

No to Age Banding

Individual Librarians and Library Assistants

I'm a library assistant. This sort of thing would be catastrophic for adult literacy, apart from the other obvious problems this would create.

EB, Library Assistant

As a librarian who is constantly being asked where the books are for 'X year-olds', I have spent a lot of time educating parents and teachers that instead of treating your child as an age level, treat them as an individual with personal reading tastes and abilities.

TM, Children's Librarian

I believe firmly that age banding, in addition to patronising young people, will de-motivate developing readers. It appears to make no allowances for the fact that children develop in their reading at different rates, and will make it less comfortable for young readers to revisit the books they loved in earlier childhood.

AW, Public Library Manager

Children read what interests, enthuses, enthrals and informs them at the time. Children are perfectly capable of choosing what they can and cannot cope with, and an attempt to impose an arbitrary, market-driven, age label should and must be resisted by all of us who have children, and reading, at heart.

AP, Liaison Librarian

I got a detention when I was 16 for reading Nick Hornby's High Fidelity instead of the sweet valley high books that my school library was stocking....
Knowing how it felt to be restricted and forced into unchallenging reading, I could never do it to another child....

VHM

I purchase books for adolescents with a low reading age. Are these books to be judged on their reading level, intended audience, or content? No matter which of the above categories is used as the basis for selecting the age range, it will cause problems. It is hard enough to encourage these adolescents to read, without adding the social stigma of an age range. A designation that lasts beyond the time of purchase is unnecessary!

SD, School Librarian

I am a library student currently in my final year. I have taken many a course on censorship and reading preferences, and I am beginning to think that perhaps this age banding may act as an unconscious attempt at censorship.

Think about it: an adult who would like to read a novel by the latest author (such as Rowling) is pressured NOT to because on the cover is a print that states: Ages 9 and up, or worse, ages 9-18. Well, what adult wants to be caught dead reading a child's book? And even worse: a child who is 8, but has the ability to read beyond their years, if forbidden by society to read that book until such time as they meet some publisher's requirements. What is wrong with encouraging a person to read above and beyond?

PA, Library Student

It's difficult enough in this day and age to get kids to read as it is. This is only going to limit their choices and instead of reading something they enjoy they are likely not to bother if the age banding on it is younger than they are.

AH, Former Librarian

I'm astounded that publishers are contemplating putting recommended ages on their books. As a librarian in a secondary school, I know that there is little point in buying books that say in the blurb that the book is about a 12 year old, or younger, yet if the age was not mentioned the story, it would often be read and enjoyed. It will be much worse if the age-guidance figures are there - reluctant readers will not want to read the books that they can cope with, and parents may ignore titles that their intelligent / mature children are capable of reading. Children's life experiences and abilities vary tremendously and what is suitable for one child of a particular age might be totally wrong for another. Please reconsider.

AH, School Librarian

There can be no more restrictive and off-putting "information" on a book than the age-range it is "recommended" for. Children quickly find their own level in fiction (assuming the content and language are appropriate and not too adult), and can be trusted to find a book they are comfortable reading.

LK, School Librarian

I'm very against the age banding of books, a form of censorship but so subtle. It takes away freedom of choice for kids.

BS, School Librarian

Take a look at the stance we've taken on keeping books free and open to public use. We definitely support the individual's right to choose what they read.

EW, Student Librarian

Children should not be made to feel they are not allowed to read a book which may appeal to them.

JJ, Librarian

I find the very idea of age banding to be stifling.

DL, Librarian

I would like to express my concern at this suggestion and recommend that publishers do not prejudice students against particular titles by putting ages against them. Students should also not have their lack of reading ability pointed out to them visually with age banding of titles.

AM, School Librarian

I am a Library Assistant and former Classroom Assistant who has spent many hours listening to children read and I would hate to think that schools or parents might seek to limit what children read based on the supposed age banding of the book. I hope that your campaign will prevent age banding from becoming a reality.

EW, Library Assistant

Books are not, cannot, and should not be "One Size Fits All"! The idea to label books by age is as ludicrous as a school librarian limiting a child's selection to his/her grade level.

SB, Mother and Librarian

It is not the children's choice I am concerned about, they choose books because they like the look of them. It is teachers and parents who take the book off the child and pronounce it to be "too hard," "too easy" or "too old" who will be influenced by some committee's random idea of age banding.

MB, Children's Librarian

There are ways enough already of determining if a particular book is suitable material for a particular child.

