

Beloved books and different lenses

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Not everything ages well, even the things we loved at the time. Some of you may remember kitchen appliances in harvest gold and avocado green, and kitchen carpets that often went with the appliances.

Well, earlier this year, Dr. Seuss Enterprises made the decision to stop publishing six books. And I think Theodore Seuss Geisel would have been pleased.

You see, the six books, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (Dr. Seuss' first children's book published in 1937), *If I Ran the Zoo*, *McElligot's Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *Scrambled Eggs Super!*, and *The Cat's Quizzes*, aside from not selling as well as most other Dr. Seuss titles, contained images that didn't age well. According to Dr. Seuss Enterprises, "These books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong."

Publishers make these kinds of decisions all the time. They're businesses, after all.

In fact, shortly after the Dr. Seuss Enterprises announcement, Scholastic announced that they would halt distribution of *The Adventures of Ook and Gluk: Kung-Fu Cavemen from the Future* by Dav Pilkey. In a statement quoted in the *New York Times*, the publisher said, "Together, we recognize that this book perpetuates passive racism. We are deeply sorry for this serious mistake."

Yet, young readers may still enjoy the antics of Pilkey's Captain Underpants, Dog Man, and Dumb Bunnies.

Just as publishers re-evaluate their titles, so do libraries. A regular and essential component of library collection development is removing titles that are no longer appropriate. Some books are removed because of condition, their pages torn and stained, their bindings beyond repair. Others are removed because the information is no longer valid. Like it or not, the scientific community has determined that Pluto is no longer a planet. We've needed to refresh our astronomy collection. And no one wants ten-year-old financial or medical advice. Those books are pulled, too.

Those are the easy decisions. More difficult are those decisions based on content. We're not talking about point-of-view. After all, we have material from all points of view. Frankly, if there's not something on the shelf that makes you see red, I'm probably not doing my job correctly.

We're talking about content that promotes stereotypes or uses outdated language that is often deemed offensive. This is often gratuitous language or illustrations. We do, however, make the distinction between that and content that puts such ideas in historical context without promoting them. And that is why each work must be evaluated independently.

Your Frank L. Weyenberg Library is a dynamic institution, constantly evaluating, adding, and withdrawing material to satisfy your curiosity.

For more information, contact me at director@flwlib.org, visit our website at www.flwlib.org, or visit us in person. We're open in the summer Monday through Saturday.