Connecting patrons with library materials: A readers’ advisory crash course

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1) Readers’ Advisory Roundtable, Iowa Library Association
   • Who are we? We are ILA’s newest subdivision, working to improve readers’ advisory services for libraries and librarians across Iowa.
   • What do we do? We have presented at the 2015 ILOC and ILA conferences, host an email discussion thread about readers’ advisory practices, conduct in-depth genre studies, and more.
   • How can you join?
     ○ Join the Google Group (will need a Google account): http://groups.google.com/d/forum/RART_ILA
     ○ Email Jillian.E.Rutledge@gmail.com OR RART_ILA@googlegroups.com
       (emails sent to this account will go out to the entire RART group)
     ○ Tweet: @iowaRART
     ○ Visit: http://iowareadersadvisory.blogspot.com/
   • 2016 Genre Study: Throughout 2015 RART members read, reviewed and discussed Fantasy literature and presented our findings at the ILA Conference. This year we will be studying Historical Fiction. We will continue to email reviews to the group, as well as any pertinent readers’ advisory articles or websites, but the main difference this year is that we are also going to try and meet through Google hangout every other month for about an hour or so. Participants are encouraged to read as many Historical Fiction novels as they’d like and to send the group a review complete with rating, series information, longer review, a “too long, didn’t read” short summarized review, and read-alikes. We will also discuss the appeal factors of and various subgenres within Historical Fiction and explore how we can better help patrons find library materials related to this genre.

2) Elements of Readers’ Advisory:
   “Patron-centered library service for leisure readers and leisure time pursuits”
   -Joyce Saricks
   • Genre: is the word used to describe a category of literature, film, or music. These include: Adventure, Romantic Suspense, Suspense, Thriller, Gentle
Reads, Horror, Romance, Women’s Lives and Relationships, Chick Lit, Literary Fiction, Mystery, Psychological Suspense, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Westerns, Christian Fiction

- **Appeal factors:** Go beyond the subject or plotline and describe the “feel” or the “essence” of the book. Many times books in the same genre will have similar appeal factors, but not always.
  - **Pacing:** Speed of the book, both in terms of how the story unfolds and how it feels to read the book. Certain genres are generally known to be fast-paced, such as thrillers, romance, and action adventures, whereas historical fiction, biography, and fantasy are usually more leisurely paced. Shorter chapter and paragraph length, lots of dialogue and multiple setting changes and points of view all make a book feel as though it is reading more quickly (and it often is!). Books that contain a lot of detail and description, exposition, long chapters and paragraphs will make a book feel much slower. Additionally, end-oriented genres such as romance and suspense or mystery often feel faster because the reader expects something at the end.
    - **Words to listen for regarding pacing:** page-turner, compelling, intensifying, leisurely, non-stop action, plot twists.
    - **Questions to consider regarding pacing:** Is there more dialogue or description? Are the characters and plot revealed quickly or slowly? Are there multiple plotlines and points of view?
  - **Main genres:** Thrillers, Adventure, Suspense, Romantic Suspense

- **Characterization:** This refers to both the type and number of characters as well as how the reader reacts to them. Characters can be well defined and constant or can be developed slowly and subject to change. Often, readers are in the mood for a specific type of character, such as funny, strong, sassy, etc. In addition to the main protagonist (or antagonist) characterization also includes serial and secondary characters and how readers react to everyone involved in the book. Do they want to follow a long story arc, spread over several books, with the same repeating characters? Or do they prefer to finish a book and be done with them? Does the reader need to feel a personal connection to the characters or are they fine with a more distant observation?
    - **Words to listen for regarding characterization:**
      Introspective/Involving first-person, quirky, likeable, sassy, spirited, strong, authentic, courageous, brooding, flawed, large cast, relatable, unlikeable, snarky, sympathetic, unreliable, well-developed.
- **Questions to consider regarding characterization:** Are the characters developed over time? Is the focus on one character or several? From whose point of view is the story told? Do you identify with the character(s) or just observe them? Are there series characters? How important are the secondary characters?

