

## Guidelines for Evaluating WILLA Entries in the Children's Category

The purpose of Women Writing the West is to become the internationally recognized organization of writers and other professionals engaged in writing and promoting writing about the American West with emphasis on the experiences and sensibilities of women in that region. The WILLA Literary Awards are presented annually for outstanding literature featuring women's or girls' stories set in the West.

Entries in the Children's Category can range from a picture book aimed at toddlers to children's novels; from fiction to nonfiction to poetry. The following rubrics were developed to help readers evaluate such diverse entries. They are intended to be guidelines only. Readers should use their own judgment in assessing how well each entry suits its target audience.

Points should be awarded as follows:

- 10 – exceptional in all regards
- 9 – excellent
- 8 – well done
- 7 – majority well done; room for polish
- 6 – good overall with strong points
- 5 – good overall
- 4 – good overall with some weak points
- 3 – good start but needs work
- 2 – good idea but poor presentation
- 1 – needs work throughout
- 0 – ineligible

Note that entries that do not warrant at least 4 points in the first benchmark, “Women of the West Theme,” should be disqualified.

**WILLA CATEGORY RUBRIC  
CHILDREN’S FICTION<sup>®</sup>**

<b>Novel</b>	<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>4 - 7 points</b>	<b>8 - 10 points</b>
1. Women of the West Theme	Male main character(s) Book not set in the West* Does not portray authentic western experience Theme & content do not reflect WWW’s mission & goals	Female characters prominent Book set in the West but could have happened anywhere; or, book partly set in the West* Generally portrays authentic experience Theme & content generally reflect WWW’s mission & goals	Female main character(s) Western setting primary & essential* Consistently portrays authentic western experience Theme & content excellent reflections of WWW’s mission & goals
	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
2. Characterization	Characters not well developed Stereotypical character(s)** Dialogue not convincing Characters indistinct from those in similar books Didactic, preachy	Most characters complex Generally no inappropriate gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes** Dialogue at times sounds unnatural Characters similar to others within the genre, but well developed Character’s “lesson” generally well presented	All characters complex, well developed No inappropriate gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes included** Dialogue sounds natural Characters distinct, original Any “lesson” subtle & organic
3. Setting	Setting not important to the book Setting not described	Setting of moderate importance Setting described in conventional terms	A strong sense of place is inherent in book Setting vividly described, using all senses

	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
4. Plot	<p>Plot confusing  Subplots (if used) sporadic, or not well balanced with main plot, or left unresolved  Book fails to hook readers; ending not satisfying  Implausible  Plot predictable</p>	<p>Plot moderately well developed  Subplots (if used) not always balanced or well resolved  Slow beginning leads to more action; or conclusion leaves some questions unanswered; or conclusion is not satisfying  Some points may strain credibility  Plot not new, but shows some freshness</p>	<p>Plot well developed  Subplots (if used) well integrated &amp; resolved  Opening draws reader in; conclusion satisfying  Suspension of disbelief consistent  Plot original, fresh</p>
5. Voice	<p>Narrative voice lacking, confusing, distances readers from the story  Point of view confusing</p>	<p>Narrative voice dependable  Point of view wavers, or occasionally jumps</p>	<p>Narrative voice engaging, fresh, distinct  Point of view clear, consistent; or POV shifts clear &amp; intentional</p>
6. Literary Qualities	<p>Poor or inappropriate command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.)  Imagery confusing or nonexistent  Premise conventional, simplistic, expected  Book not suited for intended audience, unappealing  Not enjoyable or thought-provoking</p>	<p>Moderate command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.)  Imagery clear  Premise not new, but well explored  Book generally suited to the intended audience, moderately appealing  A pleasant read</p>	<p>Consistently strong command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.)  Imagery vivid, fresh  Premise breaks new ground  Well suited to intended audience, appealing  Thought-provoking</p>

