

## Tips for Nonfiction Curation & Shelving

### Weeding: A Never-ending Battle

Most school librarians weed their collections a little at a time, but when Zoan Barefield arrived at her K-8 school, the library collection had more than 37,000 books, or 200+ titles per student. Many of the books were outdated, falling apart, or moldy. With such a massive weeding project ahead of her, Zoan enlisted the help a local Eagle Scout looking for a community service project.

Over a 3-day period, a small group of scouts pulled books off the shelves, looked at the copyright date of each book, and made piles of books published before 2009. Then Zoan evaluated each book herself. The scouts were able to weed about 60 percent of the nonfiction section, repair damaged books, and pack up 70 boxes of books that would be removed from the collection.



“The scouts did a great job,” says Zoan. “They really jumpstarted the weeding process, but the project is ongoing.” Students in grades 5-8 are continuing to weed using a “Should It Stay or Should It Go?” worksheet that Zoan created. After a year of work, the collection had about 22,000 books, or 120 titles per student.

### Should it stay or should it go?

Book reviewed by \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ grade.

Book Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Copyright Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Age of book: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-Fiction	1	2	3	4	5
Age	Greater than 15 years old	Between 10-15 years old	Between 8-10 years old	Between 5-8 years old	Current within the last 5 years
Condition	Book is very well used and cannot be repaired	Book has many bent and torn pages, but could be fixed	Book has some bent and torn pages, but could be fixed	There are signs of wear, but it still has a lot of life left	Book looks new
Information	There are some false or outdated facts		There are no false/outdated facts, but the book doesn't present new information		The book presents all factual information and I would learn a lot from this book
Interest and readability	Most kids would not be interested in this book	There are a few students that may be interested in this book	The book is too hard/too easy to read for students who would be interested in this subject	This book is slightly too hard/easy for students who would be interested in it	This book has a good amount of interest and the readability matches with who would check it out
Visual appeal (only applies to books with illustrations/pictures)	The photograph/pictures are dull and outdated		The photograph/pictures are in color and detailed but could be better		I could look at these pictures all day. They are current and bright.
Personal thoughts	Weed!	Should weed	I can't decide	Should keep	Keep!
Total Score					

School Staff only:

How many times has the book been checked out in the last 5 years? \_\_\_\_\_

### Experimenting with Shelving

Over a 2-year period, K–12 school librarian Laura Wylie de Fiallos increased the circulation of her nonfiction collection more than 350 percent! How'd she do it? By better meeting the needs of

her youngest students.

First, Laura removed all the K–3 nonfiction books from the cramped shelves in the back corner of the library. After weeding aggressively, she grouped the remaining books loosely by subject (oceans and ocean animals, sports/dance/gymnastics, our world, how things work, etc.) and shelved them in a high-traffic area near the story corner. She displayed as many books as possible with the covers facing out to entice young readers.



“If you’re still ‘on the fence’ about your students’ enthusiasm for nonfiction, I encourage you to look at your collection and consider making some changes,” says Laura. “You have nothing to lose, and your school community has lots to gain!” For more details of Laura’s project, see [this link](#).

### Reorganizing the E-Nonfiction Section

When teacher-librarian Erin Chapman arrived at her K-5 school, the nonfiction collection had an average age of 1971 (Gasp!). Her first task was to weed aggressively. Then she made a list of her goals for reorganizing the E-nonfiction section and a list of the resources available.



After using Scholastic dollars to buy plastic bins, she developed a category plan that she hoped would make books more accessible and easier to locate independently.

Next, she used Canva to create labels that include words and pictures. Then she printed the labels on color on cardstock, laminated them, cut them out, and hot glued them onto the bins. Even



though Erin is in the middle of re-organizing her older nonfiction, her total nonfiction circulation is already increased 20 percent.

