

How to Do a

BOOKSHELF AUDIT

by Naomi Shulman

In my work life, I'm an officer of content and engagement at PJ Library and a member of the book selection committee — a job I love in part because it means I read a *lot* of children's books, which I really love. In my home life, I'm a mother of two daughters who grew up loving children's books too, especially Jewish children's books; they were PJ Library subscribers before I even began working here.

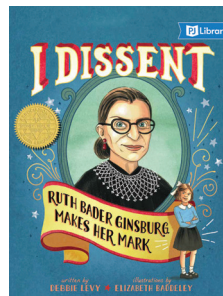
My kids are teenagers now. I give them books on their birthdays and at Hanukkah, but for the most part, their reading choices are entirely their own. When they were younger, however, I was their de facto librarian, and as such, I curated their book options, occasionally conducting what librarians refer to as a bookshelf audit.

Just as it sounds, a bookshelf audit is a review of the titles in your collection. A cursory audit would entail removing any books that no longer interest your kids. But when librarians use the term, they're talking about going a lot deeper than that.

Doing an audit helps you get a sense of which values and ideas are getting adequate representation in your collection. That means looking not only at the content of the books but also who is doing the writing and illustrating — in other words, whose perspectives are being offered. This entails asking many questions: Who is represented in the illustrations? Are all the children white, for example? When illustrations show nonwhite people, do they serve as accurate depictions, or do they shore up implicit biases? Do the characters in the books hew to sexist stereotypes, or do they offer up narratives to children that help them imagine broad futures for themselves, regardless of gender? Does each family look much the same — father, mother, sister, brother — or is there a sampling of the many ways that family constellations are formed?

The responses to these questions can lead to some pretty remarkable discoveries, and you may find out what your bookshelf might be missing and what additional titles (or at least the type of titles) you may need to fill in some gaps of representation. A successful bookshelf audit can point you in the right direction so that you can widen the scope of your collection.

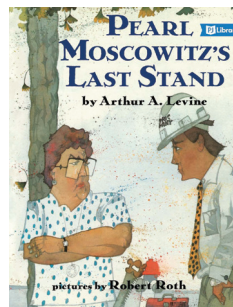
The PJ Library content team and book selection committee are always on the lookout for diverse content and representation when considering books to add to the PJ Library collection. Here are three books that PJ Library has added to the shelves of 8-year-old subscribers and some reasons why.



I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark

Written by Debbie Levy
Illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley

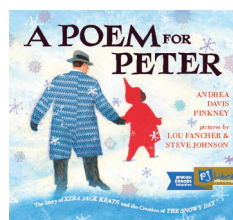
The late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was an inspiration during her long and illustrious career, especially to girls, but really to everyone who saw unfairness in the world and wanted to correct it. This beautifully illustrated graphic-novel-style picture book highlights the impact that antisemitism and sexism had on young Ruth, and how fighting it — dissenting — became her life's work.



Pearl Moscovitz's Last Stand

Written by Arthur A. Levine
Illustrated by Robert Roth

The title of this story is a little bit of a misnomer. Yes, the main character is Pearl Moscovitz, and, yes, she takes a stand — against the removal of a tree on her street — but it's really a community effort. The neighborhood, which comprises people of all ages and backgrounds, works together toward the common goal of saving the last ginkgo tree on their street. They work so well together not in spite of their diversity, but because of it.



A Poem for Peter

Written by Andrea Davis Pinkney
Illustrated by Lou Fancher and Steve Johnson

You're probably familiar with *The Snowy Day*, the children's classic published in 1962. What you may not know is that the author and illustrator, Ezra Jack Keats, was born Jacob Ezra Katz. The child of poor Jewish immigrants, Keats knew how it felt to be left out, so as an illustrator he wanted to depict kids who rarely saw themselves in children's books. Peter, the star of *The Snowy Day*, quickly became one of the most beloved characters in children's literature. Andrea Davis Pinkney's lyrically written account of Keats' life and work truly is a poem.