Readers Advisory

Readers’ advisory is an important endeavor to answer a patrons’ question "what should I read next?”. This is not an easy question because unlike reference questions, where the goal is to find factual information, “what should I read next”, is a personal question with many variables to consider. When you conduct a reference interview, the goal is to figure out the type of information the patron is requesting, whether it is “what is the population of Venezuela” or “what are the ethical implications of banning books in classrooms”. The reference librarian then consults authoritative sources to answer the question fully (Cassell & Hiremath, 2013).

On the flip side, readers’ advisory gears their recommendations not to authoritative sources, but to personal tastes. The Encyclopedia Britannica is not going to be very helpful in figuring out book recommendations for your patron who likes books with talking animals. Readers’ advisory is about finding books with entertainment value, or for the patrons’ pleasure. (Cassell & Hirmath, 2013). An academic database or government census website are not going to be very helpful in answering a readers’ advisory question, however, there are other search strategies that can be useful to help answer the patrons question.

Lists are probably the greatest invention that mankind has created. They can keep track of what you need to do for the day, make sure you get everything you need at the grocery store, or, help answer patrons book recommendation questions. Lynn Welch, in her article Getting Started With Readers’ Advisory suggests getting
together with your fellow library coworkers and compiling readers advisory lists. These lists can be about anything, for instance you can make a list of all the books you are aware that your library has of Elizabethan theater plays, urban fantasy romance, crime novels with lead heroines, lift and see children books, etc. Welch even goes on to suggest that you post these lists on your libraries webpage that way patrons’ have access to them.

There are also databases, similar to reference databases but for readers advisory. These can help you get a feel for what people are reading with similar interests. Other sources include readers’ advisory blogs and websites with book reviews that can be helpful as well. The most important thing to remember is to stay current with your readers’ advisory. New books are published (many are part of series) continuously and you don’t want your lists to become too outdated.

It is kind of ironic that as I am writing this report I have received two emails, one from a blog I follow and one from the American Library Association, and they both contain readers’ advisory website recommendations. The first one, recommended by the ALA is booklistsonline.com. The tagline on their website states “more than 160,000 book reviews for librarians, book groups, and book lovers—from the trusted experts at the American Library Association.” In order to get the most out of the website you have to become a subscriber. Once you are subscribed you can make lists and save your searches. You can read reviews of books and views other subscribers and ALA recommended lists. They also offer readers’ advisory webinars to help refine your skills and learn about new and up and coming material. One feature that I really appreciated is they have a section that lists all the awards
given to books. When you click on an award, say the Pulitzer prize, the site will show you the current award winning book(s).

Booklist Online is easy to navigate and has almost an overwhelming wealth of information. The one drawback is this is only accessible by librarians/ALA members. Unless the general public wants to pay the subscription cost of an institution, they are not going to get much information from it. Another problem I stumbled on is they only provide readers’ advisory for young adult and adult literature, but there is not anything for children’s’ books.

The other readers’ advisory resource that was recommended to me via email is yournextread.com. Your Next Read combines book reviews with social media to help tailor recommendations. You can search for a book, for instance let’s say Divergent by Veronica Roth, and the site creates a spider web with Divergent in the middle. They then place books around the middle book and you can either thumbs up the recommendation, or if you disagree with a recommendation you can thumbs down. You can create and save lists, and view other lists. The site offers reviews on all the books, as well as links to Amazon reviews. Another interesting feature is you can connect the site to your goodreads (goodreads.com is a social media site that allows you to catalogue your personal collection, write reviews, and see what your friends are reading) account and get recommendations for books you have on your goodreads shelves.

Your next book is a fun way to get readers’ advisory information and create more visual lists with the spider web layout. It links to Amazon and other social media sites and is a good resource for patrons'. It is free to join and simple to use. It
even gives recommendations for children’s books. The site also goes beyond books and offers the same features for film and video games. The one problem that I did come across is not every book is listed and so you might not always get a recommendation. However, I can see this changing if more people use the site and start making book lists.

With professional readers’ advisory such as the ALA to informal social media readers’ advisory it is clear that this is an important subject to be familiar with. As Welch (2013) states that readers’ advisory “is an art, rather than a science, and requires patience and willingness to experiment.” Answering reference questions is more like a science. Much as a scientist uses the scientific method for finding answers, reference questions are also answered in more of a prescribed way, they have a more clear cut answer, or end result. Readers’ advisory is a lot more like art. It takes creativity a splash of blue paint here and maybe some modpodge there. The end result is varied, however, if done right it is pleasing to the patron, which is the goal of both reference and readers’ advisory.
**Reading List**

I started my own personal readers advisory list a while back. With the help of Amazon, goodreads, my branch librarian and friends I am trying to obtain as many bilingual books as I can for my (now 17 month old) son. He loves to read, especially books that are interactive like touch and feel or slide and find. There are very limited books in this genre, and not all of them are what I call "Ezekiel approved". Books either become his favorite and we read them over, and over, and over again, or we read them once and he doesn't bring it back to me. So here are his top six favorites in no particular order, except the first one is an all time favorite:

**Murphy, Mary. I Like It When...Me gusta cuando...**

A Mother and baby penguin talk about what they like throughout the day ("I like it when you hold my hand"). The illustrations are bright and simple. The words are in both English and Spanish. Appropriate for babies and toddlers.

**Bright Baby. Words, Palabras**

This is a simple book with four pictures of related objects on each page. The objects are big and bright and listed in both English and Spanish. The fourth picture on each page has a slider with a question to ask your baby/toddler. ("Which fruit is red? ¿Qué fruta es roja") When you slide the picture up it reveals the answer ("Straberry, fresa"). This is a fun interactive start for babies and young toddlers who are developing object recognition.
Katz, Karen. ¿Donde está el ombliguito?
ISBN: 978-0-689-86977-8

Katz, Karen. Where is Babies Belly Button?

This is a cute lift–the-flap book (careful with the flaps, they can tare) with pictures of babies that have certain body parts hidden such as their hands or feet. The body parts are hidden under everyday household objects such as cups, bubbles, and cats. Unfortunately this book is an either/or language book, meaning you can only get a copy in either English, or in Spanish. The Spanish version is harder to find, but well worth the search, and the English version can be found at the local library. It is a bright fun book with lots of opportunities for object recognition.


A book full of greatly illustrated babies going through the motions of touching their heads, shoulders, knees and toes. The Spanish translation for knees and toes are off (piernas is legs and pies are feet), but I believe they did this purposely so the words would rhyme (rodillia y dedo del pie is a mouthful) when you sing the song. It is a great book to get your baby/toddler moving and recognizing their body parts.

Priddy, Roger. First 100 Words, Primeras 100 palabras.

This is a large board book filled with pictures of 100 different objects. The objects are divided into categories such as farm animals and transportation. The pictures
are bright and easy to see. The word for each object is listed in both English and Spanish. This is a great book to leave lying around where your child will see it often. When you notice them looking at it, you can point to pictures and tell them what it is. As they get older you can ask them to show you where an object is (do you see an elephant?).

Mitchell, Melanie. *Good Morning, Good Night/Buenos días, buenas noches*

This is a touch and feel book that also has flaps to turn as the animals in the story go to sleep. Each animal has a different feel and it ends with tucking in a little girl into bed. It’s great for interaction, and allows your child to learn about the difference between day and night. The illustrations are calming and there are different objects besides the animal that your child can point to. The story can be read in either English or Spanish.
References