AC, Librarian

What really frightens me is that these suggestions might become an unwelcome inspection of the suitability of material for its audience. Please publish my name as an ardent opponent of any attempt to censor, restrict the circulation and availability of or to label books or any other information medium with age/suitability classifiers.

DB, Librarian

Please add my name to the list in support of intellectual freedom.

JP, Librarian

I believe it will have a negative impact on the selection of books by and for children.

MN, Young People's Librarian

It will be detrimental to the cause of encouraging and promoting a love of reading and books in young people.

KN, Chief Librarian

I agree totally that age banding is more harm than use to children.

EC, Children's Librarian

Age banding is a bad idea through and through. It removes the opportunity to develop book selection skills, and does not cater for the vast numbers of children who are 'non-standard' - those who have reading ages which are out of step with their chronological age. Also, this policy does no favours for the hundreds, or even thousands who have English as a foreign language.

Any self respecting child (and let's face it, street cred is a potent force amongst young people) would not be seen dead reading a book that is labelled for an age below their own. So what happens as a result? Children choose their books according to the age band label, and end up bored,

dissatisfied or frustrated. Not a good situation to be in.

HJ, Team Librarian (Youth)

The people I don't understand are the publishers themselves who seem to want to shoot themselves in the foot (feet!). Once you label a book by age, you're limiting the market in book shop terms. If the shops arrange their books accordingly, some great books will be missed.

CR, School Librarian

This is such idiocy. The best judge of a child's reading age is not some arbitrary judgement, but what the child is interested in.

EC, Librarian

I strongly object to age banding. Anything that puts a young person off reading a book that they might well enjoy is so obviously not good practice. Why do we have to try and pigeon-hole people and dictate their choices? It's so far from the whole point of books and reading.

SW, Community Librarian

I'm lucky enough to work in one of the greatest libraries in the world. It's a pleasure to see the work that the BL does with young people, bringing school groups into the building for instance, to encourage them. It seems a great pity that in other areas the aim is to put another hurdle in the way of the child's development.

GB, British Library

Age banding is restrictive, exclusive and harmful to the interests of readers.

AU, Librarian

I know publishers have to improve sales but this is a potentially dangerous way. A child chooses a book to read but can't have it because they are told you are too old or too young. Freedom of choice underpins enjoyment. Age banding could be a constraint on a child's freedom of choice. We need to educate the adult buyers rather than provide rudimentary guidelines.

PL, School Librarian

This is such a ridiculous idea. These people always seem to forget that reading is also for fun, which has no age limit, not just for academic education. We have enough trouble getting some children to read at all, without adding more barriers.

JS, Senior Library Officer, Children and Young People

I'm currently writing my dissertation on children's book selection strategies and find that many young people have a hard enough time finding books they want to read. I can only imagine the damage that would be done if these kids found a book they wanted only to discover they "shouldn't" be reading it. Librarians and teachers work very hard to motivate young readers and I can't help feeling that this proposal can only have a negative impact on their reading.

SD, Student Librarian

This is a ridiculous idea and will put so many children off reading. Every child is an individual - as is every book.

SH, Library Manager, Branch Chair YLG

Book banding will be as much use as age ranges on children's clothes i.e. meaningless. How many toddlers actually fit the age ranges the manufacturers assign to them? ... I firmly believe that if a child cannot cope with a book because the vocabulary is too challenging, or the content is beyond their understanding, they will usually put the book aside until they are ready for it. For that, they don't need an extra layer of interference from busybodies.

IC, School Librarian

I too am against age banding as I feel the negative consequences for reading far outweigh the safeguards of preventing adult-type literature being made available to youngsters.

CW, School Librarian

This is a misguided initiative. Sales will be more likely to be limited than increased.

JF, Head of Services to Education and Young People

It's hard enough retaining teenagers' interest in reading without alienating those that are by suggesting they're reading below their recommended level. This will make our work even harder.

SP, School Librarian

I remember the struggle we had regarding music and the PMRC in the early 80s. I never, ever thought it would come to this with books. At times like these we ALL need to remember that censorship is the enemy of democracy.

MV, School Librarian

My question on this is, why? For what possible purpose? Why effectively censor reading when we are already struggling to get children away from computers and back into books? Are we talking about the age of the child who should be capable of reading the content, or the age of the child who could be capable of reading the content? Depending on the child, these could be vastly different ages.

KW, Senior Librarian

Children cross all pre-conceived age barriers when they read. They read what's fun and interesting, not what publishers think they should. Age-banding would be worse than useless. Either the kids would completely ignore it or it would keep them away from books that challenge them or ones that are suitable for their reading levels.

