

How do we decide what goes into the Children's Room, and what goes into the Teen Zone?

People sometimes ask what the cutoff is for titles in the Children's Room vs. the Teen Zone. At what age can children start reading the Teen Books? There is not a clear, black and white delineation. Since everyone has different values, the decision is best left up to the people who know the children best, namely their guardians. Here is how we decide which titles end up shelved in the Children's Room, and which are shelved in the Teen Zone.

When books are reviewed, they are suggested for a range of ages or grades. Fiction books in the Children's Room generally include titles that are suggested for up to grade 6. Books in the Teen Zone may include titles reviewed for children younger than that. Fiction titles are frequently recommended for grades 4-6 or grades 6 and up. Titles in the grade 4-6 range, often called middle-grade, will typically be found in the Children's Room; titles for grades 6 and up are typically found in the Teen Zone. Parents can reassure their children that just because a title is in the Children's Room, it is not necessarily a childish book. There is plenty of adventure, gore and suspense to be found in both areas.

Like the fiction section, the nonfiction section in the Children's Room includes titles that are suggested for readers through grade 6. More of the titles used for school reports such as science experiment books and biographies will be downstairs. There's also more room downstairs for fun nonfiction reads such as books about the Mars Rover exploration, Arctic rescue, and sports books on surfing and gymnastics. Nonfiction titles selected for inclusion in the Teen Zone are interfiled with adult nonfiction.

We also look at the content of the book. Fiction titles in the Children's Room address "first discoveries" of self, others, and the world around oneself; titles in the Teen Zone expand upon these discoveries. The impact of tough topics such as war, alcoholism, racism, and suicide will be found in both places, as that is the reality for some children, even in the Kennebunk area. Because children like to read about someone older than themselves, a few of the titles in the Children's Room include high school aged protagonists.

A good example of the dilemma is the Alice McKinley series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. This is a well reviewed series with a substantial following about the coming-of-age of Alice McKinley. Some of the titles are shelved in the Children's Room; others are upstairs in the Teen Zone.

In the first book, *The Agony of Alice*, we meet 11-year-old Alice. Her mother died when she was four, and her father has done his best job at raising her. But now she's entering 6th grade, and longs for some feminine insight. Alice struggles with realistic pre-adolescent worries such as fitting in, crushes on boys, and bodily changes. Girls will recognize many of her fears, and that is what has kept the series so popular over the years.

Alice ages over the course of the series. Obviously, as she ages, she encounters age appropriate dilemmas. The first seven books in the series are shelved in the Children's Room. In the eighth book, *Alice in Lace*, each student in Alice' eighth grade health class is given an assignment to role play hypothetical life situations. Topics assigned include budgeting for a wedding and married life, teen

pregnancy, drunken driving and shoplifting. Because of the inclusion of more mature topics, this title is the first of the series shelved in the Teen Zone.

By identifying with characters through books, children can see the results of life choices in a safe manner. Whether it is learning how to be friends in spite of rivalry, learning how to interact with members of the opposite sex or the harsh realities of poverty, alcoholism, or war, reading about the life of a character you've grown to care about can help children and teens discern their values.

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