

Materials Selection and Access Policy

In order to provide guidance to librarians and to inform the public about the principles upon which purchased materials and services are selected, the following is stipulated:

Definitions: The word “materials” has the widest possible meaning. It may include, but is not limited to, books, pamphlets, maps, magazines and journals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, sound discs, sound tapes, videotapes, and digital information owned or accessed by the Library District, including the Internet.

Responsibility for Materials Selection: The ultimate responsibility for selection rests with the Library Director who operates within the framework of the policies approved by the Board of Trustees. The Library Director may authorize other staff to apply this policy in building the collection. Collection guidelines are articulated in the Library District’s *Library Materials Conspectus and Collection Guidelines*, which is updated frequently and is available for public inspection on the Library District’s public website.

Criteria for Selection: These basic principles are considered for selection:

1. authority and competency of the author, composer, filmmaker, etc.
2. comprehensiveness in breadth and scope
3. sincerity and fundamental objectivity
4. clarity and accuracy of presentation
5. appropriateness to the interests and skills of library users
6. relation to existing collection
7. relative importance in comparison with other materials on the subject
8. importance as a record of the time

Use of Library Material: The Library District recognizes that many materials are controversial and that any given item may offend some library users. Selections will not be made on the basis of any anticipated approval or disapproval, but solely on the merits of the works in relation to building the collection and to serving the interests of the Poughkeepsie community.

The Library District will neither mark nor identify materials to show approval or disapproval of the contents and no item will be sequestered except for the expressed purpose of protecting it from injury or theft.

The use of rare and scarce items of great value may be controlled to the extent required to preserve them from harm.

Responsibility for the reading, listening, and viewing of library materials by minors, including use of the Internet, rests with their parents or legal guardians. Selection will not be inhibited by the possibility that materials may inadvertently come into the possession of minors.

Use of the collections and services owned and accessed by the Library District for patron use must be in accordance with prevailing local, state, and federal law as well as the Patron Code of Conduct.

Guidelines for Selection

1. The Library District adheres to the principle contained in the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* and *Freedom to Read* statements. Both are attached to this policy.
2. The Library District recognizes the purpose and resources of the other libraries in Dutchess County and shall not needlessly duplicate functions and materials. Through cooperative agreements the resources of these libraries may be made available to the Poughkeepsie community.
3. The Library District acknowledges the purposes of educational programs for students of all ages provided by the educational institutions in the areas. Textbooks and curriculum-related materials for these programs are provided where the materials also serve the general public or where they provide information not otherwise available.
4. The Library District acknowledges a particular interest in local history. Therefore, it seeks to acquire materials, as they relate to the Mid-Hudson Valley, particularly Dutchess and adjoining counties in New York and Connecticut.
5. Because the Library District serves a public embracing a wide range of ages, educational backgrounds, and reading abilities, it will always seek to select materials of varying complexity.
6. In selecting materials for the collection, the Library District will consider the special, commercial, industrial, cultural, and civic enterprise of the community.

Gifts: The Library District accepts gifts of materials, but reserves the right to evaluate them and to dispose of them in accordance with established policy.

Maintaining the Collection: Materials that no longer serve a need may be removed from the collection. Decisions for removal will be based on circulation, physical condition, usefulness, age, and accuracy.

Reconsideration of Library Materials: The choice of library materials by patrons is an individual matter. While a person may reject materials for themselves, censorship may not be exercised to restrict access to the materials by others. Recognizing that a diversity of materials may result in some requests for reconsideration, the following procedures have been developed to assure that objections or complaints are handled in an attentive and consistent manner.

- A. The person with the request for reconsideration would be referred immediately to the Library Director or, in their absence, the Assistant Director. The librarian in charge should explain to the patron that selections are made in accordance with the Materials Selection Policy of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District. If the user is not satisfied with the explanation received, a reconsideration request may be made in the following manner:
 1. The person making the request for reconsideration must complete a Request for Reevaluation of a Book or Other Library Materials form. This form is permanently attached to this policy.
 2. The Request for Reevaluation will be referred to a committee of the Library Director, the librarian selecting materials, and one other staff librarian.
 3. The committee will reconsider the item in question by using the Materials Selection Policy and reviews from recognized sources.
 4. The Library Director will then write to the patron regarding the committee's recommended action. Comments made by individual Committee members are to

be held confidential by all concerned. Brief quotes, however, may be used in the Library Director's letter to the patron.

- B. If the patron desires further action, an appeal may be made to the Board of Trustees.

Request for Reevaluation of Library Material

Title: _____

Author: _____

Book? _____ If other material, describe: _____

Name of Person Making Request: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Person Represents Self? Y N

Person Represents Group? Y N

 If yes, please name group: _____

What do you believe is the theme or purpose of the material? _____

Is your objection to this material based upon personal exposure to it or reports you have heard:

Have you read/heard, seen the material in its entirety? Y N

To what do you specifically object? _____

Please forward completed form to:

Administrative Office
Poughkeepsie Public Library District
93 Market Street
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Thank you.

Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable bases, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 18, 1948.
Amended February 2, 1961, and January 23, 1980,
inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996,
by the ALA Council.

THE FREEDOM TO READ

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label “controversial” views, to distribute lists of “objectionable” books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as citizens devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary citizen, by exercising critical judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow citizens.

We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they need the help of censors to assist them in this task. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be “protected” against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings. The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. *It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox or unpopular with the majority.*

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. *Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.*

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. *It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. *There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.*

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. *It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept with any expression the prejudgment of a label characterizing it or its author as subversive or dangerous.*

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for the citizen. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.*

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive.

7. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.*

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all citizens the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

This statement was originally issued in May of 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, which in 1970 consolidated with the American Educational Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers.

Adopted June 25, 1953; revised January 28, 1972, January 16, 1991, July 12, 2000, by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee.

A Joint Statement by: American Library Association
Association of American Publishers

Subsequently Endorsed by:

American Association of University Professors
American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression
American Society of Journalists and Authors
The American Society of Newspaper Editors
Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
Association of American University Presses
Center for Democracy & Technology
The Children's Book Council
The Electronic Frontier Foundation
Feminists for Free Expression
Freedom to Read Foundation
International Reading Association
The Media Institute
National Coalition Against Censorship
National PTA
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
People for the American Way
Student Press Law Center
The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression