

## Access to information in the library: Restrictions, selection, and promotion

The American Library Association's statement "Free Access to Libraries for Minors" argues that young people have the same rights as older readers, and therefore access to information in libraries should not be limited by age. However, for a variety of reasons, many libraries place age restrictions on materials. Some institutions do not allow patrons under a certain age to check out books from the adult section, and others apply outside rating systems to regulate the circulation of films, music, and videogames. Some libraries accommodate concerns about the protection of minors by requiring parents' signatures on young people's library card applications, thereby making them responsible for materials that are checked out. The question of access to information in libraries is not restricted to books. With increased access to computers in libraries, the question of internet filtering is an increasingly hot topic for debate.

Whether or not they are desirable, many young adult librarians have to work with the reality of the restrictions. In these situations, adherence to policies must be balanced with the provision of materials that are appropriate to patrons' information needs. This can involve:

- being creative in selecting materials from a variety of sources
- promoting alternative formats when a particular work is restricted
- identifying materials with particular interest for teens and ensure that a copy is classified as Young Adult
- strategically expanding the range of the Young Adult collection to include radical viewpoints in fiction and non-fiction

Whether or not age restrictions are in place, radical literature can present practical problems for a library, particularly because anti-establishment materials of interest to teens are not necessarily published for that

audience. Some questions to consider include:

- Where should books that cross age boundaries be shelved?
- Which departmental budget should be responsible for the books?
- How can the books be displayed so that they reach the target audience?
- How should radical materials for teens be selected?

These are ongoing questions for any "crossover" materials, and they are particularly relevant to anti-establishment materials that defy easy categorization. It is important to monitor the use of the collection and know the interests of patrons to ensure that their needs are met.

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*Here are some ideas for promoting awareness and providing access to radical literature:*

**Reader's advisory** is an important tool for librarians to provide wider access to their collections. While it is true that teens, like other patrons, are often reluctant to approach librarians for assistance or advice, the occasions that they do can be treated as opportunities to direct them to works that may be less mainstream or that are beyond the scope of the Young Adult collection.

### **Selection**

-As with all materials, the goal of selecting radical literature should be based on quality, educational benefits, community needs

-In addition to standard selection aids, consult less mainstream review sources, such as the Alternative Press Index (<http://www.altpress.org/index.html>)

-It may be useful to prepare rationales for why controversial materials were selected in anticipation of challenges

**Further reading:**

National Council of Teachers of English. (1981). *The Student's Right to Read*. Retrieved April 7, 2007 from <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/cens/107616.htm>

California Department of Education. (2006). *Recommended Literature: K-12 Selection Policies*. Retrieved April 7, 2007 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/ll/litrlppolicies.asp>

National Council of Teachers of English. (2004). *Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Non-print and Multimedia Materials*. Retrieved April 7, 2007 from <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/level/gen/107611.htm>

**Booklists**

For use with reader's advisory or posted on libraries' websites:

-Lists of radical thinkers, designed for students who are studying historical figures. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi are common choices for school assignments, so it may be useful to include important but less ubiquitous figures, like César Chavez or Noam Chomsky.

-Thematic bibliographies for teens, such as for genres like cyberpunk or political philosophies like anarchism

-Web resources for political theories and activism opportunities for teens

**Displays**

These can incorporate multimedia materials, including videos, graphic novels, and fiction:

- *Fight the man*

Present works that portray resistance to control and oppression, such as *Nothing but the Truth* by Avi, *V* for Vendetta (comics by Alan Moore and a film), *One Pledge Unspoken* by Patricia Hilliard, *Supernaturalist* by Eoin Colfer, *Chron!ic!Riots!pa!sm!* (comic collection/zine by Fly), and *Tomorrow, When The War Began* by John Marsden.

- *Are you afraid of the future?*

Feature dark dystopian works, such as *Neuromancer* by William Gibson, *Blade Runner* (a film based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick), *The Machine Stops* by E.M. Forster, and *Feed* by M.T. Anderson.

- *May Day*

Display materials related to workers' rights and workers' movements. Possible selections include *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson, *Bread and Roses* (a film), *May Day: A Short History* by Philip Foner, and *Cesar Chavez: A Voice for Farmworkers* by Barbara C. Cruz.

- *Free the books*

Display challenged or controversial books that have been censored throughout history, perhaps decorated with barbed wire or chains.

**Booktalks**

-Pair a dystopian novel with a non-fiction work about a person who fought against oppression in the real world. For example: *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.* by Luis Rodriguez with *Stand on Zanzibar* by John Brunner, or *Unbowed: A Memoir* by Wangari Maathai with *The Last Book in the Universe* by Rodman Philbrick.

-Present a "classic" dystopian title, like *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, with a more recent work like the *Uglies* trilogy by Scott Westerfield.

**"Freedom is actually a bigger game than power. Power is about what you can control. Freedom is about what you can unleash."**  
- Harriet Rubin