GENREFYING IN A PUBLIC LIBRARY

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The idea of genrefying, that is, organizing the fiction section in a library first by the genre of the title rather than lumping all titles together in order of author’s last name, is a topic lacking in specific research in the realm of public libraries. Some studies have been conducted, but, in general, much of what is presented on this topic is based on opinion or personal experience. This bibliography combines the wide variety of information needed to adequately discuss the topic of genrefication, including general information on ways to organize a fiction section, patrons’ browsing habits, and descriptions of different genres or genre lists.

ORGANIZATION OF FICTION IN A PUBLIC LIBRARY

SOME RESOURCES ON THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF FICTION SECTIONS.


Gail Harrell’s essay analyzes the many ways to organize a fiction section in a public library, especially those with a large, wide collection. Her focus on using fiction categories is not limited to organization by genre physically but also discusses ways to create the idea of genre sections without physically having to change the collection.


This essay describes the various approaches to organizing the fiction section of a library with regards to how the reader goes about finding a book and focuses on the best way to meet the reader's needs. It discusses genrefication at length, as well as spine-labeling, book displays, and alternative classification schemes.

RESEARCH ABOUT PATRONS' NEEDS AND WANTS

WHAT WILL ACTUALLY WORK FOR THE PATRONS WHO USE THE FICTION SECTION?


Sharon Baker’s essay abounds with practical advice for helping readers find books they want based on studied browsing techniques of library patrons. She uses what we know about browsing techniques to suggest ways for a library to create new entry points to the collection for the patron. For example, she suggests shifting the collection periodically.
since patrons tend to browse at eye-level; shifting the books that sit at eye-level will introduce the reader to different titles.


This was a survey of 500 readers and library users conducted in 1980. The survey was meant to provide “information of practical value for librarians concerned in the selection and promotion of fiction in public libraries” by asking users their preferences on what they liked to read, how they decided what to read, and how they found new books. It also asked them a number of questions about their preferences on the physical layout of libraries and how books are shelved. The survey is out-of-date, but still offers some insight into what patrons prefer when you have taken technology out of the realm of possibilities.

**RESEARCH STUDIES ON GENREFICATION**


This study of North Carolina public libraries focused specifically on experimenting with genre classification by separating specific titles from the general fiction collection. They were able to find support for their theory that doing this would increase the circulation of those books.


Ross Betzer's research paper comprehensively compares views on genrefying adult fiction in public libraries through library science literature. Betzer looks as far back as 1909, following the arguments forward both for and against genrefication. Betzer attempts to present the arguments impartially, but he acknowledges his bias toward genrefication, positing in no uncertain terms, "The biggest argument in favor...is that it is what patrons want. Virtually all of the surveys done over the years have born this out...When fiction is separated by genre, circulation goes up." Betzer's paper serves as a concise review of the existing literature, and is a solid springboard from which to continue deeper research.


This study looks directly at the correlation between how fiction sections are classified and its effect on circulation. A number of different organizational options had positive effects on circulation, and the study supports any change that will increase patron use of the collection.

Richard's Master's paper on the genre classification of the Durham County Library supports genrefication, especially with regard to increased circulation and patron satisfaction. Richard reaches back as far as 1899 to find academic literature about genres in libraries. According to Richard, studies have repeatedly shown, through time, that patrons want to be able to browse for books on the shelves. This is currently the easiest and most successful selection method for them. Granted, this paper was published in 1999, and public preference might have changed since then with the arrival of the internet. However, Richard’s points continue to stand strong--genre classification is gaining momentum and could be the way of the future.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH GENREFICATION

The vast majority of these resources are blog posts, and all of them are about genrefying in school libraries. However, the personal experiences of these librarians are not dissimilar from what would be experienced in a public library setting and are therefore important to this conversation.


Leigh Collazo's blog post provides a clear account of genrefying's costs and benefits. She outlines the process she went through to genrefy her middle school library’s collection. Collazo describes how she picked each genre, and how she decided to display each genre with a combination of shelving, labeling, and signage. This blog post, complete with its cost estimates in dollars, is very practical and useful for the genrefying librarian. Collazo also follows through in the post: she shares definitive statistics that point to the increased circulation in the library.


In this follow-up blog post, Collazo answers questions on genrefication submitted by readers. The questions mostly fall into two camps: How do you decide which genres and where books go within them? How do you physically genrefy with labels and shelving? Collazo discusses her color coded genre system, which is common in genrefied libraries. Uncommon, however, is Collazo's response to selecting which genres to pull out. Collazo encourages specificity with genres, approaching sub-genre range with her suggestions. Many genrefying librarians balk at this idea because they are concerned that small genres will limit and alienate readers. Collazo's fresh take convinces readers to comment and discuss their own situations.

Laura Stiles' brief article for School Library Journal strongly encourages librarians to genrefy their collections. She references her own genrefication work, calling it "a fairly easy process." However, she does admit that it took her "about five to six months" and that it can be "very time consuming." Stiles is greatly optimistic about genrefying and its application in libraries, to the point of dismissing arguments that genrefying risks pigeonholing students by saying, "That may be true, but is that so bad? To a nonreader, finding a book that's interesting only makes reading more appealing. I say that these reluctant or low-achieving students are gaining the confidence they need to explore other genres."


