

# Supporting the Personal and Inter-Personal Skills of Global Citizens Through Fiction

Barbara Reid and Siobhan Roulston  
The Alice Smith School and The Garden International School  
Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia  
breid.jb@alice-smith.edu.my  
roulston.s@gardenschool.edu.my

## Abstract

*How can Teacher-Librarians collaborate with teachers, school counselors and parents to support and teach values, coping skills and the management of interpersonal relationships? What tools can Teacher-Librarians use to inform the school community about the range of resources available? This practical presentation introduces a variety of texts that can be used with Primary and Middle school students and suggests how they might fit into a school setting. The selected texts will be predominantly picture books written in English and sourced from a range of countries and cultures. Teacher-Librarians are often approached to suggest books that will assist the school community to develop confident, empathetic global citizens. They must ensure that these books are easily accessible. They should promote them and suggest how and when they may be used with individuals and/or in a classroom setting. Participants will be invited to add their own suggestions to the list of books provided.*

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy, reading lists, elementary libraries, collection, development, values

## Bibliotherapy

"In reading about a character who is facing a situation similar to their own, readers may identify with the character and in so doing gain some awareness and understanding of their own motivations, thoughts, and feelings" (Coleman & Ganong, 1990, p. 327).

## Support materials

The companion website to this presentation has links to various texts with ideas on promotion and areas of use. The lists are dynamic and all contributions are welcomed. Please visit <http://alice-smith.libguides.com/interpersonalskills>

## Purpose

With an increasingly mobile global population, schools find themselves to be melting pots of cultures. Teacher-Librarians face the challenge of providing collections that address the needs of a wide variety of students. As Teacher-Librarians in international schools, the presenters have long been attempting to gather books in a variety of languages and from various cultures to present to their school communities. In most international schools, this collection development is supported by administration both in principle and financially. Teacher-Librarians working in an international setting are often fortunate enough to have

engaged parents and teachers offering their assistance to develop their collections in their particular culture.

Today, most schools, international or national, have many nationalities represented in their student bodies. The presenters are aware that some Teacher-Librarians may not have the access that they have to input from adults from a variety of cultures, or the financial support from their school leaders, therefore they would like to share some of the tools and texts that they use to assist them. Teacher-Librarians are notoriously good at sharing information, but it is not possible to address the collection as a whole. Therefore, this presentation intends to focus on a subset of the collection; the part of the collection used for bibliotherapy.

**Bibliotherapy** : the use of reading materials for help in solving personal problems or for psychiatric therapy; *also*: the reading materials so used <sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: Definition of Bibliotherapy

Some social issues know no boundaries. Dealing with birth, death, a new family member, separation, sadness, moving house and/or school, acceptance of own or others' disability, etc. are stressful for children no matter what nationality they are. However, different cultures have very different ways of dealing with and discussing these issues. Each culture has differing values. While attempting to develop internationally diverse collections and support global citizenship, teacher-librarians must try to encompass as many different cultures and values as possible. At all times they should remain aware that some cultures may find some issues distressing and/or offensive, and that some issues are unique to certain cultures.

Bibliotherapy is most effective when it is a shared experience. Whilst sharing texts with children, adults will find opportunities to discuss the issues arising with the child and explain areas of the text that may cause distress. Children will draw their own conclusions from the text and may offer a different perspective to the adult. The asking of open-ended questions by the adult reader and the ensuing discussion may allow problems to be discussed and connections to be made opening the way for resolution or further treatment.

In order to meet the needs of diverse school communities, Teacher-Librarians have a responsibility to collect broadly and classify carefully. There are considerations Teacher-Librarians must make when choosing texts. In their paper, "Bibliotherapy: Helping Children Cope with Life's Challenges", Rozalski, Stewart and Miller (2010) identify a number of steps in reviewing books. These steps are:

- Is the readability of the text appropriate for the students?
- Does the text match the grade/interest level?
- Are the characters presented in a way which the students can relate to?
- Is the context of the story similar to that of the students?
- Will the students be able to relate to the illustrations/pictures?
- Does the author's message promote reflection and discussion?

