

# A LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED: DEVELOPING AN ADULT COLLECTION

## FRESHMAN SEMINAR

By: Ellen Cole

**Description:** What should be included in a Judaica library collection serving adult readers? How do I decide what to buy and where to buy it? How do I find resources for identifying and evaluating new material? Where do I purchase new items? How can AJL resources help me build and develop a current, relevant, and balanced collection? These questions and others that perplex the inexperienced librarian will be addressed in this Freshman Seminar session on Collection Development.

**Ellen Cole**, Library Educator at Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, is a well known reviewer of Jewish books for children and adults, immediate past president of AJLSC, co-editor of the AJL Newsletter's Children's Section, and a past chairperson of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee. At the 2004 AJL Convention she taught a CEU course on Colonial American Jewry. She is also a recipient of AJLSC's Dorothy Schroeder Award

### Housekeeping Declaration Before I Start:

You do not need to write down any reference but this:

[www.ajlsc.org](http://www.ajlsc.org)

In Lieu of Handouts: I have posted my book and web suggestions, noted in my talk today, on my chapter's website on the

**Resources** page

In addition: If you go to the **Proceedings** of the 37<sup>th</sup> AJL Convention in 2002  
And look for Merrily **Hart**'s presentation on Adult Collections  
You will find valuable sources: both print and electronic  
I here publicly praise Merrily for her fine work and for her kindness in allowing me to use her lists and share it with you.

### Start my talk with a personal thought:

AS a play on the old adage: know your adult readers, your institutional frame  
and above all, Thyself!

Cuz:

Getting books for adults ON THE SHELF

Depends a lot on how you want to get them OFF THE SHELF

In my institution I need to cajole adults to read

### Who are these Adults in the Library?

The staff and the clergy if their personal libraries have a hole and they need it now

The parents of students – my largest amount

Some browse, most find the library nicer than the garage before carpool

Next are Havarah or Temple Education Class members

Then those who are at Temple for a meeting who are killing time browsing

And lastly and I mean lastly, those who come for a book to read

Cuz they like it or

They read your review in the bulletin  
(I review an adult book in almost every issue)

I find you can

Attract attention and suggest ideas with **displays** as well as programs and book clubs

React to current events and news, new movies or theater

Display is simple: a computer generated sign and then the volumes you grab

YOU Need the books on the shelf to do this

Sign can be a staple like Books Around Town or Books in the News

Or the Newspaper Clipping from the morning paper

Sometimes have lead time as Skirball's Einstein Exhibit

or advance ads on a new book by a popular author

or your Temple program schedule like Mitzvah Day, Holidays

Or *Reform Judaism's* latest Significant Book

Often no warning as death, ex authors Bellow or Gur or scientist Salk

or Noble or Pulitzer or National Jewish Book Award Winner

Rush in and set up a **display** as take coat off to be au courant

Use **back titles**: If a new hot book comes out by an author, ask if read **earlier work**?

Need the books on the shelf to do this

And always the old stand-by:

**Don't have** what you want, but I have **something similar** you may like

Need the books on the shelf to do this

## BOOKS ON THE SHELF

**Think Pick, Pluck, Plunk:**

What to pick? Where to pluck it? How many to plunk down on the shelf?

How do you know what to pick?

Thinks categories, subjects, authors, individual works

Consider the needs and wants of your particular institution, your patrons

Consider the shadow of your colleagues and their opinions shouted in reviews

From where to pluck your books:

Advice of colleagues and experience with vendors

How many to pick to plunk on the shelf?

Budget and Donation constraints

Amount of Traffic

I read that more books were published in 2004 than ever before

HOWEVER 40 million less sold: less and less reading of books

## WHAT TO PICK

I am in a Reform Synagogue Library

I only have Judaica  
I balance my time between Adults and Children  
I do **print materials** only since the principal made herself keeper of the Videos  
My print is mainly books since my **budget limits periodicals** to my personal subs:  
    Pakn Tregor – one of the finest literary journals out there –  
    From National Yiddish Book Center : 100 Greatest Works of Modern J Lit -  
    Reform Judaism and the Am Jew Hist'l Society rag  
    Patrons bring reviews from *Hadassah Mag* – well written & good choices  
This colors my experience and advice to you

Start picking titles with broad ideas whether creating collection from scratch or updating

Consider your identity: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist or?  
    All **branches** have **free magazines** w/ reviews – ask at your syn to get yours  
Consider your mission  
    What would your clergy or principal like you to have  
    You could ask directly or wait until they ask you  
    Waiting is a terrific budget manager!

