**Shelf Life: How to Inform, Engage with, and Recommend with Reviews**

Presenters: Virginia Johnson and Craig Graziano, Central Rappahannock Regional Library

**Tips for Writing Reviews:**

* Strong lead/opening - Having a hook that grabs your audience right away. Look for interesting aspects that make the book stand out.
* Logical closing - Sum up or re-state the general concepts or potential audience of the book.
* Less than 300 words is ideal. - Our time and attention is precious.
* Short paragraphs are helpful. - Having large blocks of text will lose readers.
* Good to review first of a series, but for best-selling series with established fan bases, it is fine to do later works
* Akin to booktalks but far shorter.
* No spoilers! - Of course it is necessary to discuss the plot, but only to a certain point. A review should set-up the foundations of the story, but should also leave the reader wanting more.
* Link to title and author’s name in your online catalog - Hyperlinking to the item in your catalog within the review allows the reader to immediately request the item as soon as it piques their interest. Any comparisons to other books or influences may be hyperlinked too, as well as any terms or concepts that might need a longer explanation.
* Come up with (at least) one recommendation for fans of the book - Does the title have a sequel? Did it put you in mind of another great read? Let them know about it!
* Only review things that you actually enjoyed - Enthusiasm is hard to fake. Think twice if you are forcing yourself to recommend a title.
* Doesn’t have to only be books - Movies and music are not off limits. Does the audiobook performance offer something special and different from the print version? Share it!
* Have someone proof your work. Typos happen. - A second (or third) set of eyes might catch an error that you’ve glossed over. Reading your words out loud often helps determine if they make sense.

**Questions to ask yourself before reviewing:**

What stood out about the book? Writing style? Plot? Characterization?

What other books did it remind you of? Were there connections or obvious influences?

If a picture book, what did the art evoke?

Themes? Literary Skills and Practices?

**Pitfalls to Avoid:**

* Sounding like a textbook or a college English paper - Being overly formal might distance readers.
* Spending more time talking about yourself or tangentially-related matters than the item you are reviewing. Your point of view will come through in your style.
* Strong personal political or personal religious opinions. To a degree, you are the voice of the public library which serves everyone. The place for that kind of advocacy is on your personal blog.
* Belittling authors and illustrators. At Shelf Life, we review things we like and want to share. Picking someone apart helps no one.
* Very long or awkward sentences. Reading it out loud tends to identify these.
* Repeating words or phrases. In a short review, they are pretty obvious.
* Filching from others' reviews without attribution--and it's better not to do it all since you only have so much space.
* Forgetting to tag authors/illustrators or publishers in your social media posts