THE SCHOOL LIBRARY GENREFICATION GUIDE

If you are thinking about genrefying your library or you are currently in the process of genrefying your library, then this guide is for you. And, although this guide will go into the pros and cons of the Dewey Decimal System and of the Genrefication System, it is not meant to persuade anyone to change the way they organize their library. It is, however, meant to encourage you to think about how you can best support literacy efforts in your library and engage your student readers.

A genre is a label that tells its audience what to expect. It is the organization and classification of writing into categories such as fiction and nonfiction, but also into smaller sub-categories of fiction and nonfiction. Genrefication, then, is the process of organizing, classifying, and categorizing items in your library into genres. In many libraries, some form of genrefication is already happening: separating fiction from nonfiction, putting graphic novels in their own section, or creating special shelving for poetry and biographies. While this may not have been an intentional attempt at genrefication, it was most likely done to make it easier for students to browse for and find the books that they like - which is the goal and proven outcome of genrefication.

In fact, many librarians choose to transition to a genrefied system because of the questions they receive from students on a regular basis: "Do you have any other books like Maze Runner?" or "Where are the sports books?" or "Are there other authors like Sarah Dessen?" or "Where are all of the war and military books?" These questions prove to us that most readers look for new books based on genre…not by author name or title. And while the Dewey Decimal System is set up in this manner for nonfiction books, it does have flaws that make it difficult for readers to locate books, and it is very rarely used for the classification of fiction books. So, let's dive into the nuts and bolts of genrefication and how you can use it in your library to help students find the books they love. If you aren't ready to genrefy yet, stick around until the end! We'll talk about alternative methods you can use in your library to achieve some of the same outcomes.

If we are going to make any changes, we should first understand what we are making a change from. In the fiction section, genrefication means that we are simply chunking like with like. Instead of having the entire fiction section organized alphabetically by author last name, genrefication has us putting all of the fiction sports books together and then arranging those books alphabetically. In the nonfiction section, genrefication means transitioning away from the Dewey Decimal System.

The Dewey Decimal Classification system was conceived by Melvil Dewey in 1873 and first published in 1876. It is the most widely used library classification system and is continuously revised to keep pace with knowledge. It is, in fact, a healthy and robust system that uses a numerical scheme for the arrangement of subjects of nonfiction books, classifying them by dividing them into 10 main subject groups beginning with 000 and going on to 999. Each number stands for a special topic, every book is given a number, and books are put on the shelf in numerical order followed by alphabetical order. There is nothing inherently wrong with this system that has been used for almost 150 years. However, it can be a little tricky.

First of all, in order to really use the Dewey Decimal as best we can, all librarians should be experts in the classification system. And while some are, most of us are using somebody else's classification of the book when we copy catalog or we are inputting the Dewey number from the book's front matter page. In theory, this is fine. However, not really knowing the system certainly makes it harder to catch when there are errors; especially when copy cataloging. This is also a system that can be difficult to teach our students because it is a numerical system that is supposed to match up with a language-based platform. Numbers to denote genres. But somebody just came up with those numbers, so how do you explain to the students that there is any logic in the topic of "dogs" being labeled 636.7 and "wolves in Wyoming" as 599.77309787? And speaking of those long call numbers…how many of us actually print that entire number on the spine label? Let's say you shorten it to 599.773 because three numbers after the decimal is a pretty common place for librarians to shorten it to. Now the number simply refers to wolves, and if you shorten it to 599.77, it just refers to the dog family, so the integrity of the Dewey system has already been lost. But didn't I just say a few sentences ago that dogs are labeled as 636.7? So how can they also be labeled as 599.77? It's because *domestic* dogs are classified as 636.7 and *wild* dogs as 599.77. These books are not next to each other on the shelf, so if you have a student who is interested in ALL dogs, you have to send them to different places in your library. And speaking of shelving…who has to shelve all of these books with the long Dewey numbers? Probably you as the librarian but also maybe your library aide or a student helper. In any case, shelving these books is harder than, and the odds of misshelving these books is much higher than, shelving books only alphabetically.

