

The simplest solution is this: don't label the books with gendered language. Avoid calling out these titles as "books for boys" and avoid calling out romance-driven stories as "books for girls." These are all books for **readers**, regardless of gender. Some girls love a good graphic novel, just as some boys find themselves craving a good romance. By ditching the gender labels, we encourage readers to think about the elements of a book that satisfy them as individuals, regardless of gender.

A better way to call attention to these books is to develop reader guides and displays which highlight the appeal aspects of the story. Call them what they are — designations such as "action-driven fantasy," "high-octane sports stories," "totally true tales," or "love and other radical emotions" puts the power of choice squarely within the hands of the reader. Readers not only avoid wading through messages about whether the book is meant for them based on gender, but have the opportunity to discover what aspects of story appeal to their reading sensibilities.

Boys *and* girls will find sports books that fit their intellectual and entertainment needs. Boys and girls will find the romances that ignite their hearts. And

they'll find them without the fear of whether those books are "meant" for them.

It takes the same amount of time and energy to develop a book list of action-driven sports novels as it does to develop a list of "books for boys," and we accomplish a lot more. We open the possibility that action-driven sports novels appeal to plenty of female readers, too.

Another display-driven idea is "blind date with a book." Wrap some books in plain paper and write a two or three sentence description on the paper. Readers won't see what the cover looks like and will judge the book solely on the description and content inside. This can become interactive: ask readers to develop their own covers which best reflect the content of the story on the wrapping. The opportunities to discuss what covers tell readers about not just the book but about marketing and gender would be worth exploring, as well — this is real-world information literacy.

### **Neutralizing Library Programming**

Games and gaming can be huge, crowd-pleasing events. But while the intent on starting a gaming club may have

been to draw boys into the library, that shouldn't be the club's sole purpose. It should instead aim to reach *all* of those interested in gaming. Don't advertise the club as being "for boys." Advertise the games. Sell the group on the merits of being an event meant to encourage strategy and role playing in friendly, social, comfortable environment.

Many librarians can find themselves thinking that if they offer what they perceive as a boy-centric event, they should offer an equally girl-centric event. But this also re-emphasizes a gender divide. Don't offer a nail art or spa program in order to balance out your events in terms of gender appeal. Offer a nail art or spa event in addition to your gaming event because you want to reach *any* library users and potential users with an interest in either event — or both!

When you are promoting programs make no assumptions about the potential attendees. Tell boys about spa day and about gaming events. Tell girls about gaming club as well as the nail art program. Put the power of choice into *their* hands. You will never lose library users; you instead open your library to many more.

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