



# Weeding Your Classroom Library

**Keep your collection fresh, inviting, and navigable by removing unappealing, inaccurate, and unpopular books.**

## WHY

Tending your classroom library is like gardening. Pruning and weeding your collection is as essential to its vibrancy as is planting fresh new titles! While we understand the tendency to hoard books for the illusion of a robust collection, doing so actually makes it harder for readers to find appealing titles when they are lost in the weeds. Less is indeed more! Here are some benefits of weeding:

- **Saving space:** With physical space at a premium in classrooms, it is better to have fewer books displayed enticingly with their covers visible than more books crammed into bins and shelves.
- **Saving time:** Weeding prevents the selection fatigue that often afflicts striving readers by enabling them to shop for books efficiently in uncluttered bins and shelves. It also enables teachers to assemble preview stacks more quickly.
- **Making the collection more appealing:** Weeding boosts the library's "cred" among kids as a reliable source of reading material. According to the weeding authority, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), patrons often assume new books have been added to collections when all librarians have done is to weed thoroughly!

## WHEN

Like any maintenance project, it's best to make weeding an ongoing practice. The gold standard of weeding is the CREW method developed by TSLAC, which stands for **C**ontinuous **R**eview, **E**valuation, and **W**eeding. Getting in the habit of reviewing a couple of bins a week is a good way to maintain your collection over time. Involve kids by creating a bin for them to place books they think should be culled; follow up to find out why.

Alternatively, you could organize a major "weed-athon" for spring cleaning or before packing up your classroom for the summer. Involve colleagues to build camaraderie and share the most glaring examples with each other! (For inspiration, follow the "Awful Library Books" blog ([awfullibrarybooks.net](http://awfullibrarybooks.net)) by Michigan public librarians Mary Kelly and Holly Hibner. Under the motto "Hoarding is not collection development," this duo posts the most excruciating examples they find. (And they take submissions!)

 **HOW**

Aptly, TSLAC recommends weeding books that are **MUSTIE**:

- **M**isleading and/or factually inaccurate
- **U**gly and worn
- **S**uperseded by a new edition or better book on the subject
- **T**rivial or no longer of interest
- **I**rrelevant to the needs and interests of your students
- **E**lsewhere (e.g., available in the school library)

In our experience, the easiest to spot (or sniff out) are outdated books that meet several MUSTIE criteria. Physically, they are damaged, tattered, missing pages, yellowing, and, to quote the kids, “smelly!” The content of these oldies is often troubling as well. In nonfiction books, the information may be inaccurate or antiquated, and in fiction the characters and plots may be clichéd or, worse yet, stereotypical. Discard these books right away!

You are also likely to find high-quality books that have not been circulating. Consider the following:

- Are they worth promoting by displaying more prominently, book-talking, or offering in preview stacks and conferences? Perhaps they were simply buried and will move now that you’ve weeded.
- Are they mismatched to your students (most likely too challenging)? If so, donate them to colleagues on the appropriate grade levels or organize a school-wide book swap.
- As much as you love them, is it possible that they no longer appeal to kids? If so, put them in your own collection for sentimental reasons but remove them from valuable library real estate.

Finally, a caveat: Not only must we fight our hoarding tendencies; we must also curb the impulse to donate MUSTIE discards to families we think could use them. Instead, we must work to acquire and maintain the freshest collections we can and to ensure that striving readers, particularly those from low-income homes, have access to the juiciest and most compelling books from our classroom and school libraries. They deserve nothing less!

Here are weeding guidelines adapted from the CREW method, Texas State Library and Archives Commission: [tsl.texas.gov/sites/default/files/public/tslac/ld/pubs/crew/crewmethod08.pdf](https://tsl.texas.gov/sites/default/files/public/tslac/ld/pubs/crew/crewmethod08.pdf).