The Importance of a Dedicated Middle Grade (Tween) Collection

Did you ever look at a book and think, “That subject matter is a bit below the young adult designation, but a bit above the juvenile designation…where do I put it?” I know I have. And there were times when a parent came to me, not to complain about a book, but just the section it was in. That gave me the opportunity to pause and re-evaluate where I put the book based on my community.

This is the age where kids tend to lose interest in the library, especially if we, as librarians, are not cultivating a new relationship with them. The literary interests of tweens (about 5th-8th grades) are unique. It is an awkward time in life – not a child anymore, but not quite ready for the subject matter of some young adult literature. Granted, we are NOT in the business of censorship. That is a venue strictly related to parenting. But why not create a designation of books for just the middle grades? It gives kids the ability to shop for books about kids who are at the same age or point in life. Even if it is fantasy, historical, or real life fiction, kids tend to want to be able to see themselves in what they read.

How do you select books for this age group? Some publishers are catching on that a designation of middle grades is important, but others have not made this move yet. Most times it takes looking at the age of the protagonist, maturity of the subject matter, and guessing at the probable appeal to tweens. That takes time…something that many librarians, especially those in small libraries, don’t have much of. The first thing to do is just listen. Listen to what kids in that age group are asking for and are reading. If they are not asking you, then you ask them. If they know you are interested, they will tell you. Besides that very important step of engaging your middle graders, there are things like Book List, Book Page, Library Journal, Publisher’s Weekly, etc. However, these can be expensive subscriptions for a small library. In addition to the resources listed below, ALA, ALSC, and YALSA have a variety of book lists available. Start out with www.ala.org and look at the divisions for their book lists. One company, Junior Library Guild has selection lists for this age group, and they also offer books that are specifically “clean” in their content in case that is a concern for your area.

How do you shelve and market it? That can be as easy as putting a classification label on library materials.
Unfortunately, library suppliers have not caught on to this concept either, so you might have to make your own. That can be as easy as putting MG (Middle Grades or some libraries call it Middle Ground) or MS (Middle School). Pulling those books from your Juvenile and YA collections, labeling them, and then setting aside a few shelves just for those books would be helpful to kids and parents. Market it with a sign; let people know at the front desk that there is something new, and there you go!

Is it worth it? According to an article in the May 1, 2017 issue of the Library Hotline, “Statistics prove the hard work is worth it: circulation goes up when books are shelved in focused age/grade range collections. Middle schoolers seem to appreciate not having to browse through the general juvenile collection and value having a specialized collection that shows a strong commitment to their reading tastes….It also gives these readers a little more trust with more serious content, making them feel respected.”

Grades 6-8 Booksoure: [http://www.booksource.com/](http://www.booksource.com/)

Good Reads: [https://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/middle-school](https://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/middle-school)


The *Kids Count Data Book*, published annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is intended to provide a snapshot of the well-being of children in the United States. Some of the indicators evaluated are economic, education, health, family and community, and overall well-being. The online data can be sorted by state, county, town or city, school district, or zip code. This allows you to drill down for local indicators which will assist you in providing services and for grant writing purposes. The online tool can be found at [http://datacenter.kidscount.org/](http://datacenter.kidscount.org/). You can also order a FREE print copy of the report from the foundation by going to: [http://www.aecf.org/order-our-reports/#KCDB-17](http://www.aecf.org/order-our-reports/#KCDB-17).

**Yakety-YAK Needs YOU!**

Do you have a specialty or topic that you would like to write an article about? Have you had a successful youth program that can easily be scaled for small libraries with few $$ and staff? OR scaled up for larger libraries? If so, please send your step-by-step of why you did it, how you did it, and any special information (like things you would have done differently to make the program more successful). Please include several pictures. Email ideas to gsheldon@apls.state.al.us.
Alabama Public Television is offering the opportunity to stream virtual field trips this summer through a partnership with OVEE. OVEE is an online interface which allows multiple users to watch a video together, send in questions, comments, participate in polls and more. These field trips are appropriate for children and teens from 5th through 12th grade. Below are a list of dates, times, and topics. For more information about how to access this great resource, go to: https://ovee.itvs.org/screenings/. When you click the RSVP button, you will get more information and directions for how to join in.

