

Selection Policies for Library Materials: How Crandall Public Library Chooses

This statement defines the standards of critical judgment and describes the methods by which Crandall Public Library augments its collection of books and non-book materials (such as periodicals, CDs, DVDs, and videos).

The Library seeks to serve a wide range of customers with diversified interests and intends that its collection will be sound, balanced and fair. Its customers should find a collection carefully chosen for its intrinsic worth, its timeliness and its potential usefulness in the community,

Scope of Service

Crandall Public Library is the chartered library for Glens Falls, Queensbury and Moreau; and it is also the Central Reference Library of the Southern Adirondack Library System (SALS) for four counties: Warren, Washington, Saratoga and Hamilton. Beginning in 1959, State funds provided a Central Book Aid (CBA) collection of more than 50,000 serious and substantive books of adult non-fiction, and periodicals on microfilm; initially half of these titles were chosen by SALS and half by Crandall, with SALS determining the final choice. This ten-year State grant concluded in 1968, but provisions continued for the Crandall Public Library, as the Central Reference Library, to select additional CBA titles annually and to house and maintain the CBA collection.

Authority

The Director of Crandall Public Library delegates to other professional members of the staff the duty of reading reviews and resumes, studying and scrutinizing the judgment of other libraries, and judging a suggested title in terms of present holdings and potential needs. The initial selection of material is the responsibility of the professional librarians so designated. The Director has the ultimate responsibility for such selection, within the framework of policies determined by the Board of Trustees.

Criteria

Material added to the collection must meet high standards of quality in content and expression. Factors to be considered in judging quality are: factual accuracy, effective expression, significance of subject, sincerity, integrity and responsibility of opinion. The need for each item in relation to the rest of the collection and to the interests of the community also influences selection. Public demand is always considered, and books suggested for purchase by Crandall's customers are given due consideration, and added if they meet the required standards of excellence and can be purchased within budget limitations.

Adult Selection Guides

The chief professional journals consulted are Library Journal, Booklist, Publishers Weekly and Kirkus Reviews. Other critical reviews appearing in the New York Times daily and Sunday editions, as well as other national newspapers are considered. Electronic resources including subscription services to MasterFile and Novelist are utilized. Non-fee electronic

Web sites such as amazon.com, borders.com, and barnesandnoble.com, are used for consolidating reviews. Publisher and distributor bibliographies may also be considered. In choosing materials on a controversial subject or by an unknown author, several reviews are studied before the decision to purchase is made.

Children's and Young Adult Selection Guides

The professional journals that are regularly consulted for reviews of children's materials are: the Horn Book, School Library Journal, Bulletin for Children and Families, the New York Times Book Review, Multicultural Review, and Booklinks. Young adult selection guides include: VOYA, School Library Journal, Horn Book, and Multicultural Review. For both children's and young adult materials, non-fee electronic Web sites such as amazon.com, borders.com, and barnesandnoble.com, are used for consolidating reviews. Publisher and distributor bibliographies may also be considered. For selection of children's and young adult materials on controversial subjects or by unknown authors, several review sources are consulted before a decision is made.

Adult Materials

In selecting materials for adults, the overall value is the chief criterion. Works which present an honest picture of some problem or aspect of life are not excluded because of frank language. Books written to trade on sensationalism are not added knowingly. Freedoms of speech and of the press are rights of our heritage guaranteed by the Constitution and defended in the courts. Crandall Public Library subscribes to the "Library Bill of Rights", "Freedom to Read Statement", and to the "Freedom to View Statement" (texts follow) endorsed by the American Library Association. There has been some liberalizing of policies of selection in the fields of social, sexual and moral problems, reflecting increasing sophistication of the public at all levels. Crandall Public Library tries to draw the line at the point of greatest freedom combined with creative value, which is supported by at least a substantial minority of the community. Selection policies always keep in mind court decisions which have ruled that a book for adults should be judged in its entirety, not by passages taken out of context, and by its likely effect on a reasonable mature adult, not on a susceptible youngster.

Local Interests

A subject in which Crandall Public Library attempts full coverage is local history. Anything written about the local communities and much written about the adjacent counties are bought. Special local interests, such as paper and lumbering, antiques, music, art, ballet, and sports are emphasized and represented in some depth in the selection. Books written by local authors that meet these standards of selection are added to the collection.