- **Main genres:** Horror, Romance, Gentle Reads, Chick Lit, Women’s Lives & Relationship, Science Fiction, Mystery, Literary Fiction and Psychological Suspense

- **Storyline:** Storyline refers to more than just the plot of the book. Rather it is a combination of the book’s type, theme, genre, subject, focus and how the story is constructed. Think of it as the book’s blueprint.
  - **Words to listen for regarding storyline:** Complex, convoluted, issue-oriented, action-packed, character-driven, nonlinear, open ended, plot-driven, sweeping, world-building, family-centered, tragic.
  - **Questions to consider regarding storyline:** Does the story emphasize people or events? Is the focus more interior/psychological or exterior/situational? What is the author’s intent with the story?

- **Main genres:** All

- **Language/Style:** Language/Style refers to the reader’s perceived quality and manner of writing. Language/Style is not always essential to a reader’s enjoyment, but when it is important, it is often the most important appeal factor.
  - **Words to listen for regarding language/style:** Lyrical, lush, beautiful, haunting, eloquent, gritty, provocative, humorous, jargon-filled, precise, dry, poetic, elegant, conversational, colorful, candid, flamboyant, frank, showy, simple, sophisticated, unpretentious, unusual.
  - **Questions to consider regarding language/style:** Does the reader prefer elegantly written, award-winning books, or would they rather have a book written in a conversational style? Is the style of the writing important to the reader, or are they more interested in a specific subject, genre, tone, setting, etc.?

- **Main genres:** All books have a specific language and writing style, though Literary fiction is often viewed as “high quality” or “well written”. Readers’ advisory experts suggest avoiding terms like these as they’re very subjective. If the reader appreciates such
qualifications, you may choose to use “critically acclaimed” or “award winning” when describing a book.

- **Setting:** This refers to not only where the story is set, but also the book’s background how much that setting is integral to the book. Books can be set in either real or imagined places, and the setting can be as fundamental to the story as a character or can be insignificant.
  - **Words to listen for regarding setting:** Descriptive, detailed, atmosphere, world-building, culture, ambience, background, time period,
  - **Questions to consider regarding setting:** Is the background detailed or minimal? How important is the geographic location of the book? Is the setting a real place or has the author invented a new world?
  - **Main genres:** Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Western, Science Fiction, Thriller (in terms of Political, Medical, Military, Legal, Scientific, Financial, Law Enforcement, Espionage backgrounds)

- **Tone/Mood:** Tone/mood describes how the book feels when it is read. Often a reader’s own mood and sensibility will affect the type of book they want to read, and those feelings can change quickly. A reader might say, “I’m in the mood for...”
  - **Words to listen for regarding tone/mood:** bleak, upbeat, amusing, atmospheric, bittersweet, chaste, conservative, creepy, darkly humorous, disturbing, dramatic, explicit, gossipy, gruesome, funny, haunting, heartwarming, heart wrenching, homespun, hopeful, inspiring, impassioned, irreligious, menacing, moody, moving, mystical, nostalgic, offbeat, racy, reflective, romantic, sardonic, self-deprecating, sobering, spiritual, steamy, strong sense of place, suspenseful, thought-provoking, violent, whimsical.
  - **Questions to consider regarding tone/mood:** What type of book is the reader looking for? What is the reader in the mood for today? Does the reader want a book that makes them feel happy? Scared? Hopeful? etc.
  - **Main genres:** Horror, Romance, Gentle Reads, Chick Lit, and Women’s Lives & Relationships

- **Frame:** Frame encompasses the setting, tone, mood, and background of the book; in other words the book’s impression upon the reader.
• **Genre groups**, from Joyce Saricks: Grouping of genres according to their similar appeal factors. Particularly helpful when dealing with unfamiliar genres or when suggesting a new genre to a reader.
  - **Adrenaline**: Focuses on pacing of the story and action of the plot. Includes Thrillers, Adventure, Suspense, Romantic Suspense.
  - **Intellect**: Focuses on question of “What if” as well as the language and inner world of the character. Includes Science Fiction, Mystery, Literary Fiction and Psychological Suspense.
  - **Emotion**: Focuses on tone, feel, and character interactions. Includes Horror, Romance, Gentle Reads, Chick Lit, and Women’s Lives & Relationships.
  - **Landscape**: Focuses on settings. Includes Westerns, Fantasy, and Historical Fiction.

• **Appeal Doorways**: Nancy Pearl has another approach to Readers' Advisory that pictures readers entering books through a particular doorway: Story, Setting, Character, and Language. As you listen to the reader describe a book he or she enjoyed, or a book they are in the mood for, pay attention to what they are focusing on. If they describe what happened in the book they are entering through the Story doorway. If it’s the writing quality they bring up it’s the Language doorway. If they are describing the people in the book they are entering through the Character doorway, and if it’s where the book takes place they are using the Setting doorway. This approach is more streamlined than remembering all of the different appeal factors, which makes it easier to use for librarians just starting out in readers’ advisory.

• **Active vs. passive readers’ advisory**:
  - **Active**: Readers’ Advisory interview: Any time you interact with a patron about reading (or viewing, listening, etc) materials you are participating in Active Readers’ Advisory. The interactions can be in person, over the phone, or through email or social media sites, but in order to be active RA you must be talking directly with the patron. For instance, if a patron says, “Can you recommend a good book?” or “I’m looking for something to read” or “I just loved this book and wish there were more like it”, or even, “I HATED this book and never want to waste my time with something like that again”, they are seeking active readers’ advisory assistance.
  - **Passive**: Passive readers’ advisory happens when you don’t engage the patron directly, but rather offer suggestions through other means, such as bookmarks, shelf-talkers, displays, book lists, bulletin boards, etc.
These may be “If you’ve read X you may also like Y”, themed displays, similar author suggestions, and more.

3) Readers’ Advisory Toolbox

- **Trade journals:** Great for quick reviews, starred reviews/must-haves, upcoming author releases, publishing trends, and more. These cover all ages and genres, fiction and nonfiction, as well as various formats such as audio books and graphic novels. If you don’t have a subscription to School Library Journal or Library Journal you can access all issues from 1975 to the present through EBSCO. Publishers Weekly, Kirkus Reviews, Book Page and Book List all have great websites with access to reviews. However, if your library can afford it, having a print subscription is great for staff and patrons, alike.

- **Databases:**
  - **NoveList:** Hands down, the most useful online readers’ advisory databases is NoveList, which is available for subscription through EBSCO. It offers book readalikes, author readalikes, recommended reading lists, detailed appeal terms for books, popularity ratings, reviews from trade journals, and subject headings, including fiction. They also have a specific Readers’ Advisory section on the website which offers detailed genre descriptions, ideas on how to train yourself or staff on readers’ advisory, book discussion guides, and more. (See the screenshot at the end of the handout). Our subscription (Waverly) costs less than $1,000 per year for NoveList Plus, and I highly recommend it.
  - **Reader driven databases:** These generally require an account (email address and password).
    - [https://www.librarything.com/](https://www.librarything.com/): Online social catalog where users can organize their own collections, as can libraries and bookstores. Features community, forums, groups, tags, recommendations, reviews, series information, etc.
    - [http://www.goodreads.com/](http://www.goodreads.com/): Great for series information, often more accurate and up to date than KDL. Allows readers to keep track of books they’ve read, or want to read, as well as assign to shelves (similar to tags), review, tag, add and rate. Also has discussion threads and groups for specific genres or authors.
    - [http://www.fictiondb.com/](http://www.fictiondb.com/): Database of over 900,000 titles. Features series information, classifications, time period, genre, reader tags, reviews (pulled from Goodreads), tags, awards, release dates, multi-author series (ie Star Wars books), author pseudonyms, coming soon lists, popular reading lists, more.
From Amazon. Crowdsourced, editable database, much like Wikipedia. Features community, discussion boards, very detailed summary (will give away spoilers without warnings, so read at own risk), “Ridiculously Simplified Synopsis” (a great one sentence description of the book. Very helpful for books that a readers’ advisor has not read or is not familiar with), quotes, settings, glossary, awards, tags, reviews, more. There was an article last week that said Amazon was going to merge Shelfari with Goodreads, and it seems like the change will take place in March 2016.

