

Terri L. Lyons

harmful? This is also true for the old versions of *World Book* that many of us keep to hold up our shelves!

Another example of what should be weeded, but often isn't, is historical books. As many historians have told me - history does not change. Maybe not, but what I do know is that our perception of historical events does evolve, and how we write about the events does change. Many of the books written about former communist countries describe the communist culture, not the traditional cultures of those countries and peoples. Many of the books on First Nations peoples have changed dramatically over the past 10 to 15 years. Traditional history rarely included the contributions of women or visible minorities, but that is slowly beginning to change. Do we want our young girls to believe that only white men shaped civilization, or do we want to reflect the contributions of both men and women, and of various races as well?

I have had teachers beg to keep beautifully photographed books on mammals or birds. One teacher told me that we should keep a book from the 1950s on local birds because the pictures could be used and that the birds were still here. What she did not realize, however, is that the birds that come to our backyard feeders today are different from those that came 50 years ago. Like all life on this planet, climate changes and accidental imports have affected local ecology and migratory patterns. And there are very few ornithologists in our ranks who can identify these inaccuracies in older texts. This is also true of many other specialized fields of knowledge, which is why copyright date should be a factor in our weeding. An older book's pristine condition should actually be considered an indicator of a lack of interest, rather than an indication the book is worthy of retention.

The State of Florida has put together a Web site devoted to weeding for school libraries from JK-12. In addition to a pamphlet that details the MUSTY way of weeding mentioned above, there is a compilation of weeding stories. You will read them with a great deal of humour and a certain amount of guilty acknowledgement that you just

might have something like that on your shelves! Click on "Things we have dug up" at www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed.

Another useful resource is "Weeding the School Library: The Counterpart to Selection", a pamphlet from the California Department of Education which provides information, outlines the MUSTY criteria, and identifies resources. This pamphlet is available at www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/lb/documents/schoollibweedng.pdf.

The other common dilemma for teacher-librarians is what to do with the discarded material. Many of us have had to resort to smuggling the books into our car to put in the garbage at home or trying to hide the books at the bottom of large recycling bins. Some have sent the material to third world countries. If that is your preference, please remember that if you have weeded following the MUSTY principles, then the material should not be used by anyone. Classroom teachers do not need the material either. The only exception to this general rule might be material that has been republished – novels with new covers, picture books with updated illustrations, etc.

Check out your local Board's collection development policy for support on weeding. List, on bookmarks, the reasons that a book might be withdrawn from the collection and insert a bookmark into the book. If a parent discovers the material and questions the discard, you will have written evidence for your decision.

Last, but certainly not least, there are two reasons why you should weed: after a collection is weeded, the true gems are more readily apparent AND your administration may finally have to acknowledge how dated and limited the library's collection really is. So, think of the library users who will be thrilled to finally find what they really want (circulation is likely to go up) and of the collection mapping that you can now do to plead your case for more funds.

When you have accomplished a complete weeding (oh, and how cathartic that will be!) you will have progressed from "reluctant weeder" to collection advocate – a win-win situation for all! ■