	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
7. Technical Conventions	<p>Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary inappropriate for target audience</p> <p>Frequent problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling</p> <p>Sloppy, wordy, repetitious writing</p> <p>Poor balance between dialogue &amp; narrative</p>	<p>Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary appropriate for target audience</p> <p>Occasional lapses of grammar, punctuation, spelling</p> <p>Clear writing</p> <p>Adequate balance between dialogue &amp; narrative</p>	<p>Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary excellent for target audience</p> <p>Clear grasp of grammar, punctuation, spelling; or reader trusts that conventions purposefully set aside</p> <p>Tight writing</p> <p>Good balance between dialogue &amp; narrative</p>
8. Presentation	<p>Unattractive cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features lacking</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting difficult to read</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) of poor quality, or irrelevant to text</p>	<p>Adequate cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features adequate</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting adequate</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) of moderate clarity, or not always germane to the text</p>	<p>Attractive, appropriate, compelling cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features reflect book’s tone</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting clear</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) appropriate, clear</p> <p>Properly bound, i.e. audio and e-books</p>

\* WWW defines “the West” as all of North America west of the Mississippi River.

\*\* Depiction of a character’s biases or stereotypical views, presented in context, may be appropriate.

**WILLA CATEGORY RUBRIC  
CHILDREN’S - NONFICTION®**

<b>Nonfiction</b>	<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>4 - 7 points</b>	<b>8 - 10 points</b>
1. Women of the West Theme	<p>Male main character(s); no relevant theme</p> <p>Book not set in or pertain to the West*</p> <p>Does not portray authentic western experience</p> <p>Theme &amp; content do not reflect WWW’s mission &amp; goals</p> <p>Little or no educational merit</p>	<p>At least half of the characters female; relevant theme</p> <p>Book set in the West but could have happened anywhere; or, book partly set in the West*</p> <p>Generally portrays authentic western experience</p> <p>Theme &amp; content generally well reflect WWW’s mission &amp; goals</p> <p>Moderate educational merit</p>	<p>Female main character(s), relevant theme</p> <p>Western setting primary &amp; essential*</p> <p>Consistently portrays authentic western experience</p> <p>Theme &amp; content excellent reflections of WWW’s mission &amp; goals</p> <p>Excellent educational merit</p>
	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
2. Characterization	<p>Depictions of people not well developed, or depiction not appropriate for target audience</p> <p>Stereotypes evident**</p> <p>People portrayed of little interest to a child</p>	<p>Somewhat complex depictions of people (as appropriate for target audience)</p> <p>Generally no gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes presented**</p> <p>People portrayed of some interest to a child</p>	<p>Complex depictions of people (as appropriate for target audience)</p> <p>No gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes presented**</p> <p>People portrayed of strong interest to a child</p>
3. Setting	<p>Setting not important</p> <p>Setting not described, or described poorly</p> <p>Setting not described accurately</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) rarely complement or match text</p>	<p>Setting of moderate importance</p> <p>Setting described in conventional terms</p> <p>Setting usually described accurately</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) usually complement or match text</p>	<p>A sense of place is inherent in the book</p> <p>Setting vividly described, using all senses</p> <p>Setting described accurately</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) consistently complement or match text</p>

