

The Reluctant Weeder!



As someone who began her career in public libraries, I find weeding cathartic and rewarding. My children, in fact, are afraid to leave for sleepovers because I might “weed” their toys and books while they are gone! “Use it or lose it” has been my philosophy for years. However, when I started working in school libraries, I found that weeding was anathema to most teacher-librarians.

With ever-dwindling budgets and the ever-increasing cost of books, weeding appears to be something most teacher-librarians are reluctant to do. However, library research has shown over and over again that there is a direct correlation between fewer books on a shelf and higher circulation statistics. People (especially children) will not approach a shelf that is crammed too tightly. Nor will they be attracted to dirty, torn and tattered material. Higher quality books, even if fewer in number, make a better collection. They will circulate more. Why waste your shelf space and your attempts to do inventory on books that are old and outdated?

There are some general rules of thumb for weeding. One of the most prevalent is best remembered with the acronym MUSTY.

Misleading

- ◆ Look for any information that is outdated or incorrect.
- ◆ Look for racial or ethnic stereotyping.

- ◆ This will also apply to popular fiction, which is often bought due to a “fad” series. Children and young adults are particularly responsive to the cover on a paperback – if they don’t recognize the kids as “one of them” they will NOT read the book.

Ugly

- ◆ Consider the physical condition of the book.
- ◆ This also refers to illustrations in picture books or non-fiction material. Some illustrations of classic fairytales or storybooks need to be updated with new editions.

Superseded

- ◆ This would apply to almanacs, atlases, encyclopedias, yearbooks, etc.; all reference tools that have regular updates.

Trivial

- ◆ Far too many school library collections are reflective of fads – popular TV shows or music stars or anything else that is currently “hot”. And of course, all that material quickly outlives its “shelf life”.
- ◆ Books of poor quality in either content or in format might also be considered trivial.
- ◆ One way to determine whether a book is “trivial” is to look at it with a critical eye and try to guess whether it will still hold together (in content and physical format) in five years or whether the next graduating class of students will have any interest in it.

Your collection...

- ◆ Consider the usefulness of the book.
- ◆ The book may not be reflective of changes in curriculum or changes in your community.

The first school at which I worked had a fairly large collection of atlases appropriate for each division. Not one of the books had a publication date later than 1988. The teachers were adamant that these materials were to be kept since the other maps could be used. As I told them, however, the atlases would actually do everyone a disservice. Do we want to be responsible for using material that is inaccurate or, in some cases,