CRW

I have been a school librarian for 20 years, inspiring a love of reading and books in children from age 3 - 16. To age band books is deplorable. I spend so much time telling my older ones that it's still fine to read picture books at any age. Let's stop this crazy idea.

HW, School Librarian

I wish to add my voice to the opposition to age banding books; it is simply another centralized assault on independent thought and decision-making that is best left to the individuals immediately involved.

MC, Librarian

I can't believe that such a damaging and counter-productive step like this has been taken and feel very saddened at the prospect.

LS, School Librarian

It is an attempt to segregate readers into categories that someone else derives for them. As a public librarian who has worked as both a young adult librarian and a business librarian, I think this is a bad idea.

AH, Librarian

It is certainly not how children choose books for themselves - children browse! - find their own level of comfort with the book through a good storyline, layout of text, pictures and style, etc. Children recommend authors to each other, not age ranges. Children can be damaged by age ranges. What if they want to choose a book with a lower age range because they are more confident with the level - yet the book reveals a lower age range to their peers? Not ideal for self-esteem and confidence building. Publishers need to consider the damage they would potentially be doing by this "industry standard."

MN, Children and Young People's Library Service Manager

I am a librarian, parent and reader with 28 years experience of trying to get the right book to the right child at the right time (while recognising that often what I thought was the "wrong" book was a winner!).

How awful to be told you can't read X because you are Y age.

MW, Librarian

Each child is different and their reading abilities vary tremendously. To pigeon-hole each book in this way would be very off-putting and mean many children would not pick up and read a book that they would otherwise have enjoyed.

JL, School Librarian

As a school librarian I trust my professional judgement and knowledge of my readers' tastes and abilities to suggest suitable books. Shoving an age band sticker on a book will do untold harm.

SB, Learning Resource Centre Manager

What we as readers do every day, is read at a variety of levels. What an arid life it would be if we were always reading material at one level. What a tragedy if children feel unable to revisit comfortable old favourites. How limiting if they never dip into books which may inspire as well as stretch them.

JD, Early Years Librarian

Please add me to your very important petition. I just hope it makes the publishers think again. They just can't have thought it through.

AA, librarian

A further concern I have is that some public libraries may end up using these guidelines as de facto limits, and as such not allow children to borrow books for other ages (as indeed happened to me when I was about 7 until my parents complained in relation to adult books) and especially that children will be ashamed of wanting to read younger books.

TR, Librarian

We want children to read as widely as possible, the right book at the right time, time to consolidate, to go back and re-read, try something adventurous. Don't restrict choices. Don't help parents to restrict children any more than some already do.

MS, Team Librarian

Another pointless attempt to over-simplify and to stop people from making their own judgements.

JT, Library Assistant

This is an ill-conceived scheme for which I can see no benefits at all - only negative effects. It should be the choice of the individual as to what they read, not dictated by business. Many parents will be put off books or feel their children are failing if the suggested age of reading does not correspond with their expectations. Similarly children will be put off if they are given books with ages on them that imply they are not reading to their expected age group.

I find the whole scheme untenable.

JR, Learning Resource Manager

Why should we put an obstacle in front of them, which can serve to place additional barriers between them and books?

RR, Librarian

No child wants to read a book which is labelled as suitable for someone younger than him/her. Making a kid read *Jane Eyre* at year 9 as part of the curriculum is more likely to do harm than letting them revel in all the possibilities of fiction - one of the few areas where they have real choice these days!

PD, School Librarian

A terrible idea. It'll put loads of kids off even picking some books up.

TM, Children's Library Assistant

I have worked in the public library service and education and can only see age banding providing a barrier to children's enjoyment of reading and leading to confusion.

MS, Librarian

I disagree with this for so many reasons, not least that it will serve to stigmatise weaker struggling readers, and limit good, relevant material available to younger mature readers.

JL, School Librarian

No child should ever be told they can't have access to a book because they're not the right age. While I realize this is not the intent of the publishers, I guarantee that some misguided teachers, parents, and <gasp> even librarians will use the age banding in that way.

SI, Librarian

This amounts to censorship and I feel very passionately that this must be stopped for the good of every child who picks up a book and wants to read.

MG, School Librarian

Books are an important way to discover the world and debate issues. Age banding books would limit the ability of young people and adults to read and respond to books freely and without imposition.

CB, Librarian

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