Sweeney's four part blog post on the summer genrefication process of her school library covers "The Beginning," "Moving the Collection," "Selection," and "Evaluation." Sweeney begins by assessing what preparation she will need for genrefication, which for her was mostly weeding her collection and learning what it contained. Next, Sweeney arranged the layout of the library, and moved the collection into place. This involved not just fiction moving, but nonfiction as well, due to cramped shelves. Next, Sweeney labeled books with color coded stickers according to their genres, sorting books into their proper locations. Finally, when school reconvened in the fall, Sweeney was able to evaluate how her students responded to the new system. Circulation is up, and Sweeney reports feeling more knowledgeable about her collection's contents and circulation.


Turney discusses why she decided to genrefy her high school library in this first blog post of a series. While Turney herself prefers what she calls "basic fiction shelving rules," she realized that her students were only borrowing popular books and books on display. She talked to her students and found they are most comfortable with the genrefied layout of book stores. Turney concluded that despite her personal opinions and the additional time and effort required, she needed to optimize the library for her students. This blog post is a convincing read for librarians questioning whether or not to genrefy.

In this second blog post of a series, Jennifer Turney discusses how she carried out genrefying her high school library. She outlines how she selected which genres to pull out, how she updated the catalog, and how she motivated her student workers into helping her. This post honestly points out the difficulties involved with genrefying, but Turney writes that the work is worth the increased circulation and student satisfaction.

**OPINIONS ABOUT GENREFYING**


Maker has much to say about genre classification in public libraries, the first of which is "to say that [increased circulation as a result of genrefication] is a good thing for library users overall is to make a logical fallacy of composition; the assumption here is that what is true for individual members of a class is also held to be true for the class considered as a whole." Maker argues that direct comparisons between libraries and bookstores are misdirected, because "In a bookstore model, genre is a marketing category. It is not, as it is used in public libraries, a literary category." Maker suggests that libraries need to implement, not a genre-based classification system, but a reader-based classification system. He says working with patrons and the local collection will illuminate what sort of classification system should be used, and that classification system will be tailored to the community.


Both sides of the debate over genre classification of fiction are analyzed in this article. Some problems mentioned are: deciding upon genres for difficult or mixed genre books; creating or continuing stigmas over certain genres; and whether there is space for separation. Arguments for separation by genre include: creating a smaller, more manageable selection for patrons; creating “entry points” into the collection; and preserving the independence of the reader.
PRESENTATIONS ABOUT GENREFYING

MORE INTERACTIVE RESOURCES


This presentation was created for a classroom setting of library graduate students. While it does not function as a standalone resource, it does serve as kindling for a comprehensive discussion of genrefying in public libraries. The presentation touches upon the pros and cons of genrefying, and is intended to encourage the generation of more thoughts and questions on this burgeoning library trend.


Jennifer Turney's presentation for the Texas Association of School Librarians discusses her genrefication of her school library. The presentation itself is sparse in nature, but Turney does include statistics that show how genrefying has significantly increased circulation. She also points to Diana Tixier Herald’s texts as valuable resources, and she offers practical solutions for efficiently updating the catalog.

GENRE DESCRIPTIONS AND LISTS

These resources address the many different genres in literature.


Frolund’s book is a solution for librarians who wish to genrefy, but are unsure about where to place classic literature on the shelves. Frolund assesses over 400 classic texts, placing them into genres that should be appropriate to library categories. The book includes young adult and children's classics, which makes this resource all the more valuable for youth services librarians and school librarians looking to genrefy. Frolund provides several indices that add to the volume’s value as a reference material. This would be an excellent text for any would-be genrefying librarian.


Saricks' seminal text is the librarian’s strongest introduction to genre fiction. While Saricks clearly states that the text "is not a genre classification guide," she does describe genres with the intent of allowing us to explore where to place texts on the spectrum of
classification. Saricks points to appeal factors as frequently being stronger than genre conventions alone, and she emphasizes that readers' advisory work should advocate reading out of one's comfort genre. Saricks' work, however, will be very useful to the librarian attempting to determine which book falls into which genre.


This article focuses on the difficulty of classifying many popular young adult titles into specific genres and the prevalence of what could be called cross-genre titles. His main question is whether we can say that genre fiction is dead, but his points can be used to dig deep into the question of what makes a book a member of a particular genre. He also touches on how to deal with books that remain a question when it comes to their genre when you are talking to a reader. The focus on young adult titles does not detract from the usefulness of this article.


Stephens analyzes the argument for the inclusion of “Young Adult” as a genre in and of itself despite young adult books having the ability to fit into other genres. This article is important because the three books included in this section of this bibliography do not address young adult fiction as a genre. Stephens does not necessarily come to a conclusion about whether young adult is a genre itself, but does argue that it should be considered with the same literary value and perspective as both adult and children’s literature.


This influential text on genre fiction has earned its place on the librarian's short list of prized reference materials. Tixier Herald defines the standard genres with which librarians are familiar, but she goes beyond the basics by often releasing new editions that describe emerging genres. She sorts over 5,000 titles into genres, makes suggestions for readers' advisory work, and presents essays by genre experts. Tixier Herald's text would be invaluable for any library, especially librarians who have genrefied or are considering genrefying.

**RANDOM BUT RELATED**


This article offers a really interesting and dynamic way to delve further into genre classification, which the author says is a good first step but doesn't really cover the needs
of the readers. The author suggests the use of a color wheel, where colors represent genres, to allow the reader to search by subgenre and cross-genre. This idea may be a little outdated with the prevalent use of the internet now, but should help generate discussion of ways to genrefy the library and avoid most of the cons that other articles mention.