

Cookbook author Peg Bracken and our High School Reference Shelves
By Linda Wilson

I have always been a good “weeder,” in my garden and in my school library. (home library is another story, but never mind). I know absolutely that weeding increases the growth of fruits and vegetables, and makes the good books more obvious and accessible. I know that school libraries need to stay up to date and reflect current curriculum. I know that dusty shelves of heavy tomes with uninspired covers will not attract student users. I know that today’s students are heavily inclined to use the internet for all research, unless the teacher requires books as well.

Soooo, why am I finding it so difficult to weed my reference section? Oh, some of the decisions are easy – *The Encyclopedia of Social Science*, dated 1979, goes, as does the *World Almanac, 2002*. Note to myself: order 2 or 3 of the new edition! *Who’s Who in Greek and Roman Mythology* and the *Presidency, A-Z*, will be moved to regular non-fiction where they are more likely to be noticed. The Health and Wellness classes are frequent users; the science department is not. So, the health, disease and medical resources will stay, but what to do with the 5 shelves of expensive science reference books? Those on biomes and environmental subjects will be used, although clearly I need more, more, more of the latter. Still, I just can’t bring myself to part with Grzimck, ‘though it hasn’t been used in years. At this point in my agonizing, I looked up to see one of our new Biology teachers, whose students were using the computer to look up scientific classification of various organisms. I took her back and showed her the Grzimck, which impressed her so much, she promptly booked library time for her class to use the set at a time when the computers were not available. Hooray!

I’m looking ahead and Heavens! What am I to do with the *World History of Art* when the entire contents of the Louvre and every other major museum are available on line – and in color? Discard, I think. Then there’s the *Grove Dictionary of Music*, and shelf after shelf of Gale’s *Literary Criticism* and *Something About the Author*, and the list goes on and on. I need to stop; take a deep breath; listen to what I am saying here:

Weeding IS essential, and it is not always easy!

My instincts and experience count here – I need to trust myself, even if it’s an expensive, but outdated book!

Weeding helps point to areas where more materials are needed!

Some books would be better reclassified to circulating non-fiction, including many of the small dictionaries, books on biomes, environment, and history.

Departments still using book sources must be supported in print as well as electronically. (more ebooks), so some books stay!

Current hot topics like the environment need to be kept and added to!

Teachers need to know what is here!

Finally, I need to remember Peg Bracken. For you young ones, in 1960, Peg Bracken published a wonderful cookbook called *The I Hate to Cook Book* with illustrations by Hilary Knight of *Eloise* fame. It was filled with all sorts of easy tasty meals and humorous tips. My favorite chapter, for instance, was called, “The Leftover, or Every Family Should Have a Dog.” And the featured advice was: “When in doubt, throw it out!” She pointed out, that one could fill a small dish with a leftover, and then throw it out in a week or two, when it had turned into a lab experiment. OR, one could throw it out now! I think something similar applies to our reference sections. We can keep those dusty tomes for years more and watch the kids ignore them, or we can remove them now, and work to increase use of the sources that are left.

Linda Wilson, when not hard at work as the media specialist at McKay High School in Salem, is busy designing a 12 step program for weeding our home library collections.