

EVERYONE'S A READERS' ADVISOR

Training & Merchandising Strategies
for Public & School Library Staff

Presented by Stephanie Anderson
for LibraryLinkNJ
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Objectives:

- Today we will:
 - Identify a few simple tricks that will enhance the effectiveness of any book display;
 - Begin creating a set of guidelines for your library that will keep displays and shelves looking approachable and browsable; and
 - Begin thinking about training your colleagues and staff on how to use these principles.

What we won't cover today:

- Online readers' advisory
 - Reader's Advisory for a New Age: <http://librarylinknj.org/content/reader%E2%80%99s-advisory-new-age-social-media-and-tech-tools>
 - Your Next Book is On Facebook: <http://kaitestover.pbworks.com/w/file/77874587/PLASocMed14.pptx>
- Trends in readers' advisory
 - Serving Readers: http://webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Serving_Readers_Beyond_the_Basics.html
 - <http://librarylinknj.org/content/reader%E2%80%99s-advisory-youth-services-providers-if-you-like%E2%80%A6>


Why are we covering it at all?

- To listen to what our statistics (and patrons) tell us
 - ▣ Do you know how many RA interactions you have?
 - ▣ How does that compare to overall circulation?
- To broaden the spectrum of RA skills at our disposal
 - ▣ Merchandising is an important part of passive/silent RA
 - ▣ New employees can contribute to RA even while being trained on other skills
- **To keep books at the forefront of the library, visually and otherwise**

But most importantly:

“I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the ever-changing variety of books on display. I love to read but I also have two young children and work full-time. Needless to say, I don't have a lot of time to research what I want to read before coming to the library or casually peruse the shelves like I did back in the day...

Email from a patron, July 2014



“...Frequently I use the library as my place to actually get something done when I am “working from home.” I look forward to catching a glimpse of what is on display and the recommendations make it easy to find a new selection. This is my reward for buckling down to work for a couple of hours before I rush home to the kids!”

Email from a patron, July 2014

What we can learn from wine stores



Photos of Dandelion Wine (Greenpoint, Brooklyn)
<http://dandelionwineshop.tumblr.com/>

Merchandising vs. displays

- Is there a difference?
- Poll:
 - ▣ What do you think of when you hear the word “merchandising”?

Merchandising vs. displays

- Display:
 - Often themed
 - Placed in high-traffic areas
 - Often require preparation and explanation
- Merchandising:
 - More general
 - Set of guidelines that make materials easier to browse
 - Can be deployed quickly and with almost any material

Traditional library displays



Starting at top left: displays at Lawrence Public Library, Seattle Public Library, and Mid-Hudson Library System

Traditional library displays

Displays don't just have to focus on topics—here's another approach from Fairfield Public Library



Resources for library display ideas

- Schaumburg Library presentation: Leading Readers to Water...Guerilla Marketing for RA
 - <http://schaumburglibrary.org/ala/leading-readers.pdf>
- Library Display Bonanza!
 - <http://libdisplays.tumblr.com/>
- Jesse Henning
 - <http://www.jessehenning.com/book-displays/>
- Flickr book displays
 - <https://www.flickr.com/groups/bookdisplays/>
- And of course...good ol' Pinterest

Step 1: Decide your library display should be updated.

- *“I put up this Valentine’s Day display on February 12. It is now March 5.”*

Step 2: Brainstorm a new, fancy library display on something topically / socially relevant!

- *“What holidays are in March? St. Patrick’s Day is in the middle..Let’s just do National Nutrition Month. More time to update.”*

Step 3: Create a beautiful display.

- *“Where are the band-aids because I hurt myself cutting little kiwis and snap peas out of green construction paper.”*

Step 4: Admire your work. You’re representing this now!

- *“I need Cheetos. This display does not apply to me.”*

“Expectation vs. reality”

--That Blonde Librarian (thatblondelibrarian.tumblr.com)

What can be hard about displays?

