

Readers' Advisory – How, as well as what, to recommend

"I am never going to recommend a book to somebody again!" This statement came from my husband last week after his latest experience with sharing a book that he enjoyed.

I can certainly understand his feelings. Recommending books is tricky business, and since he tends to like books that are a bit edgier and lean toward the controversial, it was easy to see how he could get in trouble.

Sometimes when people know you are an avid reader, they naturally look to you for recommendations. Now if this is the person that you've known since fifth grade, don't sweat it since you probably have a great idea of their likes, dislikes and a fairly good knowledge of what might offend them. You can then comfortably give them a list of great reads and gush to your hearts content about the latest offering from your favorite author.

If, on the other hand, this is the lady you met a couple of weeks ago at the gym, or the woman who works for you (ATTN: HUSBAND), then you have to be a bit careful. Books inspire strong feelings among those of us who enjoy reading as a hobby, and recommending something the other person turns out not to like can sometimes cause awkward situations or at worst offend someone.

The books we enjoy often reveal a lot about us. When we recommend a book, we are sometimes sharing things about ourselves such as our political affiliations, religious beliefs, and our hobbies and interests. You have to remember that not everyone is going to dig the same things you do.

In library speak, the fine art of book recommending is called Readers Advisory. I love that term! It makes us sound like we are the official advisory board of readers. Important stuff! Recommending books to kids and their parents is lots of fun, and tricky in different ways. You have to consider things like reading level, interests, and what mom and dad want the kids to be exposed to. Recommending Spider-man to a 9-year-old boy might seem like a no brainer, but not if mom says it's too violent.

I have a pretty good record at readers advisory, but I must admit that for every three books I put in kids hands that result in a "WOW that was the best book I ever read", I get one mom that tells me "that book was too scary, and now my daughter won't walk into a dark room by herself". Gulp! That was a tough day.

Readers Advisory is part of everyone's job here at the library. Let's face it, we're in the business of books and we like to talk about them! Sometimes we don't get it exactly right, but remember you guys are strangers and the more we get to know you, and you get to know us, the better we'll get at it. I'm going to take the plunge and recommend some new kid's books that I think are great, but just remember if you don't like them, come back and see me and we'll try again – this is tricky business!

Dogs by Emily Gravett – A great picture books for toddler and preschool dog lovers!

I Can Be Anything by Jerry Spinelli – A fun picture book that gives some hilarious answers to the age old question “What do you want to be when you grow up”.

Falling In by Frances O’Roark Dowell – A great fantasy tale about a girl who goes into a closet in the nurse’s office at school and pops up into a different world. Great for grades 3-6.

The Doom Machine by Mark Teague – A space romp that gives new meaning to the term action adventure! Great for grades 5-8

Come check these out at the library and let me know what you think! Don’t forget summer reading club is starting June 21. We’ll see you there!

Jodi Prather is a Library Assistant in Children’s Services at Bartholomew County Public Library