- **Websites:**
  - [http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/](http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/): Author and book information, new and upcoming releases.
  - [http://www.openingthebook.com/whichbook/](http://www.openingthebook.com/whichbook/): Allows readers to select up to four appeal factors on a continuum and offers suggestions based on those preferences. For example, you can choose a book that it Happy, Sad or somewhere in between, and Short, Long, or In Between, and Funny, Serious or In Between, etc.
• **Newsletters:**
  - [http://www.booklistonline.com/read-alert](http://www.booklistonline.com/read-alert): Email newsletter (about bi-weekly, 20 issues per year) with reviews, articles, and more.
  - [http://www.earlyword.com/publishers/](http://www.earlyword.com/publishers/): This page contains links with contact information for several publishers, including publisher newsletters.

• **Print resources:** Many of these are available through interlibrary loan, though they are highly recommended for any public library collection. Patrons may even enjoy using them as they are filled with reading suggestions.
  - *Genreflecting: A guide to popular reading interests*, Diana Tixier Herald
  - *The readers' advisory guide to genre fiction*, Joyce Saricks
  - *The readers' advisory guide to genre blends*, Megan McArdle
  - *The readers' advisory guide to nonfiction*, Neal Wyatt
  - *Readers’ advisory service in the Public Library, 3rd Ed.*, Joyce Saricks (If you can only purchase one book, this should be it)
  - Specific genre guides from the publishers of *Genreflecting* and from ALA

4) Readers’ Advisory Interview
   - Open ended questions
   - Yes/No prompts can be useful too!
   - Active listening
   - Think beyond the book
   - Give them something to browse while you do further research
   - Encourage follow up visits

5) Engaging readers
   - In person:
     - Every staff member should feel comfortable having an RA conversation with readers.
       - It’s okay to say, “I haven’t read that.”
     - Bookmarks and Shelf talkers: Offer readalike authors and titles right on the shelf where a patron will be browsing.
     - Displays: “First lines for the first of the year”, “Books from the bottom (of the shelf)”, “I don’t remember the title but I think the cover was (insert color)”, “Banned Books”, “Upcoming Books to Movies”
○ Form based Readers Advisory: Makes remote RA easy, also takes off some of the pressure to provide a suggestion when a patron is right in front of you.
  ■ Seattle Public Library’s Your Next 5 Reads: https://www.spl.org/using-the-library/get-help/your-next-5-books

● Online:
  ○ Pinterest:
    ■ Waverly Public Library: https://www.pinterest.com/waverlypubliclibrary/
    ■ Carnegie-Stout Public Library: https://www.pinterest.com/cspl/
    ■ Ames Public Library: https://www.pinterest.com/amespl/
  ○ Twitter
    ■ CSPL: https://twitter.com/Carnegie_Stout
  ○ Facebook
    ■ WPL: https://www.facebook.com/waverlypubliclibrary/
    ■ CSPL: https://www.facebook.com/carnegiestout
    ■ APL: https://www.facebook.com/AmesPublicLibrary/
  ○ Tumblr
    ■ CSPL: http://carnegie-stout.tumblr.com/
  ○ GoodReads
    ■ WPL: http://www.goodreads.com/user/show/25224534-waverly-public-library
    ■ CSPL: https://www.goodreads.com/user/show/29043588-carnegie-stout-public-library
  ○ Instagram
    ■ CSPL: https://www.instagram.com/carnegiestout/
  ○ If This Then That
    ■ https://ifttt.com/
  ○ Your website/catalog