- **July 12th, 10 AM CDT: Our Nations Capitol** (appropriate for grades 5-8): Join student reporters as they uncover the history, art and architecture that define America’s living symbol of democracy and freedom. Enjoy special behind-the-scenes access as students explore the famous Rotunda and its historical paintings, dig into the archives to discover the history of the Capitol building, and learn more about the legislative branch of our federal government housed in this storied building.

- **July 19th, 10 AM CDT: Experience Shakespeare – Up on Your Feet** (appropriate for grades 6-12): Join us as we explore the vaults of the Folger Shakespeare Library and get your students “up on their feet” to perform a Shakespeare insult war in this Emmy Award-winning Learning Adventure.

- **July 26th, 10 AM CDT: Gulf Detectives – Animals of the Northern Gulf of Mexico** (appropriate for grades 5-8): Follow three young science detectives as they learn about the animals of the Northern Gulf of Mexico with the help of the scientists at Dauphin Island Sea Lab. The program features a shark research boat trip, a shark dissection, and a visit to Coffee Island to learn about the efforts by The Nature Conservancy to restore the oyster reefs in the area. The gulf detectives also get their hands dirty with marsh mud to discover what creatures live there and what they can tell us about the health of the Gulf’s ecosystem.

YALSA Future Ready is now accepting applications for their 2nd cohort. Future Ready with the Library: Connecting Communities for College & Career Ready Services is a project YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) in Partnership with ARSL (Association for Rural and Small Libraries) and made possible with a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services. The goal of Future Ready to create a customized learning program for and with library staff at rural, small, and tribal libraries to prepare middle schoolers with the 21st century skills needed to succeed in college and careers. The project also aims to help these libraries build and expand their capacity through community engagement and partnerships. The first cohort of 20 libraries is well into the year. The second cohort will consist of 30 libraries. Libraries must be small, rural, and/or tribal and meet the following requirements:

- have a service area of 15,000 or less;
- is more than 25 miles from an ‘urbanized area’ (as defined by the U.S. Census); or
- is established by an Indian nation or a public library on tribal lands.

For more information, visit http://www.ala.org/yalsa/future-ready-library. There is a webinar for potential applicants on July 13 at 6 PM Central Time. Applications are due September 1, 2017.
Making an Abacus

This activity is a little more complex and will take some preliminary work and a little bit of money. But it brings an ancient tool back to life and provides a learning experience not only in the creation, but also in the use. The activity is provided from StarNet: [http://www.starnetlibraries.org/elementary-aged/new-life-for-an-ancient-tool-making-and-using-abaci-with-elementary-age-kids/](http://www.starnetlibraries.org/elementary-aged/new-life-for-an-ancient-tool-making-and-using-abaci-with-elementary-age-kids/)

What you will need for each participant:

3 pieces of corrugated cardboard 6”x6”
Glue
10 6” pipe cleaners
50-60 pony beads (there are many inexpensive options on Amazon)
Masking tape

Before the activity, glue together 3 squares of cardboard per participant, making sure that the corrugation of the middle layer runs vertically while the top and bottom pieces run horizontally. This is so the pipe cleaners will slide in through the middle corrugation vertically. How much you want to do ahead of time will depend on the age of your group.

Ahead of time cut two windows in the cardboard – one 1” x 4” and one 2.5” x 4” with a 3/4 “ section of cardboard left intact between the windows, and a 1” border all around the square. You also might want to count out the beads and pipe cleaners into cups before the program.

After the children receive their supplies, welcome them to trade and swap the beads around to get color combinations they wanted. When everyone is happy with the collection of beads they have, have them start feeding a pipe cleaner into a cardboard vein fairly close to one edge of the windows. When the end of the pipe cleaner enters the smaller window, then add two beads (or one if using 50 beads). Then the pipe cleaner is pushed across the rest of the window to the same vein on the opposite side. When the pipe cleaner enters the larger window, four more beads are added. The pipe cleaner is then pushed into the same vein on the opposite side of that window and to the edge of the cardboard square. The rest of the pipe cleaners are fed through in the same manner, spaced equally apart across the width of the windows. When all ten pipe cleaners have been fed through and beaded, cut off any points that protrude from the cardboard square. Wrap masking tape around the edges to keep the pipe cleaners in place and protect fingers from being poked. The final step before learning to use the abaci is to decorate them with markers, crayons, stickers, and whatever you have available.
Here are some images to give you an idea about what the finished frame should look like:

![Abacus Images]

Depending on whether you constructed the abacus with one bead above the bar (soroban abacus) or two beads above the bar (suanpan abacus). Follow the links below for instructions.