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bibliotherapy>

In Detrixhe's 2010 article, Coleman and Ganong (1990) state that the issue of book selection is simple. The narrative and characters should reflect as accurately as possible the reader's situation in order to promote learning and identification. Also, on the basis of their experience, Coleman and Ganong believed that it is best for books to be set in modern times to be realistic, not to offend the religious beliefs or values of the reader. Whilst the use of contemporary fiction for bibliotherapy may be preferable, these presenters have also found that some traditional texts are invaluable for supporting students in need. In the support material provided both contemporary and traditional texts are included.

To use bibliotherapy effectively in schools, Stainbrook refers to Sullivan and Strang's notion that it "should be a natural addition to the regular curriculum" (2011, p.188). To support curricular needs, Teacher-Librarians must ensure easy access and accurate descriptions by using tags or standardised subject headings of the works they want to recommend to adults that may want to use them with children. It is also helpful to provide suggestions as to how these resources may be used, being ever-conscious that children may be exposed to more than one culture at home and school, and that teachers wishing to use these resources may be from another culture again. With the range of online tools available, Teacher-Librarians are able to share appropriate resources using a variety of methods.

## **Practice**

Refer to the support materials for examples of the following:

### ***OPACs and Library Websites***

The Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) and / or library homepage is often the first point of access for library users. In the OPAC, Teacher-Librarians can gather all the information that they want to share with users in one place. By cataloguing the curation tools they use with consistent subject headings or tags, users can be taken directly to them, as well as to the books the library holds. Many OPACs enable teaching notes to be uploaded to book records or for the addition of extensive, often searchable, notes to suggest ways to use the recommended resources.

### ***Online Curation***

#### ***Goodreads, Shelfari, Pinterest etc.***

Being able to tag books with relevant subjects is an efficient way to be able to find books when they are needed, especially if an urgent situation arises. Lists can be shared and collaborative. Some tools are more visual than others, some allow more annotation and linking.

### ***Print materials... or print like materials***

Some users prefer printed lists. Presenting a user with a library specific, annotated list can be useful, however, printed lists quickly become outdated. Printed lists can be archived on a website or an OPAC for easy retrieval. Embedding a Google doc into a website provides users with a printed list that can be updated by the owner, therefore keeping it dynamic. Issuu is becoming an increasingly popular way of presenting magazine-like lists.

## Conclusion

Using books for therapy can be extremely beneficial. Teacher-Librarians are tasked with sourcing a wide range of materials to address a wide variety of issues that may be required in their individual multi-cultural settings. It is not enough just to collect resources. With the aid of library management systems and social software, Teacher-Librarians can recommend and make suggestions as to how and where resources can be used in the most effective ways. By sharing information with other Teacher-Librarians around the world, building a comprehensive bibliography and a useful collection within the school, should be both time and cost effective.

## References

- Coleman, M. & Ganong, L. (1990). The uses of juvenile fiction and self-help books with stepfamilies. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 68, 327-331.
- Detrixhe, Jonathan J. (2010). Souls in jeopardy: Questions and innovations for bibliotherapy with fiction. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 49, 58-72
- Rozalski, M., Stewart, A. and Miller, J. (2010). Bibliotherapy: Helping children cope with life's challenges. *Kappa Delta PI Record*. Fall 2010. 33-37.
- Stainbrook, S. L. (2011). Interactive bibliotherapy: A case for implementation in the elementary classroom. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. 24/3. 187-194.

## Biographical note

**Siobhan Roulston** (B. Ed., Grad Cert. in Comp. Ed., M.Ed in Teacher Librarianship) is the Primary Teacher-Librarian at Garden International School, Kuala Lumpur. She is Australian and has been teaching internationally for 22 years. Having the opportunity to teach in seven countries has given Siobhan a broad understanding of a range of cultures and educational systems. She moved into the role of Teacher Librarian six years ago and relishes the challenges the job demands.

**Barb Reid's** first overseas teaching position was in Singapore in 2005. Barb was born in New Zealand and qualified and worked as a librarian in Australia for many years. Barbara now works in Malaysia. Barbara is the Primary School Teacher-Librarian at The Alice Smith School, a large well-established school in Kuala Lumpur. Barb has been on the organising committees of several regional conferences including SLAQ 2004 (Gold Coast) Hands on Literacy (Singapore) and Librarian's Knowledge Sharing (Kuala Lumpur). She is active in her local network and assisted in the development of The Red Dot book awards and Readers Cup competitions in Singapore.