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## Using TeachingBooks with an Academic Library's Children's & YA Collections: A Perfect Pairing for Promotion and Instruction

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**Using TeachingBooks with an Academic Library's Children's & YA Collections:  
A Perfect Pairing for Promotion and Instruction**

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**Abstract**

Beginning in the Fall of 2021, librarians at the University of Montevallo initiated a collaborative project compiling lists to feature books from their two children's and YA collections. This paper introduces the how and why of using *TeachingBooks* to create these lists. It also describes the collaborative experiences that the use of *TeachingBooks* enabled. Further, it shares practical examples and experiences that can be of benefit to other academic libraries interested in increasing access to their children's collections via promotional and instructional activities. Finally, an appendix is included with links to the programs, lists, and course guides mentioned in the article.

*Keywords:* TeachingBooks, book lists, children’s collections, academic library, collaboration, instruction, promotion

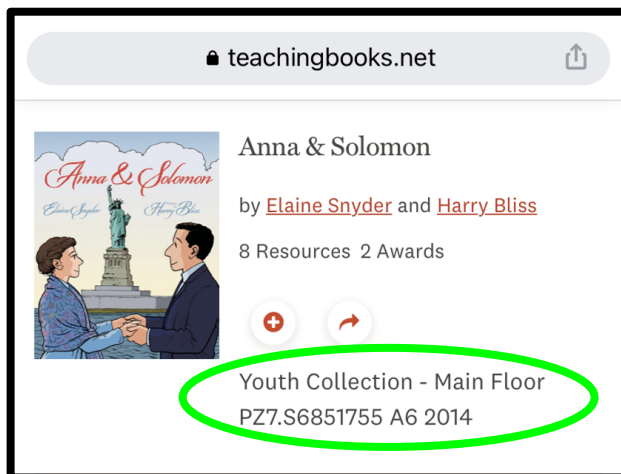
## **Introduction**

The University of Montevallo has two collections of Children’s and Young Adult books. The research collection, known as the *Pat Scales Special Collection*, contains over 3,000 volumes of children’s and young adult literature. It was founded in 2016 through the donations of Pat Scales, a retired school librarian and UM alumna with expertise in children’s and young adult literature as well as intellectual freedom. The collection includes books with some type of special status such as “signed, first edition Newbery and Caldecott Award books, interactive (pop-up) books, children’s books of historical significance, intellectual freedom papers, correspondence, and marginalia” (Carmichael Library, 2022). In addition, the *Youth Collection* consists of over 10,000 circulating volumes and includes a variety of picture books, fiction, nonfiction, and reference materials. It is maintained through library purchases as well as donations from Pat Scales.

This project began when the university archivist reached out to his librarian colleagues to explore the possibilities for creating interactive book lists as a means to promote the usage of both the *Pat Scales* and *Youth Collections*. He noted that ideally the lists would link back to the library record or include call number information, feature book cover images, and be dynamic. The systems and digital services librarian discovered that *The Alabama Virtual Library* had recently added *TeachingBooks* to their offerings. The program allows users to create custom lists that can be shared, without requiring a log-in by the viewers of the lists. Moreover, the lists it produces are both appealing and interactive. The images of the books are displayed in a

responsive format that adjusts to the user's screen size, and the lists allow for interaction. After clicking on the title, the user is taken to a page of related resources including summary information, lesson plans, video/audio resources, and award details. Furthermore, the lists can be filtered by grade level, genre, cultural experience, awards, and other criteria, increasing their usability. This is an important feature, as Wegmann et al. (2021) reported, the ability to filter a children's collection, particularly by grade level and cultural experience, is valued by college students (p. 206). Finally, the lists allow for text annotation at the title level, which was used to include the call number (see Figure 1). The ability to add notes to the lists was a deciding factor for our selection of this tool because it allows the user to skip the step of searching for location information in our discovery system.

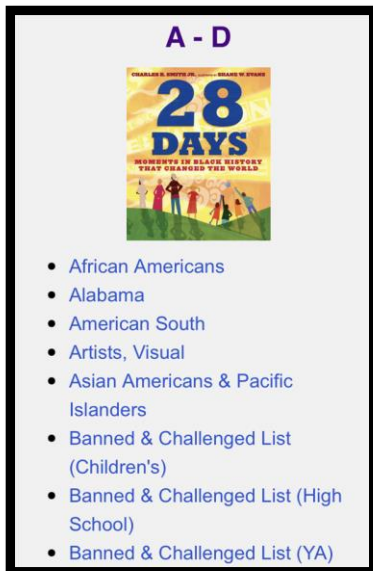
**Figure 1**



*A book with the call number annotation circled from a TeachingBooks custom list*

The lists were added to the *Pat Scales Special Collections* page of the *Anna Milner Archives and Special Collections* site. This page was redesigned using the tabbed box feature in *LibGuides*, our library website software, to accommodate background information about Pat Scales, the collection, and the book lists. To make the lists user-friendly and responsive, guide-level code was inserted using the custom CSS and JavaScript feature in *LibGuides*. This custom code enabled the building of lists that could be arranged alphabetically in three cards, or columns, which automatically resize based on the screen size on which they are viewed (see Figure 2). This responsiveness was an essential design feature, supporting students' use of their phones to access the lists while browsing our childrens' collections. Moreover, the content box containing the lists was sharable, allowing for them to be embedded in course guides and other pages on our website. For example, our *Library Collections* page contains links to the lists and multiple course guides include embedded access to them.