Soroban (Japanese) Abacus: [http://webhome.idirect.com/~totton/abacus/pages.htm#Soroban1](http://webhome.idirect.com/~totton/abacus/pages.htm#Soroban1)


**BOOKS**

There are a lot of books out there, but many are expensive. Check your own collection before ordering. There are abundant resources online besides those above.

*Abacus Mind Math* (series), SAI Speed Math Society

*Abacus 101: Beginner's Abacus & Mental Math: Learn The Story, Concepts & Basics Of Traditional Abacus*, Dazai, Tong

This activity includes Engineering, building/putting together; Art, the design and decoration - each child making it their own; and, of course, Math, learning how it works and then using it to calculate.

**Professional Development Books available @ APLS**

**DID YOU KNOW** that APLS has professional books on a variety of topics that are available to check out and have sent directly to you. Topics include Collection Development, Children's Services, Teen Services, Making and Makerspaces, STEM/STEAM, Coding, and much more! You can search the APLS catalog at [http://evergreen.apls.state.al.us/eg/opac/](http://evergreen.apls.state.al.us/eg/opac/). Just contact the reference desk at APLS: 334-213-3987, or email msmith@apls.state.al.us or aperry@apls.state.al.us tell them the title you are looking for and they will check the book out and have it sent to you! For other titles and subjects, feel free to search away!

**Book of the Month:** *A Crash Course in Children's Services*, Peck, Penny; 2014

Useful for newcomers to the children’s library staff as well as longtime children's librarians, the second edition of this popular handbook provides easy-to-follow instructions to make innovations in children's library materials work for you. • Covers new technologies and Common Core standards in addition to traditional areas of children's services • Allows any library staff to comfortably assist children searching for reference and homework help, offer effective readers’ advisory assistance, and perform basic promotion of books to children • Most useful for small libraries.
See how **MORE** public libraries around the state are decorating for the Summer Reading Program...

**Alabaster**

**North Shelby**

**Atmore**

**Homewood**
Title: Georgia Rules

Author: Nanci Turner Steveson

Release Date: May 2nd, 2017

Maggie, short for Magnolia Grace, knows her mother. She can tell her mother is about to give her bad news. But divorce? Moving to Vermont to the property her daddy had left her when he died for a whole year? How was she supposed to handle that?

Vermont is nothing like Georgia and living in the country is an even bigger change after growing up in Atlanta. Getting internet is a hassle and she's miles away from anything remotely resembling civilization. She gets funny looks for being polite and using respectful terms like ma'am and sir. And it's really unnerving for people she's never met to know who she is without her even being introduced.

The longer she's there, however, the more she realizes that this was where she was always meant to be. People welcome her into their lives like a long lost member of their family. Her father, so long absent from her life, feels like he is there even though he's dead. With every passing day, she feels like she is reclaiming pieces of herself and her heritage she'd never known she was missing. But her mother had always only meant for them to stay for a year, and Maggie's going to have to fight to stay where she knows she belongs.

I loved Georgia Rules. Any Southerners who've been up North will understand the culture shock, and it's the same thing when you're going from city to country or vice versa. But more than that, the book is about the relationship between parents and children - Maggie's lack of relationship with her birth father and her remote relationship with her mother and step-father. In contrast, are the relationships in the family Maggie gets to know, a family that consists of mostly adopted and foster children. In the end I felt the message was relationships are a series of choices, and both sides are responsible for working together to build stronger ones.

Overall, there is a lot of good that could be said about this book. It dealt with several issues, but in a way that flowed naturally throughout the story. The ending was good, but bittersweet. Maggie's father was such a vivid character, despite the fact that he was dead from the beginning, that you couldn't help but wish things had been different. I believe this would be an excellent read for children whose family lives aren't traditional, or who are having problems with their own families.

Recommended for: Family fiction, especially girls.

Things to watch out for: There are LGBTQA characters as well as prejudiced attitudes expressed by a characters about said characters. Divorce, mentions of a character suffering PTSD, a character who has a serious accident, and character death occurring before story start.