

# SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO REDEFINING FICTION AND NONFICTION

The way we categorize and define fiction and nonfiction directly impacts how students perceive, interact with, and value literature. Traditional definitions often equate fiction with "fake" and nonfiction with "fact." However, a growing movement among librarians and other educators is reshaping these definitions to focus on the *purpose* and *value* of each genre so that fiction more closely aligns with "learning through imagination" and nonfiction with "learning through information." Let's explore this trend, its origins, its importance, and how school librarians can lead the way in adopting and teaching these redefined terms.

## The Origins of the Redefinition Movement

The redefinition movement stems from a growing recognition that:

1. **Narrative Power:** Stories, whether fictional or factual, are essential to human learning and connection. Fiction fosters empathy, critical thinking, and creativity, while nonfiction informs and explains.
2. **Student Perception:** Labeling fiction as "fake" can diminish its perceived value, and equating nonfiction with "fact" can oversimplify its complexities..
3. **Modern Curriculum Needs:** With an emphasis on 21st-century skills, it is important to teach students that both genres contribute uniquely to their intellectual and social development.

## Why This Matters for School Librarians

As facilitators of literacy and learning, school librarians are uniquely positioned to:

1. **Shape Student Understanding:** Librarians often serve as the first point of contact for students' exploration of literature, making it important to frame genres in a way that enhances their appreciation and critical thinking skills.
2. **Support a Variety of Learning Styles:** By emphasizing the value of imagination and information, librarians can cater to varied learning preferences and needs.
3. **Combat Misinformation:** Redefining nonfiction helps clarify that not all information is inherently true or unbiased, teaching students to approach texts critically.

4. **Align with Educational Trends:** This movement supports broader educational goals, including fostering creativity, empathy, and media literacy.

## **Implementing the New Definitions**

### **Step 1: Update Terminology**

Begin using the new definitions in conversations, lessons, and library signage. For example:

- Fiction: "Explore stories that ignite your imagination."
- Nonfiction: "Discover information that expands your understanding."

### **Step 2: Revamp Displays and Promotions**

Highlight both genres equally, emphasizing their unique contributions. For example:

- Create displays that pair a nonfiction book with a related fictional story (e.g., a biography of an astronaut with a sci-fi novel about space).

### **Step 3: Teach the Redefinitions**

Incorporate the new definitions into library lessons. For example:

- When introducing genres, discuss how fiction helps us understand human emotions and experiences, while nonfiction gives us tools to navigate the world.
- Use examples to show overlaps, like narrative nonfiction or historical fiction, to demonstrate how imagination and information can coexist.

### **Step 4: Collaborate with Teachers**

Work with teachers to reinforce the redefinitions in their curricula. Offer suggestions for cross-genre pairings in lesson plans or book discussions.

### **Step 5: Empower Students**

Encourage students to think critically about what they read and how they classify texts. This could include:

- Genre debates where students argue why a text could fit into multiple categories.
- Book reviews that reflect on what they learned—through imagination or information.

## **The Bigger Picture**

This redefinition is more than semantics; it's about empowering students to value all forms of reading and learning. By adopting these new definitions, librarians can nurture lifelong readers who see the value in both imagination and information, help students develop a nuanced understanding of literature and media, and foster a library culture that redefines and celebrates how students engage with literature.