**Figure 2**



*A phone screenshot of a responsive TeachingBooks list located on the Pat Scales Special Collections page*

Finally, it is important to note that in this project, technology served as a tool, but it was not the focus. Instead, an emphasis was placed on collaborations and relationships that supported the project. As Corral and Jolly (2019) noted in their review of innovative projects in academic libraries,

the majority of the innovations were technology-related in that they used a digital platform, emphasized digital tools or capabilities, or were dependent to some extent on digital resources (notably the OER projects), but categorizing them as technological or technology-driven innovation fails to acknowledge their important social dimensions. (p. 123)

Similarly, *TeachingBooks* was used as a tool that enabled the collaboration needed to reach our promotional and instructional aims. It enabled us to build partnerships among librarians from different specialties (systems, instruction, and archives) and with teaching faculty.

### **Promotion**

As Hirsch (2008) notes, with promotion in mind, accessibility, via the catalog and library website, is critical (p. 14). Using *TeachingBooks* allowed us to make our collections more accessible. The program was used to create themed lists showcasing our children's and YA titles that can be shared on multiple platforms and for various purposes. The ability to have these pre-made hyperlinked lists enabled us to quickly feature our *Youth Collection* materials on monthly displays, research guides, social media posts, and the library homepage.

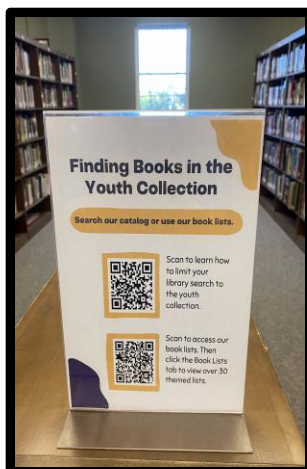
As noted earlier, the *Pat Scales Special Collections* page of the *Archives* website was updated with a full display of these lists. Also, links to the lists were added to social media posts.

For example, a link to the Hispanic American book list was added to our Hispanic American Heritage social media posts. Moreover, these lists were shared on interactive physical and online displays. Specifically, a QR code for the list related to Hispanic Heritage was added to our physical display and the full list was embedded in our virtual display.

Using displays to highlight themes or specific books that make the collection unique is a recommended strategy for promoting the children's collection of an academic library (Hirsch, 2008, p. 14). This project enabled us to spotlight *The Pat Scales Collection's* unique focus on intellectual freedom, as many of the collection's books have been subject to bans or challenges. To highlight this focus, three banned books lists (children's, high school, and YA) were created, and a *Banned Books Week* display was designed that included QR codes and links to access these lists.

Moreover, interactive signage was placed in the *Youth Collection* to promote using the lists as a tool to find books. Signs were placed throughout the collection that included two QR codes: one to view a brief video demonstrating how to limit searches to the *Youth and Pat Scales Collections* and one for access to the themed book lists (see Figure 3). Finally, in our newsletter, the book lists were featured and *TeachingBooks* and *Alabama Virtual Library* were promoted.

**Figure 3**



*QR code signage for finding books through discovery search and the book lists*

## Instruction

Opportunities to move beyond promotion to instruction were actively explored. The systems librarian teamed with the instruction librarian to identify courses in which the book lists could be incorporated into instructional sessions. The first course targeted for outreach was *Introduction to Children's Literature*. Historically, students in this course have visited the library for instruction on using the *Youth* and *Pat Scales Collections* and finding articles in support of a banned or challenged books assignment. We approached the professor about the potential for introducing *TeachingBooks* for the dual purpose of (a) demonstrating how to use our lists as a way to find books and related resources from our children's and YA collections and (b) introducing *TeachingBooks* as an instructional and informational tool that will be available to them for future coursework and employment in schools. Fortunately, the professor was receptive to integrating the tool in an upcoming instructional session. She shared her syllabi and assignment instructions to help us plan and design for instruction.

We redesigned the course guide and instruction so that it would include the *TeachingBooks* lists. Specifically, the instructional session was redesigned to support two assignments that would benefit from the list usage. In the first assignment, students were required to research a banned or challenged book. Based on our previous experiences with the course and the findings of other librarians, we knew that the students needed discovery and search instruction (Loftis and Knight, 2013, p. 40). Therefore, the students were shown how to use our banned and challenged book lists to find a book to check-out from our *Youth Collection* or to read in our *Pat Scales Collection*. Search strategies for finding children's books using our discovery system were also demonstrated. In the second assignment, students were asked to create a presentation about three picture books related to a certain theme. Prior to the session,



librarians had created over 30 thematic lists covering a variety of historical, cultural, and popular topics. These lists were shared with the students as a convenient way to find picture books, and accompanying resources, related to their topics.