Fiction

Crandall Public Library does not neglect nor downgrade its fiction collection. Many novels are powerful and constructive. They present appealing portrayals of characters and life. They educate emotions, change points of view, and help develop awareness, perception and sensibility.

Young Adult Materials

The ultimate aim of selection for young adults is to contribute to the development of well-rounded citizens with an understanding of themselves and others, at home and abroad. Some

of the better teenage novels are selected, as well as books on sports, careers and hobbies. Of greatest importance are books keyed to their needs and interests which tend to open new interests in cultural, economic, scientific and social fields. Materials are also added that support formal education.

Children's Materials

In the selection of materials for children high standards of quality in content and expression, as earlier defined, are of primary importance. Materials should be age-appropriate for the intended reader/viewer. In determining if materials are age-appropriate both the average reading and developmental levels of the target reader/viewer are given consideration. Materials are selected that encourage children to broaden their many interests, support their formal education, and develop understanding of the world, their culture and heritage. Each child is unique, so a wide variety of reading levels and interests are represented.

Controversy

Crandall Public Library tries to provide material on all sides, as far as availability permits, of public questions on which there is a variety of opinion. Such materials on controversial subjects or issues are selected which give evidence of a sincere desire to get at the facts, and which provide material for the customer to use in making his/her own decision.

When Materials Are Challenged

The Library is opposed to the addition or withdrawal, at the request of any individual or group, of materials which have been selected or excluded on the principles as outlined in the foregoing.

It is recognized, however, that the staff cannot read or even scan the numerous materials added yearly. Reliance must be placed on reviews and it is not always possible to read several reviews of all materials. It is also true that some reviews are top quality. Thus, some materials might be added unwittingly which might not meet all of the accepted standards of selection.

If a customer objects to any print or non-print material in the Crandall Public Library collection several professional staff members will read, view, or listen to the material in its entirety, the professional reviews will be searched and reread, and a decision made. The Director will be happy to discuss the pros and cons of the decision with the customer. If the customer is not satisfied, he/she may write a letter to the Board of Trustees stating the basic reasons for his/her objections, and the Trustees will then act upon the matter.

If a customer objects to a SALS (CBA) book or periodical, he/she should state the reasons in writing and the letter will be forwarded to the Director of the Southern Adirondack Library System.

Finally, it must be remembered that since all library materials probably have something in them that is objectionable to somebody, there would be few materials in the Library if selectors tried to choose only materials to which there might be no objections.

In a day such as ours, a library must choose to represent and recommend "all winds of doctrine," knowing that some will be repugnant and others disdained by many customers, but

insisting on the right of the Library to document the day and its mores. Crandall Public Library must also allow room on its shelves for the innovators, the experimenters and for authors of books that "stretch the mind". Some of the experimental writing of our day will undoubtedly become the classics of tomorrow.

Policy Concerning Gifts and Discards

Financial gifts are accepted on a restricted and unrestricted basis according to the donor's wishes. Gifts of books and other materials are welcomed by the Library, but with the understanding that they will not necessarily be added to the collection. The same standards of selection are applied to gifts as to materials purchased from library funds. Gifts which do not meet the Library's standards will be placed in the Friends of the Library book sale. Unneeded duplicate copies may be placed in the book sale or given to another library.

Choice of memorial books or recordings may be left to the library staff, or the donor may indicate a particular book or subject desired. Often the library staff selects a book which will reflect the special interests of the person being commemorated.

Memorial books are shelved with the regular collection, according to subject-classification, so that they will be available and useful to persons seeking books on a particular subject. A memorial plate is affixed to each memorial book.

Discards of CBA books will be decided upon by Crandall Public Library staff.

Discards of Crandall books may be given to the Friends of Crandall Library for its book sale, if in the judgment of the professional staff they would be of interest to the public.

Any offering to the Library of non-library materials, such as framed art, sculpture, etc., will be accepted or rejected by a committee of three. The committee will consist of a trustee or trustees, the Director and a staff member.

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 counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals 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 individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. 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 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 or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials. 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, unpopular, or considered dangerous by 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 the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression 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 others. 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; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.

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. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

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 Americans 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.

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

Endorsed by the Crandall Public Library Board of Trustees