- Finding new topics regularly
- Picking relevant topics that can be represented by the collection
- Patrons might not understand a display
- Hard to find topics that reach a wide number of patrons
- Can be time-consuming to create and keep up

Five laws of library merchandising:

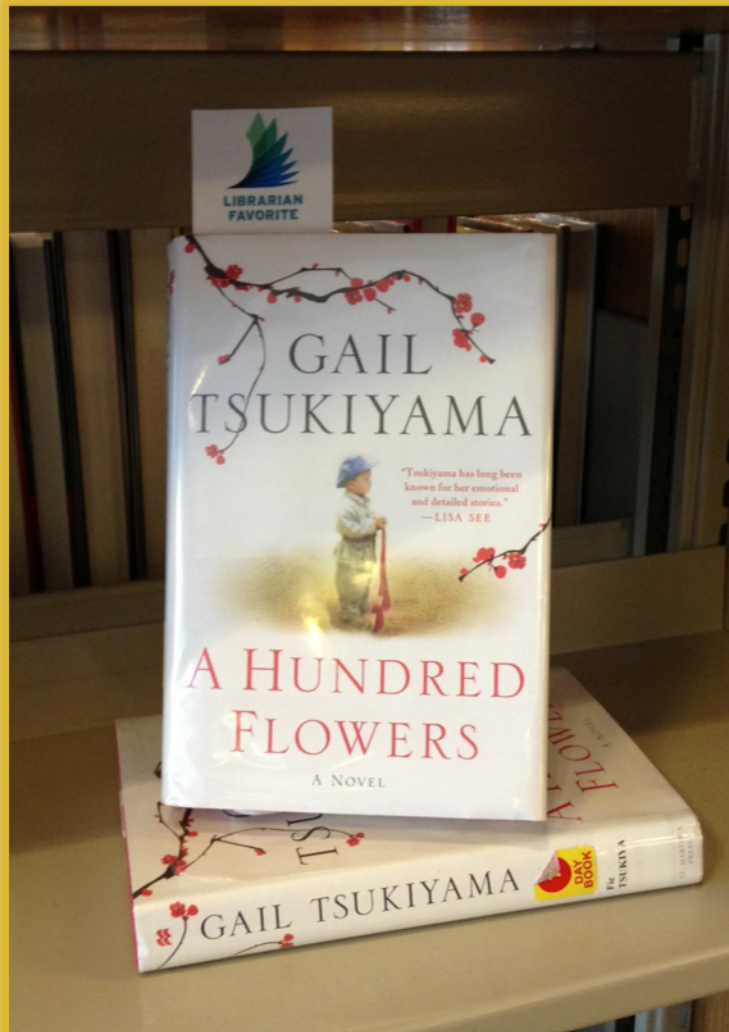
1. Love your choices.
2. Keep books visible.
3. Keep it current.
4. Respect the readers' time (and knees).
5. Keep it consistent.



1. Love your choices.

- The cornerstone of merchandising is books that you love. (And for balance, a few you can't stand.)
- Set up a great RA conversation:
 - “Hey, have you read this? Is it any good?”
 - “What’s good on this table?”

Love like nobody's watching:



Shelf-talkers



Shelf-talkers at Darien Library and Seattle Public Library

2. Keep books visible.

- EASELS! EASELS! EASELS! EASELS! EASELS!
- Let the covers do the work wherever you can.
- Use multiples and height to create table displays.
- Face books out in blank spaces.

The power of visibility:

“Turning a book face out is an act of tremendous power...You can also show a little love to an obscure mid-list paperback you just discovered suffocating between two behemoth hardcovers--simply because it feels like the right thing to do...You can't save every life. You can't save every book. But you can at least throw lifelines now and then.”

Susan Coll, Politics & Prose Bookstore

What's more beautiful than a good cover?

Cover blow-ups above the shelves at Idlewild Books (NYC) even make *War and Peace* look exciting:



Creating space and height



Endcaps in fiction stacks



Turned-over basket as a riser!

Creating height on tables



3. Keep it current.

- Be ready to serve patrons who come to the library regularly to learn about the newest books.
- But remember, current is not just Tuesday's releases!
- And sometimes books leave the field for awhile and come back.
 - ▣ Keep an eye for books like these in your regular reading, watching, and listening.