“What a HUGE victory for our newest readers!” says Erin. “I’ve also noticed a number of students who are now exclusively checking out nonfiction. They’re self-identifying as nonfiction lovers.” You can find [more details](#) of Erin’s project here.

### The Benefits of Bins

Like Erin, K-5 teacher librarian Rachel Small and K-3 librarian Laura Beals D’Elia are big fans of using bins in their libraries. While Laura has chosen red bins for her nonfiction section, Rachel uses clear bins throughout her library.

### Favorite Bins

Erin-Louise Chapman	<a href="#">Double wide book bins (teal, item # 700054) via Scholastic Dollars</a>
Rachel Small	<a href="#">12-pack large clear open storage bins by Simply Tidy from Michaels</a>
Laura Beals D’Elia	<a href="#">Lakeshore Connect &amp; Store Book Bins</a>

“It’s so much easier to rearrange a section once it’s in bins,” says Rachel. “Plus students can easily slide the bins off the shelves to look at the books more carefully.”

Rachel labels her bins with words and a picture on the end lengthwise as well as widthwise, so they can be oriented either way of a shelf. She places them lengthwise if space is tight in a section or widthwise so books face out. “The books that are face out get checked out much more quickly,” says Rachel.



To make finding books even easier, Rachel created a second copy of each bin label and stuck it to the end of the corresponding bookcase. This helps students know what topics are shelved on a particular bookcase with a quick glance.

K-1 school librarian Marti Smallidge agrees that forward-facing bins with clear labels have been “transformative” for her students. “Flipping through books that are facing you is much less daunting than traditional shelving, especially for students who cannot yet read spines,” she says.



Marti notes that her labels are almost completely pictorial, “which is perfect for our pre- and early readers,” she says. “Students walk among the shelves and discover sections they didn’t know existed. They can also find exactly what they’re looking for without adult assistance.

According to Marti, this change has affected how her staff spends their time. “Now we can focus on students with questions that are more nuanced than, ‘Where are the dinosaur books?’” she says.

Wendy Garland developed a shelving system that mixes bins with small topic-focused sections demarcated with white magazine holders that are labelled with a call number, a one-word description, and a picture. She also created a matching pictorial spine label for each book.



“Now, putting a book away is as easy as matching the spine label to the bin,” says Wendy. “And finding a book is as easy as pointing a student to the correct aisle and telling them to look for a bin with that particular topic’s picture. Creating a visual guide increased accessibility and independence in our library.”

### Ditching Dewey

Like many school librarians, Wendy Garland and Becky Sniffen have taken some liberties with the Dewey decimal system. Both moved farm animals and pets into the 500s with the other

animal books. Becky also moved her biographies of athletes into the sports section. “These changes have really bumped up their circulation,” says Becky.

K-5 school librarian Liza Halley has also made some big changes to her biography section, arranging books by the subject for which the person is most famous. Subsections now include: Artists, Athletes, Change Makers, STEM, U. S. History, and World Leaders.

“This new organization has helped with wayfinding for students and also with library lessons that support the EL curriculum our school utilizes,” says Liza. “It also avoids siloing biography subjects based on their race or gender identity.”

In the 900s, Liza thought about categories students are most drawn to and made separate Dewey numbers for all the President books and all the American Revolution books. She also moved all the books related to the human body to the 100s, which was an underutilized area. Since this section is visible from her desk, she can now monitor appropriate use of the puberty books.

### Highlighting Popular Books and Series

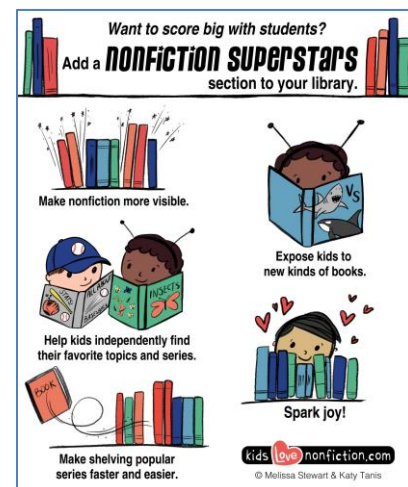
As a new librarian, PreK-4 school librarian Amy Jent felt frustrated. She spent so much time helping students locate books in their favorite nonfiction series because the titles were shelved all over the library.