All of this aside, if we come back to the goal of helping students find books, the Dewey Decimal System is not necessarily the most conducive system to achieve this. From an online survey done in 2009 on why patrons have trouble finding nonfiction, it is clear that Dewey doesn't work for our readers. The survey found that:
- 68.4% had difficulty understanding the online catalog
- 50.5% said that most of the call numbers were too difficult to use
- 33.7% felt that the shelving categories didn't effectively pull together the books they wanted to browse
- 63.2% wanted to go straight to the right shelf without having to look up anything
- 66.3% felt intimidated by a classification system that they didn't understand very well
- 7.4% said they rarely had trouble finding nonfiction books

So given all of this information, why are we sometimes hesitant to make a change? There are plenty of good reasons: because Dewey is the system that has been used for almost 150 years and it has worked; because Dewey is the traditional/true library way of classifying books; because we feel like students should know Dewey for future use; and because we want to ensure that our students can confidently use all other libraries in the future. Of course, the job of completely re-classifying your entire library is also very labor intensive, and with all of the other tasks that we have on our plates as school librarians, this may be the biggest barrier of all.

Why would we change, then? It comes back to the goals in our library. If our goals are to get more books in the hands of our students, to make it easier for our students to find the books they desire reading, and to make the library more user-friendly, then genrefication is one of the best solutions. And remember, you probably have already genrefied your library in some areas (graphic novels, biographies, poetry, etc.), so this is just taking the next step to do more. Let's go over genrefication and its advantages and, in full transparency, its disadvantages.

Genrefication is the process of organizing, classifying, and categorizing items into genres. The term was added to the Urban Dictionary in 2008, and although it is the term that librarians use most often, the general concept is also sometimes referenced as the bookstore model, subject-based cataloging, or nontraditional shelving. This classification system can be easier for patrons that like to browse, and many bookstores use it for this reason. It is also commonly associated as an element of more overarching approaches that are customer-driven, customer-friendly, user-centered, student-centered, and learner-centered. For public libraries, genrefication may be seen as a hallmark of Dave Genesy's "merchandised" library. And, for school libraries, genrefication may stand out in alignment with the goals of David Loertscher's "Learning Commons." It can be done to an entire collection or just parts of a collection. And although genrefication was only added to the Urban Dictionary in 2008, it is not a new concept. There is a fascinating website (referenced at the end of this guide) that reviews the history of genrefication in which it is noted that conversations about genrefication were happening as early as the late 1800s/early 1900s. And if you can get past its few disadvantages - it is labor intensive, it isn't a standard system, and that it isn't perfect - you might be able to really focus on its advantages. Genrefication:

- Makes it easier for students to browse for and find their desired books.
- Is student-centered organization.
- Can be easily adjusted to meet the changing needs of students and curriculum.
- Improves circulation statistics.
- Helps you weed your collection and also really get to know your collection.
- Is not perfect. But neither is the Dewey Decimal System, so if we can find a system that works in OUR library, for OUR students, then why not give it a try?

If you are ready to genrefy, don't be scared! You can do it! Just remember that you have probably already done a little genrefying anyway. Also, keep in mind that students won't only read from one section in your library if you genrefy. Oftentimes, genrefying may help them find books in other genres!

For example, let's say you have a student who only reads "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" books, so every time they come to the library, they go straight to the KIN fiction area and select another DOWK book. The books around that don't interest the student because they aren't necessarily the same genre, so they continue to only grab Jeff Kinney's books. Now, let's say you genrefy and create a section in your library for funny fiction (or something like that!). Your student who goes directly to the DOWK books is now going to see other books around them that catch their eye because those books are also classified as humorous and have a similar look as the books they like. This may lead to the student actually selecting a new author and, wait for it…that author may cross genres! So if the student really likes a certain author who writes funny books, they might also find that same author in the sports book section and cross over to reading a completely new genre. Other things to keep in mind as you start the process:

- Your library can stay open while you genrefy, and you can get help from students, other staff, and volunteers.
- There is no specific time frame in which you must complete the project. Work on it and complete it in a manner that works for you and your library.
- If weeding has been on your to-do list, this project pulls double-duty. You can weed as you genrefy!
- Collection development will become easier because you can more easily see how many books you have in each of your genres.
- Genrefication makes sense because it is a language-based system instead of a numerical system…and we are dealing with language in the library!
- Putting books into genres increases browsability and searchability.
- You can't do it wrong! And you can always move books into a different genre later.
- You don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are plenty of librarians who have genrefied both their fiction and nonfiction sections and there are tips all over the internet.
- Your time will be better spent on reader interaction and reader advisory than on writing down Dewey Decimal numbers, helping students in the catalog, and attempting to teach the Dewey Decimal system repeatedly.
- Get ready for your students to love it because they can find books more easily!
- Get ready for your teachers to love it because it helps them talk about and apply genres in a meaningful way.