“I’ve always wanted to read that book...”



3. Keep it current.

- Keep an eye on holds lists.
- Movies, TV, Bill Gates—anything can make an old book new again, so keep an eye on:
 - Shelf Awareness: <http://www.shelf-awareness.com/>
 - The Reader's Advisor Online: <http://www.readersadvisoronline.com/>

Seattle Public Library knows this:



4. Respect the readers' time (and knees).

- Keep books as visible and high as possible.
- Use easels.
- Always have a few easy focal points in a display.
- Don't crowd a display.
- Keep signs simple and visible.
 - ▣ Few words, large type, dark text
 - ▣ If possible, create a template

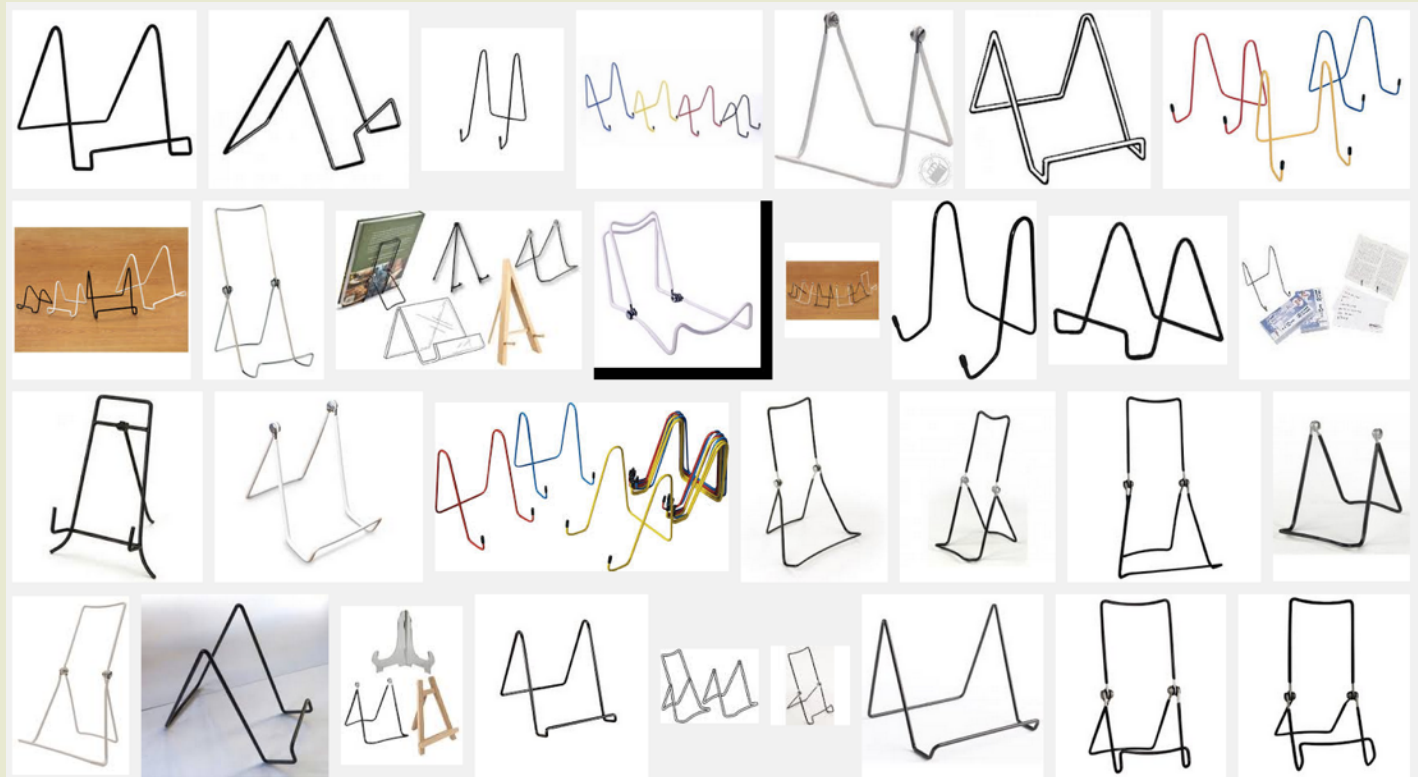
Easels, again!