	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
4. Narrative	<p>Poor presentation of facts, concepts, or ideas</p> <p>Premise or subject predictable, or poorly considered</p> <p>Narrative poorly developed</p> <p>Beginning slow, confusing; conclusion not satisfying</p> <p>Topic or theme of little interest to a child</p>	<p>Fair presentation of facts, concepts, or ideas</p> <p>Premise or subject not new, but well done</p> <p>Narrative moderately well developed</p> <p>Slow beginning leads to more action; conclusion somewhat satisfying</p> <p>Topic or theme of some interest to a child</p>	<p>Excellent presentation of facts, concepts, or ideas</p> <p>Premise or subject shows originality, freshness</p> <p>Narrative very well developed</p> <p>Opening draws reader in; ending is satisfying</p> <p>Topic or theme of strong interest to a child</p>
5. Voice	<p>Narrative voice lacking or confusing</p> <p>Quotations (if used) poorly integrated</p>	<p>Narrative voice dependable</p> <p>Quotations (if used) generally well integrated</p>	<p>Narrative voice fresh, engaging, distinct</p> <p>Quotations (if used) effectively integrated</p>
6. Literary Qualities	<p>Clumsy language</p> <p>Imagery confusing</p> <p>Text &amp; illustrations (if used) not well matched</p> <p>Not enjoyable or thought provoking</p>	<p>Smooth language</p> <p>Imagery clear</p> <p>Text &amp; illustrations (if used) generally well matched</p> <p>A pleasant read</p>	<p>Clear command of language</p> <p>Imagery vivid &amp; fresh</p> <p>Text &amp; illustrations (if used) create a single whole</p> <p>Enjoyable, thought-provoking</p>

	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
7. Technical Conventions	<p>Book difficult to follow; poorly organized</p> <p>Writing too wordy, or includes extraneous material</p> <p>Poor grasp of basic conventions of grammar, punctuation, etc.</p> <p>Word count, vocabulary, sentence length not appropriate for target audience</p> <p>Citations (if used) confusing, incomplete; or, citations needed***</p>	<p>Book generally readable; moderately well organized</p> <p>Writing generally tight, with some redundancies or extraneous material</p> <p>Good grasp of basic conventions of grammar, punctuation, etc.</p> <p>Word count, vocabulary, sentence length generally well suited for target audience</p> <p>Citations (if used) generally good***</p>	<p>Book consistently easily readable, flows well; well organized</p> <p>Writing tight</p> <p>Clear command of basic conventions of grammar, punctuation etc.</p> <p>Word count, vocabulary, sentence length carefully chosen for target audience</p> <p>Citations (if used) clear, effective***</p>
8. Presentation	<p>Unattractive cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features lacking</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting difficult to read</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) of poor quality, not identified, or irrelevant to text</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) not well balanced or matched with text</p>	<p>Adequate cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features adequate</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting adequate</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) of moderate clarity, mostly identified; may not always be germane to the text</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) provide good balance with text</p>	<p>Attractive, appropriate, compelling cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features reflect book's tone</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting clear &amp; well chosen</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) appropriate, clear, identified</p> <p>Illustrations (if used) provide excellent balance with text</p> <p>Properly bound, i.e. audio books and e-books</p>

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\*\* An author's depiction of a real individual's biases or stereotypical views, presented in context, may be appropriate.

\*\*\* Citations might include endnotes, an author's note, glossary, suggested bibliography, or other supplemental information.

## WILLA CATEGORY RUBRIC CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS<sup>©</sup>

**Note: If a picture book is chosen as a WILLA Winner or Finalist, both author and illustrator will be honored**

Picture Book	Ineligible	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
1. Women of the West Theme	Male main character(s) Book not set in, or pertain to, the West* Does not portray authentic western experience Theme & content do not reflect WWW's mission & goals	Female character(s) prominent Book set in the West but could have happened anywhere; or, book partly set in the West* Generally portrays authentic western experience Theme & content generally reflect WWW's mission & goals	Female main character(s) Western setting primary & essential* Consistently portrays authentic western experience Theme & content excellent reflections of WWW's mission & goals
	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
2. Characterization	Character(s) not well developed, not engaging Does not engage readers in a child's or child-friendly experience Characters not believable, or not appropriate for young readers Inappropriate number of characters Didactic, preachy	Character(s) moderately well developed, of some interest Moderately engages reader in a child's or child-friendly experience Most characters believable, appropriate for young readers Reader can generally differentiate among characters Character's "lesson" generally well presented	Character(s) well developed, engaging Thoroughly engages reader in a child's or child-friendly experience All characters believable, appropriate for young readers Appropriate number of characters Any "lesson" subtle & organic



	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
3. Setting	Setting not cohesive with story Setting not portrayed accurately Text & illustrations inconsistent	Setting of moderate importance to story Setting generally portrayed accurately Illustrations generally complement or support text	Setting supports story Setting consistently portrayed accurately Illustrations consistently complement or support text
4. Plot	Plot non-existent, confusing Main character does not solve problem No solution Resolution leaves no hope, unacceptable to child or adult reader	Plot weak, has holes Main character depends on others to solve problem Solution predictable Resolution provides some hope, acceptable to both child & adult reader	Plot well crafted, comes full-circle Main character solves problem Solution fresh & surprising Resolution hopeful, satisfying for both child & adult reader
5. Voice	Narrative voice lacking Point of view confusing Difficult to read aloud Rhyme (if used) forced or inconsistent Story unlikely to be read more than once	Narrative voice dependable Point of view adequate; occasional wavers Generally good to read aloud; some lapses in rhythm or language Rhyme (if used) usually good Story somewhat likely to resonate during multiple readings	Narrative voice fresh, engaging, distinct Point of view appropriate for story & intended audience Excellent "read-aloud" quality Rhyme (if used) excellent Story likely to resonate during multiple readings
6. Literary Qualities	Poor or inappropriate command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.) Premise conventional, expected Content not appropriate or appealing for intended audience	Moderate command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.) Premise not new, but well explored Content likely to appeal to some of intended audience	Consistently strong command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.) Premise breaks new ground Content likely to greatly appeal to intended audience

	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
7. Technical Conventions	<p>Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary inappropriate for target age group</p> <p>Frequent problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling</p> <p>Dialogue poorly written or unbalanced</p>	<p>Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary generally appropriate for target age group</p> <p>Grammar, punctuation, spelling generally good</p> <p>Dialogue adequate</p>	<p>Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary excellent for target age group</p> <p>Clear grasp of grammar, punctuation, spelling</p> <p>Dialogue appropriate, believable, incorporated well</p>
8. Presentation	<p>Illustrations inadequate, unpleasing</p> <p>Illustrations irrelevant to story</p> <p>Unattractive cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Interior design features lacking</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting difficult to read, not used to support story</p> <p>Illustrations have no educational merit (if book appropriate or intended for classroom use)</p>	<p>Illustrations adequate, moderately well executed, pleasing</p> <p>Illustrations generally support story</p> <p>Adequate cover art &amp; design</p> <p>Design features offer moderate story support, or not always germane to text</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting used adequately</p> <p>Illustrations have some educational merit (if book appropriate or intended for classroom use)</p>	<p>Illustrations appropriate, well executed, engaging</p> <p>Illustrations effectively help tell the story</p> <p>Attractive, appropriate, compelling art &amp; design</p> <p>Excellent design features support story</p> <p>Font &amp; typesetting used effectively</p> <p>Illustrations enhance book's educational merit (if book appropriate or intended for classroom use)</p> <p>Properly bound, i.e. audio and e-books</p>

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**WILLA CATEGORY RUBRIC  
CHILDREN'S POETRY ©**

**Note: If a poetry anthology is chosen as a WILLA Winner or Finalist, the compiler will be honored**

<b>Poetry Collection</b>	<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>4 - 7 points</b>	<b>8 - 10 points</b>
1. Women of the West Theme	Male main character(s), no relevant theme in most poems Western landscape (natural or human-made) nonexistent or irrelevant* Poems do not portray authentic western experiences Theme & content of most poems do not reflect WWW's mission & goals	Female character(s), relevant theme in most poems Western landscape (natural or human-made) somewhat important* Most poems portray authentic western experiences Theme & content of most poems reflect WWW's mission & goals	Female main character(s), relevant theme consistent Western landscape (natural or human-made) primary & essential Poems consistently portray authentic western experiences Theme & content of all poems excellent reflections of WWW's mission & goals
	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
2. Characterization	People/characters not well developed, or not appropriate for young readers Stereotypes evident in many or all poems**	People/characters generally well developed & appropriate for young readers Most poems convey no gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes**	All people/characters believable & appropriate for young readers No gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes presented**
3. Setting	Setting not important Setting not portrayed accurately  Illustrations (if used) & text inconsistent	Setting of moderate importance Setting generally portrayed accurately Illustrations (if used) & text generally matched	Setting supports book's theme Setting consistently portrayed accurately Illustrations (if used) & text well matched

