establish values, discover knowledge, increase appreciation, experience feelings and discover the unique perceptions of others.