

How do we decide what goes into the Children's Room, and what goes into the Teen Room?

People sometimes ask what the cutoff is for titles in the Children's Room vs. the Teen Room. At what age can children start reading the Teen Books? There is not a clear, black and white delineation. Since everyone has different values, the decision is best left up to the people who know the children best, namely their parents. Here is how we decide which titles end up shelved in the Children's Room, and which are shelved in the Teen Room.

To start, the budget for the children's collection is bigger than the budget for the teen collection, And let's face it, there's a lot more room downstairs than in the Teen Room! So a title that could be found in *either* location will probably be found downstairs. This is especially true with nonfiction titles. More of the titles used for school reports such as science experiment books and biographies will be downstairs. There's also more room downstairs for fun nonfiction reads such as books about the Mars Rover exploration, Arctic rescue, and sports books on surfing and gymnastics.

We also look at the content of the book. There are books about puberty and changing bodies downstairs, but titles discussing teen pregnancy will be found upstairs in the Teen Room. Fiction titles that include teen pregnancy and suicide are upstairs, while crushes, handholding, and first kisses will be found in some of the titles downstairs. The impact of war and alcoholism will be found in both places, as that is the reality for some children, even in the Kennebunk area. Talking animals are more likely to be downstairs. Because children like to read about someone older than themselves, a few of the titles in the Children's Room include high school aged protagonists.

A good example of the dilemma is the Alice McKinley series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. This is a well reviewed series with a substantial following about the coming-of-age of Alice McKinley. Some of the titles are shelved in the Children's Room; others are upstairs in the Teen Room.

In the first book, *Alice in Agony*, we meet 11-year-old Alice. Her mother died when she was four, and her father has done his best job at raising her. But now she's entering 6th grade, and longs for some feminine insight. Alice struggles with realistic pre-adolescent worries such as fitting in, crushes on boys, and bodily changes. Girls will recognize many of her fears, and that is what has kept the series so popular over the years.

Alice ages over the course of the series, with the most recent title taking place after high school. More than one book may cover the same school year in her life. Obviously, as she ages, she encounters age appropriate dilemmas. The first seven books in the series are shelved in the Children's Room. In the eighth book, *Alice in Lace*, each student in her eighth grade health class is given an assignment to role play hypothetical life situations. Topics assigned include budgeting for a wedding and married life, teen pregnancy, drunken driving and shoplifting. Because of the inclusion of more mature topics, this title is the first of the series shelved in the Teen Room.

By identifying with characters through books, children can see the results of life choices in a safe manner. Whether it is learning how to be friends in spite of rivalry, learning how to interact with members of the opposite sex or the harsh realities of poverty, alcoholism, or war, reading about the

repercussions on a character you've grown to care about can help children and teens discern their values. With parental guidance and family discussion about topics raised in their reading, children most often grow to incorporate the values of their family.

When books are reviewed, they are suggested for a range of ages or grades. Books in the Children's Room include titles that are suggested for up to grade 8. Books in the Teen Room may include titles reviewed for children younger than that. Parents can reassure their children that just because a title is in the Children's Room, it is not necessarily a childish book. There is plenty of adventure, gore and suspense to be found in both areas.

Written by the Kennebunk Free Library in Kennebunk, Maine.