# 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 North 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 North American West and includes Alaska and Hawaii.

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 judgement 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©

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

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

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

* WWW defines "the West" as all of North America west of the Mississippi River, and includes Alaska and Hawaii.
** Depiction of a character's biases or stereotypical views, presented in context, may be appropriate.

# WILLA CATEGORY RUBRIC
# CHILDREN'S NONFICTION©

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

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

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

\* WWW defines "the West" as all of North America west of the Mississippi River, and includes Alaska and Hawaii.

\*\* 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©

**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)<br>• Book not set in the West*<br>• Does not portray authentic western experience<br>• Theme & content do not reflect WWW's mission & goals | • Female characters prominent<br>• Book set in the West but could have happened anywhere; or, book partly set in the West*<br>• Generally portrays authentic experience<br>• Theme & content generally reflect WWW's mission & goals | • Female main character(s)<br>• Western setting primary & essential*<br>• Consistently portrays authentic western experience<br>• Theme & content excellent reflections of WWW's mission & goals |
| | **0 – 3 points** | **4 – 7 points** | **8 – 10 points** |
| 2. Characterization | • Characters not well developed, not engaging<br>• Does not engage readers in a child's or child-friendly experience<br>• Characters not believable, or not appropriate for young readers<br>• Didactic, preachy | • Character(s) moderately well developed, of some interest<br>• Moderately engages reader in a child's or child-friendly experience<br>• Most characters believable, appropriate for young readers<br>• Reader can generally differentiate among characters<br>• Character's "lesson" generally well presented | • Character(s) well developed, engaging<br>• Thoroughly engages reader in a child's or child-friendly experience<br>• All characters believable, appropriate for young readers<br>• Appropriate number of characters<br>• Any "lesson" subtle & organic |
| 3. Setting | • Setting not cohesive with story<br>• Setting not portrayed accurately<br>• Text & illustrations inconsistent | • Setting of moderate importance to story<br>• Setting generally portrayed accurately<br>• Illustrations generally complement or support text | • Setting supports story<br>• Setting consistently portrayed accurately<br>• Illustrations consistently complement or support text |

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

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

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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

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

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

| Poetry Collection | 0 – 3 points | 4 – 7 points | 8 – 10 points |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. Technical Conventions | • Frequent problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling<br>• Line breaks & poems' shapes confusing<br>• Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary inappropriate for target audience | • Grammar, punctuation, spelling generally good<br>• Line breaks & poems' shapes adequate<br>• Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary appropriate for target audience | • Grammar, punctuation, spelling consistently good; unique constructions clearly intentional & effective<br>• Line breaks & poems' shapes carefully considered<br>• Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary excellent for target age group |
| 8. Presentation | • Illustrations (if used) inadequate, unpleasing<br>• Unattractive cover art & design<br>• Interior design features lacking<br>• Font & typesetting difficult to read; not used to support collection | • Illustrations (if used) adequate, pleasing<br>• Adequate cover art & design<br>• Design features moderately support collection<br>• Font & typesetting used adequately | • Illustrations (if used) appropriate, well executed, engaging<br>• Attractive, appropriate, compelling cover art & design<br>• Excellent design features support collection<br>• Font & typesetting used effectively<br>• Properly bound, i.e., audio and eBook |

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