

5 Tips for Building and Maintaining a Great Collection of Reading Materials

These tips are intended to aid afterschool staff in selecting and maintaining a collection of reading material to use in programming with children and families. This list of resources is not exhaustive; when in doubt, talk to your local librarian. They would love to help you!

Get To Know Your Collection

If your afterschool site already has a collection of books, getting to know it is a good place to start. Here are some questions to ask yourself and your colleagues as you are evaluating the books you've got:

- Are the books current, relevant, and appealing?
 - Current: Are the nonfiction titles up-to-date in terms of the information and perspectives presented? Do the fiction titles feel dated?
 - Relevant: Do the titles in your collection reflect the communities you serve? Do they offer readers opportunities to see themselves reflected in the stories they read? To see and learn about the lived experiences of others?
 - Appealing: Are the books in good shape? Are the covers and titles interesting and exciting to young readers?
- Are the books in invitingly good condition? They don't need to be in perfect condition, but look out for books that are tattered, torn, dirty, or otherwise in bad shape.
- Are the books being read by kids in the program?
 - Consider putting out a bin to collect books that kids use throughout the day to evaluate in-house use of materials.
- Do you have an appropriate range of books for the kids in your program? Consider:
 - Reading level: Do you have books at a range of reading levels?
 - Genre and format: Do you have chapter books? Picture Books? Graphic Novels/Comics? Non-fiction? How-To Books? Wordless Books?
 - Topics: Do you have books on a variety of interesting topics?
- Is your collection diverse?
 - Does your collection meet the needs of all children in your community and [recognize the need for children to see and learn about people like and unlike themselves?](#)

- Does your collection show the [diversity of experiences and beliefs](#) within racial, ethnic, and other marginalized groups? Does your collection have books with indigenous characters and characters of color living modern contemporary lives?
- Are the books in your collection [written by authors from the community they are representing](#)? For example, are they written/illustrated by an author/illustrator who is of the same culture and/or race as the characters?
- Are there multilingual books? Are they authentic texts written in the author's first language or are they translated from English (or another language)?
- Do the books in your collection contain biases or stereotypes? Consider using a bias checklist as you evaluate your collection:
 - [Evaluating Children's Books for Bias](#)
 - [Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children's Books](#)

Get To Know Your Audience

- What are the kids in your program interested in? Use what you know or can find out about their interests to guide the types of books you include in your collection. For example, are they into sports? Crafts? Animals? Socializing? What types of books do you think would interest them? Joke Books? Science Experiments? The lives of famous people? Chapter books featuring favorite characters from movies or television?
- Talk to kids in your program about what they are reading. Do they like to read Minecraft guidebooks? Comics? Books about how to make things? Books about kids like them? Books about aliens? Ghosts? Dragons? Books with pictures?
- If you are connected to a school, consider talking with classroom or library staff about kids' reading habits.

Get to Know Your Local Librarians

Your local librarians can provide a wealth of information and resources to help you find and select books for kids in your program--and love talking to their community about great books! You can also use your library's collection to support and supplement your in-house collection. Your library may have special programs for educators and other resources; make sure to ask what is available at your library.

Weed!

Weeding (library lingo for removing books from your collection) is an important part of keeping your collection relevant, interesting and appealing. If the books seem out-of date, dull, and unloved, will your kids want to read them? Take time periodically to evaluate your collection using the tools listed above and remove books that are out of date, in poor condition, contain bias and/or stereotypes, and those that don't meet the needs and interests of your community. Use the information you gather from getting to know your collection and your audience as your guide. If you'd like a deeper dive into weeding strategies, check out the CREW manual:

- [CREW: A Weeding Manual for Libraries](#)

Build Your Collection

Your local librarians can give you great recommendations for books to help you build your collection. You can also check out the following online resources:

- [American Indians in Children's Literature](#)
- [Bulletin for the Center of Children's Books](#)
- [De Colores: The Raza Experience in Books for Children](#)
- [Kirkus](#)
- [Latinxs in Kids Lit](#)
- [Lorito Books](#)
- [Reading While White](#)
- [School Library Journal](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)
- [Teaching for Change](#)
- [The Brown Book Bookshelf](#)
- [We're the People Reading Lists](#)

Credits



Creative Commons License

Fostering Readers by [Deborah Gitlitz, Jen Burkart, Kari Kunst, Kelli Scardina, NPC Research, OregonASK, and Washington County Cooperative Library Services](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).