But in 2018, she had a brilliant idea: Why not create a popular nonfiction section? She did, and it’s now a place to shelve series like “Who Would Win?” and “Fly Guy Presents” as well as popular titles like the *Guinness Book of World Records* and a range of books on topics like the military, gaming, and unexplained mysteries.

“Students can find the books they want with little or no assistance,” says Amy, “and shelving is easier because titles don’t need to be in exact Dewey order as long as the books in a series or about a specific topic are together on a shelf. You can find [more details](#) of Amy’s project here.

Amy isn’t the only librarian to highlight subsections of their nonfiction collection to help students find books and to simplify re-shelving frequently checked-out books. These special sections go by many names, ranging from the obvious (Popular Nonfiction) to the fun (Nonfiction Superstars, which allows for a sports-related theme).

K-3 school librarian Laura D’Elia chose the name “Nonfiction Stars” and added a star-shaped sticker to each book’s spine. Since she didn’t change the books’ call numbers, the stickers let volunteers know where to shelve the books. As an added bonus, Laura loves that when a student asks where to find a book they didn’t know was in this section, she gets to say, “Go look under the stars.” 😊





Laura also created a fun Corner Zoo section with a jungle theme to call attention to her animal books as well as an Active Nonfiction section, so students can more easily find drawing books, craft books, origami, magic tricks, cookbooks, how to survive books, etc. The Active Nonfiction titles have a red dot spine sticker to remind volunteers where they should be shelved.



### Filling Gaps in the Collection

A few years ago, Laura came up with a clever solution to a problem many librarians face—gaps within some topics in her nonfiction collection. For instance, she didn't have enough dinosaur books. She had no books about world religions, no recent books about health and the human body, and a "miserable" selection of country books.

As Laura searched for books to fill the holes, she would find a great series through one of her vendors, but then discover that the vendor only had 2 or 3 titles from the series. What she really wanted was ALL the books in the series. She wanted to buy them all at once, and then not worry about that section for a while.

How did Laura solve this problem? By contacting publishers directly.

"This has been a gamechanger for my collection," says Laura. "Publishers can send you *every single book* in a series. They will also offer promotions and discounts and process the books for free."

Instead of buying a few books across a broad range of topics, Laura now focuses on just a few topics each year and buys everything she needs. "Each year, I choose new topics and a new publisher," she says.

Laura explains how this practice has helped her serve students better: "You know when a reader comes up to you with a book in their hand and they show you the back of the book with all the other books in the series and they point to one of them and ask, 'Do you have this one?' That used to stress me out because I typically didn't. Now I confidently say, 'Yes! I have that one!'

## Labeling Books with the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction

Many school librarians teach the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction classification system. When students have opportunities to sort books into these categories, they're better able to locate the formats and writing styles that can help them with particular tasks. They also learn to identify the kinds of nonfiction books they enjoy reading most.

Librarians like Wendy Garland and Laura Beals D'Elia have gone a step further by creating active nonfiction sections in their libraries, but K-5 librarian Tom Bober has taken the time to color code every single nonfiction book in his collection.



“Looking back, I’m glad that I took on the task,” says Tom. “It was necessary given our collection and how students and teachers were wanting to use it, and it benefited our nonfiction collection in several ways. Looking forward, I’m excited for the possibilities that this new organization will allow.”

Tom has also created series nonfiction section that pulls together titles that were previously spread out when organized by Dewey as well as a picture book nonfiction section to help students find titles that are engaging and

perfect for a parent to read aloud.

To learn more about Tom’s project and how it has affected students and teachers, see [this link](#).