

Guidelines for Writing Book Reviews from the Cream of the Crop Committee

- Please check your writing for correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation. The reviews are online and may be viewed by anyone including the publishers and authors.
- We highly **recommend** you write your reviews in a word processing program (ex: Google docs, Word, etc..) before entering it into the database. This will allow you to proofread and edit **before final submission**.
- The review should be brief; 150-200 words is a great length. Do not quote large passages from the book. Please don't write a lengthy summary of the book. The focus of the review should be about the book strengths and weaknesses. Your review should include the genre, writing style, details about the illustrations, and a suggestion about the audience for the book. **To assist in keeping notes and outlining your review, use the review worksheet which can be found at <http://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/services/children.htm> .**
- If you think the book you read may be excellent and want to suggest it for Cream, it's a good idea to read professional reviews of the book to see what other reviewers have to say.
- *Kirkus Reviews* and *School Library Journal* are two professional review sources you might want to consult. Reading professional review journals are also excellent examples of how to craft a well-written book review.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/>

<http://www.slj.com/>

Book Review Examples:

***The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* reviewed by Brooke Faulkner**

From the moment fourteen-year-old Adam meets Robyn in their support group for teens with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), he knows she's the one for him. They grow closer as they and their peers in the group playfully don superhero personas (he becomes "Batman" to Robyn's "Robin"), visit Adam's church looking for spiritual support and begin to learn more about each person's specific issues. However, for Adam, his secrets include his mother's hoarding and a series of anonymous, hateful letters she's been receiving - both hugely stress-producing and things his mom has forbidden him to talk about. This poignant debut novel is both an honest and nuanced portrayal of a young person's struggle with OCD and a warmly real first love story. Adam is a likable narrator and his interactions with his wise and supportive therapist and his family, particularly with his adoring younger half-brother, are sweetly funny. His internal monologues, often punctuated with compulsive prime number counting and bitterly self-deprecating thoughts, are palpable in their anxiety. Fans of other realistic fiction like *The Fault In Our Stars*, *Say What You Will*, and *Eleanor and Park* will fall easily for these characters.

***The Doldrums* reviewed by Jill O'Connor**

Spectacularly illustrated and expertly told, with quirky characters reminiscent of a Roald Dahl novel - the likeable, stifled hero, the horrifying, despotic teacher, the bumbling parents, this middle grade novel is delightful. The story ambles a bit, which will throw off reluctant readers, but for those who enjoy unwrapping a story and clever wordplay this is a great book. Archer's grandparents are famous world-explorers, but they have gone missing on an iceberg. Archer fervently believes that they are still alive, so much so that he is

willing to put together an expedition to find them. He enlists his two new friends (also his neighbors), the milquetoast Oliver Glub and the dashing, one-legged Adelaide Belmont (the story goes that she lost that leg wrestling a crocodile). The story is not so much about their expedition, but the planning and putting together of that expedition and what it brings out in each child. Not that there isn't action, there is, particularly at the end, but the book is really an exploration of friendship and family and finding out who you really are when faced with a hungry tiger. The 20 color illustrations, also by Gannon, are gorgeous and the black-and-white line drawings add to the telling. There is also a nod to the kind, knowledgeable school librarian! Hopefully, we haven't seen the last of Archer, his friends, or his globe-trotting grandparents. Give to fans of Dahl, Trenton Stewart's Mysterious Benedict Society, or Lemony Snicket. Highly recommend.

***Steve Jobs: Insanely Great* reviewed by Cathy Potter**

Jessie Hartland chronicles the life and work of Steve Jobs in this graphic novel aimed at middle grade readers. Beginning with his childhood in Santa Clara, CA, Hartland paints an honest picture of the tech mogul. It is obvious from an early age that Jobs is a creator, an inventor and an entrepreneur. Black and white illustrations are rendered in India ink and pencil. The pages are busy with a combination of illustrations, captions and dialogue. Some readers may have difficulty reading Hartland's handwritten text that is a hybrid of cursive and manuscript. Readers will enjoy studying the two-page spread in the middle of the book that illustrates the technology available in the 1980s including cordless phones, the fax machine, and the Sony Walkman. Overall, the graphic novel eloquently captures the accomplishments and personality traits of the complex Jobs in both words and pictures. Source notes and a lengthy bibliography are provided in the back matter.

***A Rock Can Be* reviewed by Kathy George**

In the simplest of rhyming text (words rhyme) Ms. Salas reminds the reader of what rocks are, a grain of sand, a dinosaur bone, a home for seabirds a star. While the text is sparse, the words run off the tongue and are fun to say and talk about. The illustrations convey in bright, full page detail the meaning of what a rock can be. The text and the bold illustrations give our youngest readers a lesson in rhyming, geology and creativity and lots to talk about when looking at a stone! The author has included a glossary of terms, and an explanation of each illustration which adds to its appeal. Pair this with Peggy Christian's *If You Find a Rock* in which readers will explore the rock with different criteria- a wishing rock, a climbing rock or a resting rock. This is a beautiful book.