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# A Selection of Core Resources for Readers' Advisory Service

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What would happen if you asked a group of readers' advisory (RA) librarians—ranging from some of the top experts in the field to sharp readers who recently graduated from library school—to handpick a collection of professional tools, including books, articles, websites, blogs, and databases? You would get an eclectic collection of hard-working titles and sites that serve the daily needs of on-the-desk staff, foundational texts that set the standards of the service, and idiosyncratic picks that seem to always provide inspiration.

I found this out when I sent an e-mail to more than a dozen RA experts and asked them to work on this column. The only rules imposed to wrangle this process were that no one could pick their own work or work with which they are affiliated, and because of space limitations, once a title in a series was picked, that title would be the only book in the series included (but the selector could add a note to indicate the range of the entire series line). If I had endless space to devote to this topic, the column would consume the entire issue. RA librarians are a prolific and helpful lot and have produced a great deal of insightful writing. Library school professors teaching RA have written many seminal works we should all study. In short, there is far more excellent material available than can be covered in such limited space.

In an effort to pack in as much as possible, however, choices in each section were limited, as were annotations. While every book is annotated, only the top five picks for articles, blogs, and websites are annotated in favor of including more choices. Terry Jacobsen selected the articles, winnowing down a huge list to a hard-selected fifteen. Lisa Fraser did the same tough work in selecting the websites, as did Sarah Statz Cords with blogs. Neil Hollands and Jacqueline Sasaki also pitched in with the blogs, both selecting and annotating several of the key selections. Joyce Saricks wrestled with the RA databases, providing a neat overview of the five main products. The books were selected by John Charles, Mary K. Chelton, Gwen Glazer, Cindy Orr, Joyce Saricks, Kaite Mediatore Stover, Barry Trott, Kimberly Wells, and David Wright.—*Editor*

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## BOOKS

Baker, Sharon L. and Karen L. Wallace. *The Responsive Public Library: How to Develop and Market a Winning Collection*. 2nd ed. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2002 (ISBN: 978-0-313-00897-9).

One of the most useful works on the public library, this book is almost unknown to readers' advisors. It promotes the

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use of strategic planning techniques to anticipate demand and deliver client-centered service based on an accessible collection. The book is packed with practical information such as what elements affect user selections, research on arrangements of fiction collections, information on promotion and displays, and providing gracious RA service. It includes an impressive bibliography.

Hollands, Neil. *Read On . . . Fantasy Fiction: Reading Lists for Every Taste*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2007 (ISBN: 978-1-59158-330-1).

Hollands compiles and annotates more than eight hundred titles in this excellent resource for RA and collection development librarians and the readers they serve. Listed by major appeal, titles are grouped by story, character, mood, setting, and language into quirky sublists. "Armageddon Out of Here: Fantasy's Furious Final Battles" is one example of the many reading lists provided. Hollands not only leads readers to new books (or old forgotten favorites) but gives the stumped librarian a place to find everything from culturally diverse titles to action-packed stories that will appeal to gamers.

Series Note: Hollands's book is part of the Read On series, which collects hundreds of titles into fun reading lists arranged by five areas of appeal (story, character, setting, mood, and language). Each book focuses on a genre or reading interest—crime fiction, women's fiction, horror, memoir, etc.—and is designed to help readers find new favorites and RA librarians to get a sense of the scope of the genre.

Husband, Janet G. and Jonathan F. Husband. *Sequels: An Annotated Guide to Novels in Series*. 4th ed. Chicago: ALA, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0-8389-0967-6).

No one characterizes series as invitingly and precisely as the Husbands. Arranged by author, the entries describe each series in a few paragraphs and list titles in reading order, almost always with a brief plot summary. The entries speak to the appeal of each series and provide information perfect for sharing with readers. An online subscription version (<http://esequels.com>) keeps series information up-to-date. Series likely to be found in a medium-size library are included; coverage is limited to novels only, across genres.

Kannenberg, Gene. *500 Essential Graphic Novels: The Ultimate Guide*. New York: Collins Design, 2008 (ISBN: 978-0-06-147451-4).

