Where Are the Spooky Books?

Genrefication Pros, Cons, Considerations, and Tips

Genrefication is not a perfect system. It is a flexible system that may be adjusted to your library. It’s not for everybody, and that’s fine. Like almost everything in life, it has its advantages and disadvantages.

Today’s session is an informal discussion to ask questions and share experiences regarding genrefication. This handout gives background information that covers some of the considerations regarding genrefication and can serve as a reminder after you get back to your own library.

Pros

★ Students find books faster if they know which genres they like (as long as you have clear signage).
★ Books that had been previously overlooked start checking out after being genrefied because students are able to find them better.
★ Shelving is faster (as long as you have clear signage).
★ Your colleagues are impressed by your devotion while watching you rearrange thousands of books.
★ Students connect with genres in a personal way.
★ It may be modified to suit your library’s physical layout, your patrons’ genre preferences, and your school’s culture/climate. Examples:
  * Christian books are embraced in some schools. Others don’t have enough in this genre or have a larger variety of religious beliefs. Depending on your collection, you could call it Religion and Spirituality or whatever works for your school.
  * LGBTQ is an even more sensitive genre that would work in some libraries better than in others as a separate section instead of being included in Romance & Relationships, Realistic, etc.

Cons

★ The time and physical labor required are extensive. The number of books and staff (and volunteers) affects this, of course.
★ If you have your book vendor provide genre info, they probably won’t have all of the exact genres that you want, so you will have to change some things. Examples:
  * Animals is a genre, but some libraries break them down even more (dogs, cats, horses).
  * War, Military and Holocaust are categorized as Historical so those would need to be changed. (After establishing a War & Military section, Brenda’s students checked out war books that previously hadn’t been circulated since the 1980’s.)
  * Christian fiction was not an option with Mackin, so those books were determined individually.
  * Some books strongly fit multiple genres:
  Capstone’s EOD Soldiers are graphic novels about the Army’s Explosive Ordnance Disposal soldiers (bomb squads). Would students look first in the Graphic Novels section or the War and Military area? (When asked, one student said, “War and Military” after I had decided GN! However, this particular student never reads graphic novels, so he typically wouldn’t look there...for anything.)
Various vendors offer genre services. For example, Mackin provides 15 genres which cannot be customized. Their service doesn’t include picture books or MARC records. (This cost $200 last spring.)

- Animals
- Action / Adventure
- Classics
- Dystopian
- Fantasy
- Historical
- Horror/Scary
- Humor
- Mystery
- Realistic
- Romance
- Science Fiction
- Sports
- Supernatural / Paranormal
- Western

If you don’t change all of your MARC records, having a master list from your vendor helps. Ideally, you will update your MARC records to include genre information, but if your students don’t use OPAC much and just go straight to the genres they like, it still works. They can just ask you to consult the master list until you update everything. Looking online at your vendor’s information is another way to check (assuming your vendor includes genres).

If you can’t afford a master list from your main vendor, another strategy is to search your current circulation system for Fantasy (or whatever genre) as your subject heading or keyword and print those titles to help you genrefy. You will have some overlap, but this will give a general idea of how many you have in various genres.

**Consider Various Ways to Genrefy (During the School Year)**

*Figure out which genres will go where, even if the rearranging won’t be happening for a while.* Which genres do you want near each other because they have similar audiences? Recommendation: put the more widely circulated genres in areas where you can supervise those sections better.

**Option 1:** If you are on a flexible timeline, just add stickers as books return for one year. Shelve them in their traditional spots. At the end of the year, you’ll be able to see the books that weren’t checked out all year because they’ll have no stickers. The others will have stickers already in place to make it easier to pull and sort them. You’ll still have to either weed or label the books that were not circulated that year.

**Option 2:** Focus on one genre at a time. If you can make space in one section of bookshelves by putting those books on carts or on tables, start by shelving one genre’s books alphabetically by author’s last names. Stickers could be applied while books are on the carts or after everything has been moved to its designated genre section. This method takes months, but you gradually get there! If you have enough bookcarts, you can store a smaller genre on the cart until enough space opens. Just label the cart and circulate the books from there.

**Option 3:** If allowed to genrefy instead of doing inventory or something like that, you could label each table with a genre and pile the books onto the appropriate tables. Do one section of a bookcase at a time.

At Brenda’s second school, they had enough book carts that they put a section of books on tables, took the master list, and then sorted the books onto the carts labels with different genres. Then they put the sorted books on top of the bookcases where that genre would be shelved.

**Option 4:** Start with the A authors, add stickers, and update the MARC records and call numbers as you work your way through the alphabet. Rearrange after you finish the Z’s.

**Option 5:** Genrefy just part of your library. If you are K-12, start with the HS books. Otherwise, just have a section with the most popular genres shelved together. After you explain it to the students, they will quickly understand. Baskets of certain types of books are mini-genrefication. Experiment and see what you think. Then it won’t be so overwhelming if you don’t have the time or energy to tackle a full genrefication project.
Labeling choices: Genre labels are informative, but covering existing spine labels with transparent colored tape or colored labels is another option. You’d need a different color for each genre. A small adhesive dot of varying colors would also work. Your budget or available room on the spines might be the determining factor.

Tips

★ First, make an informal floor plan of what should go where. Expect to revise it!
★ When you move your books into the new genre sections, leave lots of room at the end of each shelf. You will always find books that need to be added later, and you’ll have room for new books.
★ Your largest section will probably be Sci-Fi/Fantasy/Dystopian if you combine them or Fantasy if you don’t.
★ Don’t stress about books that qualify under multiple genres. Ask students where they would look for it and go with that or just try to think of the book’s dominant feature. It can always be changed later.
★ Be aware that some authors write under multiple genres. Students who prefer a particular author might now need to be directed to multiple areas in the library, instead of just the author’s last name.

Examples:
Jodi Picoult – Her books have been categorized as Realistic, Mystery/Suspense, Fantasy, and Supernatural.
Stephen King – Most are Horror, but some are Sci-Fi.
Gary Paulsen – His books are definitely different genres.

(Silver lining: Students may follow an author into a different genre and discover they like that genre also.)
★ List the genres on the ends of any interior bookcases, as well as on top of all bookcases.

Would we do it again? Yes! We both have genrefied two libraries (so far)!

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P.S. Brenda set up free Kindle downloads of her newly updated book, Where Are the Spooky Books? How to Genrefy Your Library: Weeding, Moving, and Genrefying, from September 26-30 for anyone who may be interested. Just search on Amazon for her name or for the book title. Thanks for your support!
Notice the last two due dates in each picture.

Supernatural
Scary

Sports
(fiction and nonfiction)

Realistic fiction
Humor
Graphic novels

War & Military

nonfiction & fiction

Special sections showcase special series.