



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Children’s series books have historically been frowned upon by educators and librarians alike. Due to this, thousands of the books have been disregarded as the equivalent of ‘trashy’ for children, and have thus been excluded from the classroom.”

-Jennifer Lyn Sczerbinski,
Honors Thesis April 2004,
*Mystery in the Old
Schoolhouse: Why
Children’s Series Have
Wrongly Been Excluded
from the Classroom*

Right around the time I was pregnant with my third child, my mother found seventeen Nancy Drew mysteries at a garage sale and bought them all. They were really intended for my other two daughters, but the combination of nausea and hormone adjustment had made it impossible for me to concentrate on any of my usual reading material, so I read all seventeen of them. I kept them in a tall stack by the side of the bed and as soon as I finished one, I’d pull out the next. Chain Nancy Drew reading, I guess you could call it – and it got me through some challenging times.

I mention these books because there is a longstanding controversy over children’s series books: Are they worth reading? Should children be guided toward other, more intellectual reading? There are dozens of series available to children now – should they be discouraged from reading them?

Well, to start with, I believe if a child is reading, then that child is developing a comfort with words, books, page-turning, anticipation and all the other wonderful parts of reading. A well-loved book leads a child to another book and another – and who knows where it will end up? My reading as a child included Super Man comics, *Anne of Green Gables*, fairy tales and just about anything else that came along. I saw reading as a vehicle for escape and entertainment, and as a way to find out more about how I felt in my own world.

Next, I can understand the desire to read a series of anything. It can be intimidating to walk into a library and try to find something you want to read. Librarians help with this by organizing the materials in some way – by genre, like mystery or science fiction; by subject, like history or cooking; by currency – all new books; or even by more practical or

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popular categories – like books about things with wheels or monsters. There are parenting collections, international language collections, reference books on quotations, atlases – even, at some libraries, staff favorites. All of these groupings are aimed toward making it easier for a library user to find a book that is of interest to him or her.

A series fills this same need in children and adults. Once you’ve read and enjoyed one of the books, you know you will probably like the other ones. One of my happiest moments is when I find a great new author and inside the front cover of the book is a long list of other titles by the same person. Of course, these aren’t necessarily a series – each may have completely different characters and stories – but it is the same principle.

And of course, adults read series all the time – look at

the Walter Moseley mysteries or the ones by Tony Hillerman. These are adult series, just as Herculeah Jones is a child’s mystery series.

I admit there can be a sameness in a series – or even in unrelated works by the same author. But this will eventually lead the reader to other books and other authors.

I believe there are no wrong books. I think books are like stepping-stones across a running creek: Our foot rests on each one – sometimes for a longer time, sometimes we barely make contact. But in the end, it is the crossing that matters.