There are very few comprehensive RA tools for the graphic novel format, but Kannenberg's colorful guide comes the closest. A short history of the American graphic novel opens this resource, divided into ten chapters ranging from "Adventure" to "Non-Fiction" to "War." Each entry comes with a color duplication of the cover, an informative and occasionally critical annotation, a short review, and a read-alike suggestion. An essential collection development tool for the library beginning to build this type of collection and a browsable resource for fans.

Leshner, Linda P. *The Best Novels of the Nineties: A Reader's Guide*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000 (ISBN: 978-0-7864-0742-2).

The subjective organization of this model readers' guide just feels right, with such sections as "More Than Meets The Eye" (literary titles with genre elements), "Literary Extensions" (inspired by literary precedents), "The Ties that Bind" (love, friendship, and family), "Unique Perspectives," "The Innovators" (further divided into "Pushing the Boundaries" and "One Step Further"), and the ever popular "Humor." Detailed summaries and critical excerpts are offered for more than one thousand titles, with indexes that include film adaptations and audiobook recordings. A heavy-duty resource for readers of all levels.

Pearl, Nancy. *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason*. Seattle, Wash.: Sasquatch, 2003 (ISBN: 978-1-57061-381-4).

No RA roundup could skip the foremost expert on matching patrons with books—and the only known librarian action figure. Nancy Pearl organizes hundreds of titles into quirky lists of fiction and nonfiction suggestions that tempt readers out of their comfort zones. Two sequels, *More Book Lust: 1,000 New Recommendations for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason* and *Book Lust to Go: Recommended Reading for Travelers, Vagabonds, and Dreamers*, continue the series, and 2007's *Book Crush* reaches out to young readers.

Perrin, Noel. *A Reader's Delight*. Hanover, Md.: Published for Dartmouth College by University Press of New England, 1988 (ISBN: 978-0-87451-432-2).

Perrin's charming personal essays on forty of his favorite titles is a prime example of those congenial readers' guides that are themselves a pleasure to read. Circulating copies of Perrin together with such guides as Pearl's *Book Lust* (see above) or multiauthor smorgasbords like Mark Strand's *Books: The Essential Insider's Guide*, and Ondaatje's *Lost Classics: Writers on Books Loved and Lost* are a vital source of literary browsing for both readers and their advisors.

Ramsdell, Kristin. *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1999 (ISBN: 978-1-56308-335-8).

If you can only afford one romance readers' advisory reference this is the book to buy (due out in 2011 in an updated edition). In addition to solid, practical advice on working with romance readers, the romance readers' advisory interview, and collection development tips, Ramsdell provides chapters on different romance subgenres (such as romantic suspense) with lists of key authors and titles. It is a witty and well-written guide to the most popular of all fiction genres.

Series Note: Ramsdell's book is part of Libraries Unlimited's extremely useful Readers Advisory series, which began with the classic *Genrelecting: A Guide to Popular Reading Interests*. The series now has more than a dozen titles, each of which offer an overview of the genre and its subgenres, key

authors and titles, and advice on working with readers in that genre. The series has also branched out to cover nonfiction and thus far includes three titles on such topics as women's nonfiction, biography, and investigative writing.

Ross, Catherine Sheldrick, Lynne McKechnie, and Paulette M. Rothbauer. *Reading Matters: What the Research Reveals about Reading, Libraries, and Community*. Westport Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006 (ISBN: 978-1-59158-066-9).

Readers' advisors like books that offer practical advice on providing service to readers. While these books are important to building skills, it is also essential to understand reading theory and how it relates to the practice of readers' advisory. Ross et al. have written an authoritative and useful book for exploring how and why readers of all ages respond to books. Their research offers advisors a firm foundation from which to examine the reading experience.

Saricks, Joyce. *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library*. 3rd ed. Chicago: ALA, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-8389-0897-6).