Unimportant:

1. Color
2. Size
3. Shape

Important:

1. Having more easels than you think you need



Grab and go



End of shelf faceouts at Darien Library



Books right at hand at Elliott Bay Books

Be careful (or have fun with) signs



5. Keep it consistent (straightening).

1. Pull for displays and faceouts.
2. Shift shelves if necessary.
3. Flush front.

5. Keep it consistent.

- Make sure there's a little bit of everything on a display of new books.
 - Work with staff to make sure they understand *why* this is important!
- Make sure themes are recognizable, and broad enough that any staff member can stock it.
 - If a display can't be understood without a sign—reconsider!

Staff picks merchandising



How to implement in your library

- Find statistics to support why it's necessary.
- Inventory your display spaces.
- Introduce the standards and rules of thumb that work for you:
 - ▣ What does “current” mean to your patrons?
 - ▣ What level of straightened should you strive for?
 - ▣ What are your collection's strengths? Weaknesses?

Training ideas

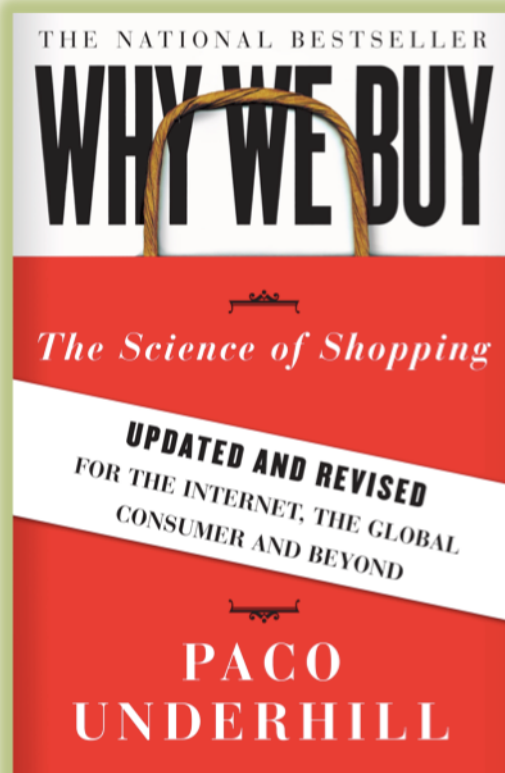
- When you can, go hands-on!
 - ▣ Work with an actual display space and real books
- Get support from administration and a few key staff members who will be working with displays.
- Make decisions as a group.
- Pick a few key elements—don't try all at once.
- **Make time in your day, every day.**

If you remember nothing else:

- Simple tricks for merchandising:
 - ▣ Flush front, use easels, add height
 - ▣ Let the book covers work their magic!
- Guidelines for your library:
 - ▣ Where do you display? What? Why?
- Training your colleagues and staff:
 - ▣ Explain why it's necessary, work hands-on
 - ▣ Make time everyday

Further reading

For more background



For more guidelines to consider

Anythink Libraries Visual Merchandising Guidelines

Customers first

Retailers have long known the importance of merchandising their products through the use of attention-getting exhibits and displays. An eye-catching window display will draw customers into a store as will a prominent sign placed near the flow of traffic. End aisle displays used in many type of stores from hardware to high fashion boutiques promote impulse purchasing. While many dollars are spent on advertising and promotion in the marketplace, librarians can utilize many of the same techniques to enhance the looks of their library, promote its activities and generate more library 'business' of browsing and circulating materials at little or no cost.



Twenty Rules for Better Book Displays

by Susan Brown

This article originally appeared in the March 2013 issue of RA News. [Subscribe](#) to RA News and any of our other newsletters.

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