It also helps to know that there is plenty of evidence that genrefication works. A quick Google search will show you statistics from libraries across the nation that have transitioned from the older traditional way of shelving fiction and nonfiction books to the more contemporary system of genrefication. In almost all cases, circulation numbers increased tremendously after genrefication was implemented.

So, let's get started!

You can also check out SDSL's ExCITE! 2022 Presentation on Genrefication:

https://youtu.be/ovqvZL_zFhc

THE GENREFICATION PROCESS

Step 1: Identify your Why
- ☐ The first–and perhaps the most important–question to ask yourself is "Why do I want to genrefy my library?"
- ☐ Outline the goals you want to accomplish by genrefying your library.

Step 2: Make a Plan
- ☐ What parts of your collection will you genrefy?
- ☐ Request a genre collection report (if possible) from your library management system.
- ☐ Determine genre categories & how you'll label (GLADES, BISAC, Neighborhoods, etc.).
- ☐ Determine when/where/how you will proceed.
- ☐ Order supplies.
- ☐ Organize volunteers/workers (if necessary).
- ☐ Consider shelf space and signage.

Step 3: Do the Work
- ☐ Start organizing books into genres.
- ☐ Weed as you go.
- ☐ Make hard decisions!
- ☐ Grab a stack, change the spine labels, and match that info in your catalog.

Step 4: Finish Up
- ☐ Create SUBLOCATIONS in your catalog.
- ☐ Shelve the books in their new genre section.
- ☐ Put up your signage.
- ☐ Celebrate and promote!
- ☐ Give it some time and then run statistic reports.

Other Tips:
- You can't really do it incorrectly, you are never really done, & you can always move books around.
- The library looks so pretty when you're done!
- There is no set amount of time for this project. It depends on the size of the library, the size of the collection, the number of workers, how fast you work, etc.
- If you can't decide in which genre to put a book, just remember you can choose one (as long as it makes sense) and as long as the call numbers match on the book, the shelf, and the online catalog system, then your students will be able to find it!
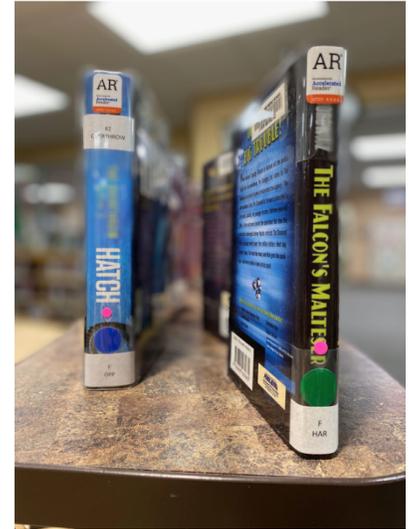
How your library might look as you do the work:

Genrefied Nonfiction Examples:

It's easy to see in the top left picture that there is a book that was misshelved…easier than with Dewey numbers!

Genrefied Fiction Examples:

Colors represent genres. Yellow=Realistic Fiction, Orange=Historical Fiction, Blue=SciFi/Fantasy, Green=Scary/Mystery, Small Pink=New Books

Not convinced? If you are not quite ready to ditch Dewey, consider these alternative ways to make your library more user-friendly and increase your nonfiction circulation:

- Make shelf signage thinking about what your students ask for most often.
- Create a rotating nonfiction display about a particular subject.
- Review how to search the library catalog and how to use Dewey several times a year.
- Weed your collection.
- Change the call number on books that seem out of place.

Resources

- The Dewey Dilemma: www.libraryjournal.com/story/the-dewey-dilemma
- Genrefication Update: www.readerpants.net/2012/12/genrefication-update-2-years-later.html
- The Genrefication Debate: www.readerpants.net/2015/06/genrefication-debate-dewey-has-worked.html
- Sample Models: http://genrefication.weebly.com/sample-models.html
- CREW: A Weeding Manual for Modern Libraries: www.tsl.texas.gov/ld/pubs/crew/index.html
- Follett Genre Solutions: www.follettlearning.com/books-materials/library/genre-solutions
- Genrefying the Children's Fiction Collection: www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/pubs/slr/vol23/SLR_GenrefyingChildrensCollection_V23.pdf