Offering tried techniques and best practices for a range of readers' services including the RA interview, professional development, the creation and use of resources and tools, indirect advisory, and reader-oriented programming, this seminal work is the Strunk and White of our field, ignored by would-be advisors at their peril. Packed into its two hundred pages are a trove of thoughtful exegeses and detailed advice, presented from the practitioner's standpoint and instructive for novice and expert alike.

———. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. 2nd ed. Chicago: ALA, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0-8389-0989-8).

The definitive guide for readers' advisors in genre fiction, Saricks's second edition is packed with new titles, concepts, and practical suggestions while still covering the basics of genre appeal, benchmark, and "sure bet" authors. Saricks's grouping of the genres into Adrenaline, Emotions, Intellect and Landscape is especially helpful, as is her signature Five Book Challenge for self-study and staff training. This essential reference helps define genres, trends, and genre overlap—both in fiction and narrative nonfiction.

Series Note: ALA publishes a range of RA guides to genres, focusing on helping librarians get up to speed in a genre, identifying the key writers and works in each genre, and understanding the appeal of the genre to readers. Newer works in the series also include a whole collection element, holistically connecting the print collection to the rest of the library's holdings.

Van Riel, Rachel. *Opening the Book: Finding a Good Read*. Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK: Bradford Libraries in association with Morley Books, 1996 (ISBN: 978-0-907734-47-5).

Opening the Book ([www.openingthebook.com](http://www.openingthebook.com)) is a library consulting service in England started by Rachel Van Riel in 1991 that works with libraries creating reader-friendly service by changing the look and feel of library spaces, management and presentation of collections, skills and confidence

of staff, and the library's presence on the Web. Her book of the same name urges readers to find their reading personalities, embrace their role as readers, and discover books they will love.

Wyatt, Neal. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Nonfiction*. Chicago: ALA, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-8389-0936-2).

Although RA initially focused on fiction readers, there has been a burgeoning interest in the field in working with nonfiction readers. Wyatt's guide is an essential tool for librarians interested in suggesting titles to nonfiction readers. Wyatt covers the major areas of narrative nonfiction writing, discussing reader interests and listing key authors and benchmark titles. She concludes with sections on learning and marketing the nonfiction collection, building subject guides, and practicing whole collection advisory.

## KEY ARTICLES

Chelton, Mary K. "Readers' Advisory 101." *Library Journal* 128, no. 18 (Nov. 1, 2003): 38–39.

This is a noteworthy article describing the worst possible examples of RA service. Using a secret shopper method, library school students sought assistance at their local public libraries and reported receiving widely varying levels of service. Citing the importance of approachability and follow through, Chelton firmly emphasizes the importance of the interpersonal touch. The article includes examples of bad read-alikes.

Hollands, Neil. "Improving the Model for Interactive Readers' Advisory Service." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 205–12.

The personal encounter with the reader has been a mainstay of RA work since its inception. Hollands examines this tradition, and presents a practical alternative for engaging library customers through the use of an online reading preference form. Challenging six traditional assumptions about the best way to offer readers' advisory assistance, he lays out the reasoning behind trying an online method for tracking readers' requests. Details about setting up a form-based service are provided.

Saricks, Joyce. "Training 101—First You Read." *Booklist* 106, no. 11 (Feb. 1, 2010): 27.

Saricks's "At Leisure" column is a regular feature in *Booklist*, and her pieces provide quick microtraining on readers' advisory topics. This is one example.

Smith, Duncan. "Your Brain on Fiction." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 38–42.

Long a student of adult reading patterns, Smith shares the story of one of his research subjects. This philosophical piece is based on his own extensive research with readers. The article stretches one's approach to RA work, deepens the understanding we have of our readers, and encourages us to

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reflect upon the reading experience.

Trott, Barry. "Building on a Firm Foundation: Readers' Advisory over the Next Twenty-Five Years." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 132–35.

Trott muses on what's ahead in this realm, asking what the challenges might be in the digital age. He notes the burgeoning interest in nonfiction RA work, and also audio advisory. He also covers issues RA librarians are tackling now: the continued blurring between genre lines, non-English speaking readers needing assistance, leisure reading by college students (extra-curricular reading), social media participation, folksonomy, outcomes measures, and marketing.

