



**MICHIGAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION**

## Age Appropriateness and Placement of Materials in Public Libraries Statement of Principle

Since 2021, the Michigan Library Association (MLA) has been addressing an unprecedented volume of formal and informal actions to ban, hide, destroy, weed, move and challenge books in our libraries – which ultimately leads to restrictions on access to information. We believe in protecting Michigan citizens' First Amendment rights and long-established case law that bars public libraries from censorship.

MLA affirms that public libraries have a vital role in introducing young readers to a wide range of perspectives and information. Libraries are tasked with curating collections that are both diverse and balanced, reflecting various viewpoints to enrich the reading experience for all ages. To achieve this, public libraries rely on authors, publishers and professional book reviewers to guide the designation and classification of age appropriateness for all materials and to place these materials in the appropriate section of their library. Materials are normally categorized by Adult, YA/teens, children, graphic novels, and movies to name a few.

Age ranges suggested by reviewers are based on multiple factors, including the age of characters, the complexity of writing, and developmental stages. These ranges are intended as general guides rather than strict rules, serving as starting points within the context of the work for determining suitability rather than definitive measures.

A core responsibility of libraries is to provide age-appropriate materials, a task that requires careful consideration due to the subjective nature of what is deemed suitable. MLA emphasizes the importance of transparency in this process. Libraries use guidelines to determine appropriate age ranges for their materials and make these guidelines publicly available to foster trust and understanding among patrons. These guidelines are periodically reviewed and updated to ensure they meet the dual mission of offering broad access while supporting responsible content curation.

Each public library in Michigan develops its own collection development policies, which are approved by governing or advisory boards composed of community representatives. These policies outline the criteria for selecting, deselecting, and organizing materials. Librarians adhere to these policies, utilizing professional assessments, reviews, and community feedback to guide their decisions. Libraries of various sizes are sometimes constrained by budgets and availability of materials when building their collections.

While libraries provide information to assist in age-appropriate recommendations, the ultimate responsibility for determining suitable content for children rests with parents and guardians. Parent and guardians are encouraged to use these guidelines as tools for making informed decisions, while respecting the autonomy of others in their community. As governmental institutions, public libraries do not have the legal right to act in place of the parent and make decisions about what materials children cannot access.

In summary, MLA is committed to supporting public libraries in Michigan by promoting access to diverse and balanced materials shelved in the age-appropriate place in the library. We oppose restricting access to library materials based on age or grade level as this does not support individual needs, interests, and abilities of patrons.

Ultimately, parents and guardians retain the right to choose what is age and/or developmentally appropriate for their own children, and libraries are willing and prepared to help every family find materials that meet their needs. We believe that while a specific book may not be the right fit for one person, it may still be the perfect fit for another. No one individual or group should make sweeping decisions that take that process of careful consideration and choice away from readers.