

## Critical Conversation: A Guide

- **Curate Diverse Collections**

Build a library that includes books from various genres, cultures, and perspectives. Ensure representation of multiple viewpoints (e.g., positive and flawed characters from the same racial/ethnic group) to avoid oversimplified "good vs. bad" narratives.

- **Balance Familiar and New Experiences**

Select books that reflect children's lived experiences while also introducing narratives that broaden their understanding of other cultures and identities.

- **Revisit Books**

Reread books periodically to allow children to reconsider earlier interpretations and deepen their critical analysis over time.

- **Encourage Critical Engagement**

Teach children to question, accept, or challenge an author's message. Validate their right to disagree with a book's ideology.

- **Structured Discussions**

- Literature Circles: Use small groups to discuss books. Prompt children to share likes/dislikes and personal connections.
- Comparative Analysis: Read different versions of the same story or books by the same author to analyze stylistic and thematic differences.
- Theme Exploration: Group books by themes (e.g., identity, family) to compare how cultures address similar topics.

- **Reflect on Educator Bias**

Educators should examine their own responses to books (e.g., how they describe characters or plots) to avoid unconsciously steering children's interpretations.

- **Model Lifelong Learning**

Share your own reading experiences with students to demonstrate that critical literacy is a continuous practice.

### Key Principles

- Focus on dialogue over evaluation ("What do you think?" vs. "This is correct").
- Prioritize multiple readings and perspectives to uncover implicit biases.
- Adapt discussions to children's developmental levels, starting as early as age 3.

### Reference

Swindler Boutte, G. (2002, Spring). The critical literacy process: Guidelines for examining books. *Childhood Education*, 147-152.