Wyatt, Neal. "An RA Big Think." *Library Journal* 132, no. 12 (July 1, 2007): 40–43.

Appeal's pervasive hold on the RA librarian's work is under review here as a brainstorming session tries to better understand readers' preferences and ways of looking for a good book. Moving past the four traditional pillars of appeal—pacing, character, story line, and frame—the librarians consulted explore more nuanced components such as formats, tone, genre shifting, and doorways. Wyatt writes for *Library Journal* on a regular basis as part of her Redefining RA series.

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## TEN ADDITIONAL ARTICLES OF NOTE

Ahlvers, Alicia. "Older Adults and Readers' Advisory." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 305–12.

Alpert, Abby. "Incorporating Nonfiction into Readers' Advisory Services." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 25–32.

Booth, Heather. "RA for YA: Tailoring the Readers' Advisory Interview to the Needs of Young Adult Patrons." *Public Libraries* 44, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2005): 33–36.

Charles, John, and Cathie Linz. "Romancing Your Readers: How Public Libraries Can Become More Romance-Reader Friendly." *Public Libraries* 44, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2005): 43–48.

Crowley, Bill. "Rediscovering the History of Readers Advisory Service." *Public Libraries* 44, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2005): 37–41.

Hooper, Brad. "Selling the Classics." *Public Libraries* 49, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2010): 26–33.

Ross, Catherine Sheldrick, and Mary K. Chelton. "Reader's Advisory: Matching Mood and Material." *Library Journal* 126, no. 2 (Feb. 1, 2001): 52–55.

Stover, Kaite Mediatore. "Stalking the Wild Appeal Factor: Readers' Advisory and Social Networking Sites." *Reference &*

*User Services Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 243–46, 269.

Vnuk, Rebecca. "Jack of All Trades Readers' Advisory; How to Learn a Little About a Lot." *Public Libraries* 49, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2010): 34–37.

Wyatt, Neal. "Reading Maps Remake RA." *Library Journal* 131, no. 18 (Nov. 1, 2006): 38–42.

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## BLOGS

*Booklist* Online Blog, [www.booklistonline.com/default.aspx?page=general\\_info&rid=55](http://www.booklistonline.com/default.aspx?page=general_info&rid=55).

*Booklist* offers five blogs that add up to a full package of information about RA topics. Written by librarians and *Booklist* staff, the blogs include Book Group Buzz, with tips, advice, and book news for book groups; Likely Stories, with posts on books, reviewing, and the publishing industry; Audiobooker, in which Mary Burkey takes on all topics audio; Bookends, about young adult and children's books; and Points of Reference, which addresses reference books and service.

Bookslut Blog, [www.bookslut.com/blog](http://www.bookslut.com/blog).

Editor Jessa Crispin offers both a website (which provides monthly reviews of fiction and nonfiction titles, and articles and interviews) and a frequently updated blog, which provides valuable information primarily on literary fiction and nonfiction, poetry, and reading awards and news. Irreverent, funny, and frighteningly knowledgeable, this site is often recognized as one of the first and most respected lit blogs.

EarlyWord, [www.earlyword.com](http://www.earlyword.com).

Nora Rawlinson's robust blog and website has quickly become a site worth daily monitoring. Rawlinson, a past editor of both *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*, aims to provide librarians with the information they need to keep ahead of demand. With the site being updated continuously, collection development librarians will find most useful the buzz of forthcoming titles in all formats and genres and the online publishers' catalogs and contacts. The requisite booklists and awards, archived Reading Trends and Readers Advisory articles, as well as the Ideas to Steal will make devotees out of readers' advisors.

Reader's Advisor Online Blog, [www.readersadvisoronline.com/blog](http://www.readersadvisoronline.com/blog).

A free blog associated with Libraries Unlimited's subscription database, the Reader's Advisor Online Blog is a great way to keep up with book news with a single browsing stop each week. Written mainly by RA veterans Cindy Orr and Sarah Statz Cords, this blog includes a weekly rundown of major new releases, carefully collected links to all things bookish, award announcements, author news, and book lists. Feature articles address reading trends, techniques for practice, display ideas, and more.