6) Readers’ Advisory and Digital Citizenship
• From an RA perspective, a Digital Citizen is “a person who uses digital means to engage in society”
  ○ not just familiar with/immersed in technology (like what we’d call a digital native), but someone who uses online tech to find and interact with a community
  ○ Our customers are shaped by their digital habits and by online trends, and we owe it to these patrons to consider our RA service in that light too.
• Web 2.0
  ○ Usability (it’s easy)
  ○ interoperability (all devices, watches to phones to regular computers etc.)
  ○ it’s community-focused (you can find, connect, and interact with others)
  ○ user-generated content (you can modify and improve what you find).
• Library 2.0
  ○ reflects the library’s position as a useable/multi-format/community organization
• Reading 2.0
  ○ people have moved passed simple consumers of books
  ○ seek out people with similar interests, they interact with the work by dressing up as a favorite character, or publishing fan blogs or producing podcasts, or writing fan-fiction - that’s fandom
• Fandom - the microcosm of enthusiasts surrounding a particular interest or work
  ○ new-fangled word, but a familiar concept
    ■ Beatlemania - Sports super-fans
    ■ now, even people with niche interests can find communities online
• Digital citizens in the library
  ○ Be available
    ■ “Demolish the stereotype that libraries are not aware of or eager to discuss popular culture.”
    ■ If you don’t make it clear that you wouldn’t mind giving a CD, or DVD recommendation, then people won’t ask.
    ■ No one can be familiar with every genre in every format, so focus on being as helpful as possible
    ■ “Providing advisory services to our users fortifies the role of the library in its community by making
connections between people and materials and building relationships with library users through conversation and overlapping interests”

SEE: Materials Matchmaking Articulating Whole Library Advisory. Williamson, Tara Bannon


- Whole collection RA
  - A 2.0 reader of sci-fi, for example, probably consumes it in movies, TV shows, perhaps even in video games
  - If reading is part of your social identity, then you’re probably open to any recommendations that expand that identity - not just books
  - Seems daunting to EXPAND the scope of RA even further, but there’s a bright side too
    - a patron with trouble telling you WHY they like a certain book might be more apt to use appeal terms when talking about a TV show than when thinking about the books they read
    - Even if they can’t describe why they like a book, maybe they CAN tell you that their favorite TV show is fast-paced, with witty narration.
  - For example - whole collection, reader 2.0 displays

- Football fans
  - NF books
    - Bios of coaches and players
    - coaching X’s and O’s, football trivia
  - DVD’s
    - TV shows (Friday Night Lights)
    - Movies (Rudy)
  - 2.0 picks
    - Grilling, mixed-drink books for tailgating

- Force Awakens release
  - Whole collection part is easy
    - DVD’s, Books, Soundtracks etc.
    - Entertainment Weekly magazine open to articles about Harrison Ford?, sure.
  - 2.0 picks
    - Costume making books (true fans need Jedi robes)
    - Computer books about Blogging, video editing
○ Writing books from the 800’s to encourage fan fiction

Beard, David, and Thi-Beard, Kate Vo

• When format matters
  ○ there are some things that readers want in one format over another
  ○ most-prominently - erotica
    ■ ‘born’ in fanfiction and digital books, and the widest variety of titles continues to be available there
    ■ even someone who liked the book might be offended by the DVD
    ■ some people just don’t want to walk down the street with erotica in hand
  • be sure to mention that you have it on Bridges

SEE: EROTICA’S FULL-FRONTAL SHELVING.
Dunneback, Katie

• Take it online - even in the library
  ○ take advantage of the fact that people are carrying more tech into your library
  ○ Don’t have room for a huge display? - make a QR code that links to recommendations or read-alikes
    ■ makes the display ‘feel’ interactive, and thus appealing to 2.0’ers
    ■ link to a social media post, and it really IS interactive, they can leave comments, give it a ‘like’ or a retweet