Students completed a *Library Instruction Survey*, one which is routinely used for instructional improvement, providing valuable feedback about the session. When the students were asked to list what they found most helpful in the session, their responses included the broad themes of being able to find books in support of their assignments and to use the book lists along with the other resources featured in the course guide. Moreover, all indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that the session was focused on information that was useful to the class and was valuable to them.

Later, we provided a general instructional session for an educational foundations course. The professor requested a session on finding multicultural children's books in our collections. The students were introduced to searching for the books using our discovery system and via our *TeachingBooks* lists. Again, the *TeachingBooks* database was presented as a way to both use and create book lists and to find lesson plans and other related resources. Specifically, we reviewed our lists, many of which were related to different cultures. Methods for refining our thematic lists through the use of the cultural experience filter built into *TeachingBooks* were highlighted. Students in this class were excited about what *TeachingBooks* had to offer. In particular, many indicated that the lesson plans related to the books were valuable resources for current courses and in their future employment as an educator.

Both instructional sessions were supported with research guides that included links to the book lists, a video for searching for books using our discovery system, and a series of brief *TeachingBooks* tutorials. As both classes only visited the library once for in-person instruction,

the guides were designed to be accessible resources that could be used at the time of need. In both cases, the professors shared links to the guides in their Canvas courses. Additionally, the librarians showed students how to find the guides on our library website. The usage statistics indicate that students returned to the guide throughout the semester for point-of-need access. In the children's literature course, with an enrollment of 50 students, the guide was accessed 293 times. Further, in the educational foundations course, with an enrollment of 30 students, the guide was accessed 146 times.

### **Lessons Learned**

Based on our use of *TeachingBooks* in this project, a few important "lessons learned" were identified that could be of benefit to interested libraries.

- Create an educator account using your university email address. Searching and using *TeachingBooks* does not require an account, but creating lists does.
- If working in teams, create an educator account using your library's email account (ex. library@youruniversity.edu). This will enable multiple library team members to maintain the lists.
- Manually add books to a list that are not included in the *TeachingBooks* database. While most books are included, you can easily add books you can't find in a search by following the simple manual add process.
- Register your institution with *TeachingBooks* to gain administrative access to content and features such as usage statistics.
- Keep list limits in mind. When we began this project, annotated custom lists were limited to 250 titles. However, they are now capped at 200.

## Evolution of Project & Future Plans

From our experiences with using the lists as a promotional and instructional tool, future plans have been developed to enhance or modify our efforts. In both courses, time constraints were encountered when trying to incorporate the lists in one session. However, the professors found the inclusion of the lists to be beneficial for their students and mentioned that they would like to provide more time for future sessions. In fact, one professor decided to incorporate *TeachingBooks* instruction into an additional session. In this case, two sessions were offered, each delivered before the two main assignments. This was designed to keep the information fresh in the students' minds and to provide more time for the students to work with the lists and the *TeachingBooks* database in class. The other professor added a session for an additional course. Later, when the children's literature course moved to an asynchronous online format, our instructional approach was adjusted by embedding a series of short videos in the course guide to allow for just-in-time instructional access.

Currently, more lists are being created and existing ones are being maintained. There are now over 50 lists covering a variety of topics, authors, and awards. Once the collection of lists grows to a certain level, there may be a need to design a new landing page to improve discoverability and usability. Finally, new opportunities to promote the lists and our children's collections continue to be explored. For instance, the systems and instruction librarians recently presented a poster about our *TeachingBooks* experiences at a research and teaching symposium held on campus, in hopes of forming new faculty partnerships. Overall, due to the positive reception of the book lists by faculty and students, the library plans to continue to increase and refine our *TeachingBooks* use in promotional and instructional projects.

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## Appendix

### Websites and Guides

#### I. TeachingBooks

Website

<https://teachingbooks.net>

What is an Educator or Professional Login? (FAQ)

<https://www.teachingbooks.net/support.cgi?cmd=faqs&id=36>

#### II. Carmichael Library, University of Montevallo

Pat Scales Special Collections

Anna Crawford Milner Archives and Special Collections

<https://libguides.montevallo.edu/archives/patscalespecialcoll>

Pat Scales, Intellectual Freedom, and Our Children's Collections

Banned Books Week Virtual Display

<https://libguides.montevallo.edu/bannedbooksweek>

Children's & YA Collection

Hispanic American Heritage Month Virtual Display

<https://libguides.montevallo.edu/hispanicamericanheritage/youth>

Children's Books at UM

ENG 310: Literature for Children

<https://libguides.montevallo.edu/eng310>

Children's & YA Books

EDF 375: School & Society

<https://libguides.montevallo.edu/EDF375/ChildrensYABooks>