ShelfRenewal, [www.libraryjournal.com/blog/1760000776.html](http://www.libraryjournal.com/blog/1760000776.html).

Karen Kleckner, head of Reader Services at Deerfield (Ill.) Public Library, and Rebecca Vnuk, past chair of the RUSA CODES RA committee, help readers' advisors promote library collections and the backlist by linking them to new bestsellers and reading trends. They also dish on their weekly "web crush of the week." This blog is one of many worthy blogs in the *Library Journal* suite ([www.libraryjournal.com](http://www.libraryjournal.com)).

## Ten Additional Blogs of Note

Bookninja, [www.bookninja.com](http://www.bookninja.com).

Bookshelves of Doom, <http://bookshelvesofdoom.blogspot.com>.

Comics Worth Reading, <http://comicsworthreading.com>.

Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind, [www.sarahweinman.com](http://www.sarahweinman.com).

GalleyCat, [www.mediabistro.com/galleycat](http://www.mediabistro.com/galleycat).

RA For All, <http://raforall.blogspot.com>.

Reading the Past, <http://readingthepast.blogspot.com>.

RickLibrarian, <http://ricklibrarian.blogspot.com>.

Shelf Life, <http://shelf-life.ew.com>.

Smart Bitches, Trashy Books, [www.smartbitchestrashybooks.com](http://www.smartbitchestrashybooks.com).

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## WEBSITES

All Readers, [www.allreaders.com](http://www.allreaders.com).

A detailed plot search is the key feature of All Readers. By selecting attributes of plot, character, setting, and style from the extensive search form, readers can generate a list of books that have been described as having those attributes. Searches are customized for science fiction, mystery, literature, romance, biography, and history genres. Basic author and title searches and one-click plot searches are also available. Plot summaries are submitted by readers.

Fiction DB, [www.fictiondb.com](http://www.fictiondb.com).

A one-stop source, Fiction DB has most of the information readers might want about fiction books and authors. Series lists—publisher, author, and multiple author—are a valuable feature. Author pages include a complete bibliography, pseudonyms, series lists, and awards and reviews from major sources (by title). Book pages add a plot summary, genre and time period information, and recommendations and tag

cloud data from LibraryThing. Access to award and review information requires creation of a free account.

Fiction-L Booklists, [www.webrary.org/rs/flbklistmenu.html](http://www.webrary.org/rs/flbklistmenu.html).

Booklists that have been compiled as a result of queries on Fiction-L, the Morton Grove Public Library's mailing list for RA issues, are archived on this site. Lists are arranged alphabetically in the categories of genre, setting, subject, author, audience, "best of" lists, and miscellaneous. The specific focus of each list offsets the lack of a search function; this site is most helpful for those with time to peruse the content.

Gnooks, [www.gnooks.com](http://www.gnooks.com).

For a quick author suggestion, Gnooks is fun and easy to use. This self-adapting system generates ideas in two ways. Enter three favorite authors to receive a single author name based on the combination; more suggestions are available depending on whether you indicate that you like, don't like, or don't know that author. Alternatively, enter one author to receive a literature map showing writers of similar works. The site also includes a discussion board.

Overbooked: A Resource for Readers, [www.overbooked.org](http://www.overbooked.org).

Overbooked clearly reflects the hand of an experienced book selector in its thoughtfully compiled lists that include topics such as adult fiction for teens and readable nonfiction. Sections of note include starred lists, gathering in one place the starred reviews of four major review sources. Book entries include annotations, review information, and, in some cases, internal links to other lists and external links to additional information.

## Ten Additional Websites of Note

All About Romance, [www.likesbooks.com](http://www.likesbooks.com).

Downers Grove Public Library Good Reads (Fiction and Non-fiction), [www.downersgrovelibrary.org](http://www.downersgrovelibrary.org).

The Internet Speculative Fiction Database, [www.isfdb.org](http://www.isfdb.org).