• Social media
  ○ “Technology allows readers’ advisory to expand beyond the walls of the library in a variety of ways, but again the marketing of these services is crucial to their success.”
    ■ Social media is how you get readers to your catalog
  ○ These are 2.0 sites - easy to use, foster community, user generated
  ○ Don’t make it too difficult
    ■ don’t need a presence everywhere, but should try to commit to the outlets you choose
    ■ Fit your social media posting into your workflow
      ● “Look what we just ordered!”
      ● “New release Tuesday”
- reproduce physical displays/book-lists online

SEE: Building on a firm foundation: Readers’ Advisory over the Next Twenty-Five Years
Trott, Barry

- Book specific social media (Goodreads, LibraryThing, etc)
  - valuable for keeping your own RA info
    - your own book reviews/blurbs
    - you can put books on a shelf like ‘sure thing Sci-fi’ or ‘romance with vampires’
  - Source of appeal factors when patrons can’t voice them themselves
  - Source of great genre-specific language for booktalks

SEE: Social Media and Readers' Advisory.
Anwyll, Rebecca and Chawner, Brenda

SEE: Finding Good Reads on Goodreads.
Naik, Yesha

- Your catalog
  - Can a user ... personalize / add content to / add value to / find other people on ... your catalog?
  - Next time you buy an ILS, think RA
    - Novelist is an EBSCO RA service which now can be integrated into your catalog - like here in Ames
      - now partnered with Goodreads - so user-generated content is only a click away
    - LibraryThing for Libraries - Like Danbury, CT. Integrates things like tag clouds and suggested read-alikes right in the catalog
      - [http://cat.danburylibrary.org/search-$4/tthe+martian/tmartian/1%2C10%2C12%2CB/frameset&FF=tmartian+a+novel&1%2C1%2C2](http://cat.danburylibrary.org/search-$4/tthe+martian/tmartian/1%2C10%2C12%2CB/frameset&FF=tmartian+a+novel&1%2C1%2C2)
    - Ann Arbor District Library
• content from AADL users, feels really personal, interactive, and as if it builds a community
• [http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1440697](http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1440697)
  O - check out those tags like ‘female captains’ and ‘potatoes’ that you won’t find in an OCLC record

SEE: 2.0 for Readers
Wyatt, Neal

• Form-based RA - active RA sets us apart
  O what makes libraries different is the interaction
  O the way to get the information you need online, is with form-based RA
  O Takes time to devise and implement
  O But lots of advantages too
    ■ get people who wouldn’t approach in person
    ■ get question to the right librarian (one employee might know romance, another sci-fi)
    ■ can have access to materials you need (without stopping conversation to get a book or on a website)
    ■ form-based RA is established enough that you can pick and choose what you like from a number of different places

SEE: Improving the Model for Interactive Readers’ Advisory Service.
Hollands, Neil

7) Questions?
Readers' Advisory Toolbox

NovelList's "Best of 2015" Lists

Creating a summer book display, or holiday reading list? Gearing up for a movie release? No matter the time of year, the Keeping Up... Seasonal Inspiration page will get you started. Check out the books that NovelList staff loved in 2015!

Becoming a Better Readers' Advisor

- ARRT Popular Fiction List
- Readers' Advisory Strategies
- Social Media and RA
- Staying Current
- Train Your Staff (or Yourself)

Learning About Genres

- Genre Overview
- In-depth Articles: Fantasy Fiction
- Keeping Up... Genres

Inspiration for Everyday RA

- Book Display Ideas
- Featured Book Discussion Guides
- New and Updated Author Read-alikes
- Success Stories

A Reader Walks Up to the Desk . . .

- Audiobooks
- Award Winners
- Books to Movies
- Common Scenarios
- Using Appeals