

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to inform the public of the library's guiding principles in the area of collection development.

OBJECTIVES

The River Falls Public Library subscribes to the Library Bill of Rights, adopted by the American Library Association, as well as the Freedom to Read Statement. Both statements can be found at the end of this policy.

The objective is to "collect and disseminate all kinds of informational, educational, recreational, and cultural materials with free access to all people."

Materials are selected and organized to meet the needs of area residents both as individuals and as members of groups, with concern for all ages, backgrounds, interests, abilities, and levels of education. The Library acquires materials that reflect a wide range of views, opinions, and beliefs. The Library does not promote particular views, opinions or beliefs. Acquisition of materials does not constitute endorsement of content. It provides a resource where the individual can examine issues freely and make individual decisions.

Library users make their own choices as to what they will use based on individual interests and concerns. The River Falls Public Library supports the right of each family to decide which items are appropriate for use by their children. Responsibility for a child's use of library materials lies with their parent or guardian.

SELECTION

With attention to the limitations of space and budget, materials should be in sufficient supply to make the library a dependable resource for most people most of the time. The Library's goal is to encourage the maximum use of its collection by the greatest number of people.

The Library seeks to draw upon the collections and resources of neighboring libraries and systems so that materials are not unnecessarily duplicated. As a member of the MORE Library Consortium, the Library and its patrons have direct access to the collections of many other area libraries. Interlibrary loan is used to secure from other libraries those specialized materials which are beyond the scope of the River Falls Public Library collection and that are not available through the MORE consortium.

The selection of library materials is essentially a cooperative process. The users of the River Falls Public Library indicate their interests and needs. The librarians try to anticipate those interests and needs and exercise their critical judgment in evaluating and selecting the best materials available. Final responsibility for materials selection rests with the Library Director, who operates within the framework of policies determined by the Library Board of Trustees.

In order to build collections of merit and significance, materials must be tested against objective standards. All acquisitions, whether purchased or given as memorials or gifts, are considered in terms of the following standards (in no particular order):

- Professional reviews
- Reliability of information
- Timeliness and long-term value

- Literary style and readability
- Popular interest
- Diverse points of view
- Existing subject matter in the collection
- Need for added material in that subject matter
- Credibility of author and publisher
- Availability elsewhere in the community
- Suitability of format for library purposes
- Suitability of formats that meet the needs of users with disabilities
- Representation of diverse points of view
- Budgetary considerations
- Physical limitations of the library building

Though the Library does have a small local history collection, it does not serve as an archive for the City of River Falls or any organization.

COLLECTION MAINTENANCE

The collection will be kept attractive and current by a continual process of repairing, discarding or replacing worn, under-utilized, and obsolete materials.

MATERIAL DONATIONS

The Library welcomes donations of materials with the understanding that they will be evaluated using the same criteria as those applied to purchased materials. The Library generally accepts recent materials in collected formats that are in new condition, although older materials of local historical interest will also be considered. The Library reserves the right to refuse donated materials for any reason.

Donated materials become the property of the Library, which reserves the right to distribute, sell, use, or dispose of them at any time.

Upon request, the Library will provide a form which acknowledges receipt of items for tax purposes. It is the donor's responsibility to value the items.

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

The library will challenge censorship of any materials in order to provide complete and accurate information on all sides of an issue, and to foster a climate of intellectual freedom for area residents.

A. Oral Discussion

Despite the care taken in selection, it is natural for differences of opinion regarding suitable Materials to arise. Thus, individuals may discuss their personal objections to the inclusion or exclusion of a specific item with a librarian. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the librarian, the complainant may request a private discussion with the Library Director concerning the objectionable materials. Both sides may air their feelings about the value of the work in question.

B. Written Complaint

If the discussion does not satisfy the individual, they may choose to complete and sign a Reconsideration Request Form, available at the River Falls Public Library. The Library Director shall evaluate the material in depth and prepare a written statement for the person, explaining the decision.

Materials under reconsideration will not be removed from the collection or restricted in any way until a final decision is made.

C. Appeal to the Library Board

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the Library Director's written reply and re-evaluation of the objectionable work, the person may appeal the complaint to the Library Board. The complainant and the Library Director shall submit their completed written statements to the Library Board.

The Board will review the complaint and Director's written statement at its next regularly scheduled public meeting. If needed, the Board will have an additional regular business days to convene a special reconsideration meeting. Utilizing the Board approved Collection Development Policy and professional selection aids for the review, the Board will weigh the values and faults of the work against each other, and form an opinion based on the materials taken as a whole, not on passages taken out of context. The person appealing the decision shall be notified of the date, time, and location the board will hear the matter and may appear at the meeting to be heard.

One copy of the final report from the Library Board shall be given to the complainant, one copy to the Library director, and one copy shall remain in the Board's official records.

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 basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 18, 1948, by the ALA Council; amended February 2, 1961; amended June 28, 1967; amended January 23, 1980; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 24, 1996.

Freedom to Read Statement

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.

Adopted June 25, 1953, by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee; amended January 28, 1972; January 16, 1991; July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004.

A Joint Statement by:

American Library Association
Association of American Publishers

Subsequently endorsed by:

American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression
The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
The Children's Book Council
Freedom to Read Foundation National Association of College Stores
National Coalition Against Censorship
National Council of Teachers of English
The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression