

Review of 'Intellectual freedom for teens: A practical guide for young adult & school librarians'

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ABSTRACT: Review of Fletcher-Spear, Kristin and Tyler, Kelly, eds. *Intellectual freedom for teens: A practical guide for young adult & school librarians*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2014.

Keywords: young adult librarianship; intellectual freedom; censorship



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Intellectual Freedom for Teens, edited by Fletcher-Spear and Tyler, is a guide to dealing with the complicated area of access to information for young people. The book comprises five chapters spanning 87 pages, followed by a set of comprehensive indices. The book and indices together act as an extensive, though not exhaustive, reference manual for librarians to consult in the event of a threat to intellectual freedom.

Since the book's authors are based in North America, the principles contained in the book reflect heavily on the ALA's [Library Bill of Rights](#)¹ in proclaiming that teenagers are entitled to intellectual freedom, and that librarians who work with teenagers should fight for this freedom on their behalf. The book maintains that the majority of library workers—such as front-line workers²—will not have studied intellectual freedom issues, asserting its place in the field.

The field of intellectual freedom for teenagers seems to be largely dominated by book banning—7 out of 10 of the books challenged in the US in 2011 were to young adult (YA) literature—and this book reflects that. While it does maintain that this edition is updated to include digital issues, *Intellectual Freedom for Teens* is still heavily weighted to challenges to books being a library's main threat to intellectual freedom. It might have been more useful to the majority of readers if intellectual freedom issues aside from book challenges took precedence, because the issue of book challenges seems to arise more prominently in the US. While challenges to books are less heard of here in the UK, for example, the book still remains a valuable resource in case this should happen. Libraries outside the US could use *Intellectual Freedom for Teens* as a basis for developing policies and procedures relating to challenges to materials.

Chapter one, by the editors, introduces some of the intellectual freedom issue that libraries should consider when working with teenagers. Such issues include keeping teenagers' loan history private from parents, not blocking social networking sites, keeping the internet open, self-censoring by avoiding purchasing and displaying controversial materials, and resisting challenges to library materials. Preparing for challenges to intellectual freedom involves revising policies, and ensuring all staff act in a similar way if a challenge is introduced.

The second (Fletcher-Spear) and third (Tyler) chapters focus on challenges to library materials: the first on how to prepare for a challenge, and the second on what to do when a challenge occurs. Appendix 1 accompanies this chapter well, being a list of the most challenged books, together with reviews and awards won by each book, making it a useful resource for library staff who need to affirm a challenged item's value. *Intellectual Freedom for Teens* reminds policy makers within organisations to create and revise policies and train staff on preparing for and managing challenges to ensure that the entire library is consistent in its attitudes and actions.

Chapter four by Karen Jenson discusses the promotion of intellectual freedom in the terms of 'programming' and 'marketing'. The 'marketing' analogy is continued as Jenson maintains that intellectual freedom should be endorsed in the same way that large corporations promote their brand, and some readers may find this comparison problematic. Still, the chapter provides practical suggestions as to how to engage library users with intellectual freedom issues.

The fifth and final chapter by Linda Braun focuses on the issue of freedom to access information online. Instead of filtering the Internet, Braun suggests that librarians have a responsibility to teach teenagers how to use the Internet appropriately. She explains how an unfiltered Internet can be used as an opportunity to teach, and even how often-filtered areas of the Internet such as YouTube and social media can be used for educational purposes. Digital access advocacy requires the ability to advocate for an open Internet for teens to all age groups and provides information that advocates can use to advocate for this.

The book's primary limitation is that it seems on the surface to lack international application. Reference to the ALA and focus on the issue of book challenges contribute to this book's US-centricity. The values underlying US issues are transferrable universally, and can be used as a basis for forming their own policies. The legislation of the readers' own country would affect how the recommendations in the book can be executed in libraries globally.

While intellectual freedom issues are taught in library schools and the contents of the book should be familiar to qualified librarians, *Intellectual Freedom for Teens* acts as a refresher, while also introducing the newer issue of digital freedom. Even as a qualified librarian, the book made me take a second look at the state of the current practice in my workplace. The handbook would also be an informative, quick and readable introduction to intellectual freedom for any library staff working with teenagers.

References

1. American Library Association (1980) *Library Bill of Rights*.
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>
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