IRead Wiki, the Iowa Librarians' Readers' Advisory wiki, [iread.pbworks.com](http://iread.pbworks.com).

Kent District Library: What's Next Books in Series Database, <http://ww2.kdl.org/libcat/whatsnextnew.asp>.

The Lair, [www.noflyingnotights.com/lair](http://www.noflyingnotights.com/lair).

Readalike.org (The SLIS Reading Group), [www.readalike.org](http://www.readalike.org).

Readers Advisory Link Farm, [www.jackflannel.org/ra.html](http://www.jackflannel.org/ra.html).

Stop, You're Killing Me! [www.stopyourekillme.com](http://www.stopyourekillme.com).

Whichbook.net, [www.whichbook.net](http://www.whichbook.net).

### DATABASES

There are five RA subscription databases available for purchase by libraries. The compilers of this guide are collectively associated with almost all of them and as such decided not to include any in their personal selections, as doing so would violate the first rule governing the creation of this guide. Instead, a listing of key features is provided to help RA librarians decide which databases might be worth exploring through hands-on demonstration.

Each of these five subscription databases allows for standard searching by author, title, keyword or subject, and ISBN. Read-alike and similar authors are searchable or provided in each. All provide lists of award winners. Title records provide bibliographic data and cover images in addition to a plot summary. Ease of searching and the extent of additional material vary among these resources.

Booklist Online (ALA), [www.booklistonline.com](http://www.booklistonline.com).

While searching articles and reviews on the home page is free, more extensive searches require a subscription. Coverage includes all reviews and feature material from *Booklist* magazine back to 1992, including fiction, nonfiction, media, and reference resources for children, teens, and adults. *Book Links* material for teachers, school media librarians, and children's librarians is also searchable. Blogs devoted to books and publishing, audio books, reference reviews and publishing, book discussions, and YA and children's books (see above) are available at no charge.

Books and Authors (Gale Cengage Learning), <http://booksandauthors.wiseto.com/bna>.

Drawing from related products (*Contemporary Authors* and *What Do I Read Next?*), this database offers extensive biographical information on authors as well as information on genres and trends. Coverage includes fiction and nonfiction for children, teens, and adults. Published lists and librarian-created booklists are also available. Subscribers can create personal reading databases and add comments. Some searches can be completed without charge.

EBSCO's NoveList Plus, [www.ebscohost.com/novelist](http://www.ebscohost.com/novelist).

Offering more than 200,000 fiction and nonfiction titles for children, young adults, and adults, NoveList Plus also provides a wealth of training materials ranging from how to use the product to materials that assist staff in providing readers' advisory to all ages. In addition to standard information on books, NoveList is adding appeal terms to title records and creating appeal-based author descriptions and read-alike suggestions. Hundreds of booklists, book discussion guides, and booktalks are also available.

Fiction Connection (Bowker), [www.fictionconnection.com](http://www.fictionconnection.com); Nonfiction Connection (Bowker), [www.nonfictionconnection.com](http://www.nonfictionconnection.com).

Fiction Connection is provided free to subscribers of Bowker's Books In Print; Nonfiction Connection is available at an additional fee. Coverage includes adult, young adult, and juvenile titles from 1997 to the present, and each entry provides multiple reviews and subject/genre tags. Search by specific author, title, or ISBN, or choose options listed by topic, genre, setting, character, location, or timeframe. Typical search results yield long lists of title suggestions. The Bowker Reads blog offers reviews by staff.

Reader's Advisor Online (Libraries Unlimited), [www.readersadvisoronline.com](http://www.readersadvisoronline.com).

Titles in the Genreflecting series covering fiction and nonfiction provide basic data for this tool, which focuses on adult and teen titles. Browsing under Related Themes leads one to subject bibliographies. Appeal terms are included as searchable tags for many fiction and nonfiction titles. One may also search supplementary material in selected readers' advisory titles published by Libraries Unlimited. Includes series in order, and author read-alikes. The Reader's Advisor Online blog, which compiles hot titles and publishing news, can be accessed without subscription.

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