	0 - 3 points	4 - 7 points	8 - 10 points
4. Content, Ideas, & Organization	<p>Subject matter not likely to emotionally engage young readers</p> <p>Poems not organized by theme or topic</p> <p>Most poems inadequately depict an idea, experience, or emotion</p> <p>Little evidence of logical or effective order or sequence</p>	<p>Subject matter somewhat emotionally engaging for young readers</p> <p>Adequate focus on overall theme or topic</p> <p>Most poems depict an idea, experience, or emotion; some poems stronger than others</p> <p>Poems moderately well arranged in logical &amp; effective order, with workable flow from one to the next</p>	<p>Subject matter emotionally engaging for young readers</p> <p>Excellent, cohesive focus on overall theme or topic</p> <p>Each poem depicts an idea, experience, or emotion</p> <p>Poems consistently arranged in logical &amp; effective order, with excellent flow from one to the next</p>
5. Voice	<p>Little or no sense of poet's/poets' individual style(s)</p> <p>Word choice rarely reflects or evokes poems' themes, sounds, or emotions</p> <p>Difficult to read aloud</p> <p>Poems unlikely to be read more than once</p>	<p>Poet's/poets' individual style(s) sometimes apparent</p> <p>Word choice sometimes reflects or evokes poems' themes, sounds, or emotions</p> <p>Rhythm creates adequate "read-aloud" quality; some lapses</p> <p>Some poems likely to resonate during multiple readings</p>	<p>Poet's/poets' individual style(s) clearly apparent</p> <p>Word choice often reflects or evokes poems' themes, sounds, or emotions</p> <p>Inherent rhythm creates excellent "read-aloud" quality</p> <p>Poems likely to resonate during multiple readings</p>
6. Literary Qualities	<p>Poor or inappropriate command of language</p> <p>Imagery abstract or clichéd</p> <p>Rhyme (if used) forced or incomplete</p> <p>Little or no demonstrated grasp of poetic conventions &amp; devices</p>	<p>Generally good command of language</p> <p>Some use of concrete, fresh imagery</p> <p>Rhyme (if used) generally good</p> <p>Adequate grasp of poetic conventions &amp; devices</p>	<p>Consistently strong command of language</p> <p>Consistently concrete, fresh imagery</p> <p>Rhyme (if used) consistently excellent</p> <p>Clear grasp of poetic conventions &amp; devices</p>

<p>7. Technical Conventions</p>	<p>Frequent problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling Line breaks &amp; poems' shapes confusing Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary inappropriate for target audience</p>	<p>Grammar, punctuation, spelling generally good Line breaks &amp; poems' shapes adequate Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary appropriate for target audience</p>	<p>Grammar, punctuation, spelling consistently good; unique constructions clearly intentional &amp; effective Line breaks &amp; poems' shapes carefully considered Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary excellent for target age group</p>
<p>8. Presentation</p>	<p>Illustrations (if used) inadequate, unpleasing Unattractive cover art &amp; design Interior design features lacking Font &amp; typesetting difficult to read; not used to support collection</p>	<p>Illustrations (if used) adequate, pleasing Adequate cover art &amp; design Design features moderately support collection Font &amp; typesetting used adequately</p>	<p>Illustrations (if used) appropriate, well executed, engaging Attractive, appropriate, compelling cover art &amp; design Excellent design features support collection Font &amp; typesetting used effectively Properly bound, i.e. audio and e-book</p>

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