Look at your cataloging system if it is Jewish  
    If it is not, borrow someone who has an **Elazar**; I am not familiar with Weine  
    But this may work as well  
    This” how to catalog” book contains purchasing advice when you think of it  
    The system is arranged by broad categories of knowledge: **USE THEM**  
    Assume the literate Jewish adult should be familiar with all or some  
    Note: you can handle this with fiction as well as non!

Elazar has 10 broad Categories  
    Their topics are  
        Bible and Biblical Studies  
        Classic Judaica which includes Halakhah and Midrash  
        Observance and Practice  
        Jewish Education  
        Hebrew Languages and Science – strange mixture  
        Jewish Literature  
        Jewish Community, Culture and Arts  
        Jewish History, Geography and Biography  
        Israel and Zionism  
        General Works like encyclopedias

Are you missing any categories you think you should have? Shopping Time!

The categories (as expected) offer finer subject distinctions to suggest titles  
    Literature for example suggests  
        History of Jewish lit  
        Types: Poetry, Drama, Short Stories and Novels, Essays, Humor etc.  
    I esp. love to collect books on the musical stage and plays, movies and TV

You can specialize in types of lit as Sephardic or Ashkenazic or even A Language. Usually we offer our adults English volumes, but the Best fiction today is being done by Israeli writers, and we read translations from the Hebrew.

Look at they many Elazar sub-topics:

Do you need them all?

How do you **prioritize**?

Your experience counts! What are past desires

So do **Patron Requests** – **make it known you welcome these**

Do you care if some topics have gaps? Do your patrons?

I think Holo is vital.

Most reading adults in their 30's and 40's are not so interested

Getting a lot is a waste of effort and money

I get to pick what interests me – a devoted student of history -

In addition to your experience, consider your location

Is there **another Jewish Library** close that could help focus your choices

For ex:

I am three min from the SW Library

I can send patrons there

I am ten minutes from the County Public Library that

Specializes in Judaica

The Librarians there belong to our local AJL Chapter

I can send patrons there

I do not need every new Holo book

I already have some basics and classics

I pick the topics that I think are off beat or have new interpretations

I look for fiction as well as memoir and history that grab me

**What do your readers want?**

What are their book groups reading?

Do you want non-fiction that supports the topic of their fiction

What are your Havarah groups using for discussion topics

Is the Temple showing movies based on a book or on a topic that you have

Are they asking you; make it known you are open to suggestions

**Do you want it?**

Never ignore your **passions**

Mine are varied and my collection reflects this

With strengths in **Classic** areas as:

**Jewish Fiction**

I love novels and short stories

Esp. those set in the American South

**American History**, esp. Colonial History

I include history books, museum catalogs (LofC), bios,  
Portrait collections, essays, monographs and music CD's  
Am always on the lookout since the *EJ* is very weak on AJH

### **Art and Jewish Artists**

In addition to books, I buy exhibition catalogs

Ex: an unusual show in LA called Too Jewish?

For a small one room Library I burst with Shahn, Chagall,  
Modigliani and Alexander Kruse whom I love,  
and Soutine whom I hate, but since he is major, there he sits.

### **Jewish Baseball Players**

Biographies and the card collection from AJHS

Family really into the cards got me special notebook fillers  
and set the book up for me

I not only have baseball non-fiction, trivia and bios,  
but fiction and our chapter's *Jews in Sports Bibliography*

And **Odd Ball** topics as:

#### **Jewish Gangsters**

I collect biographies, histories and true crime volumes

In addition to detective and mystery fiction and

Classics - Babel's Benya Krik & Sholem Ash's Motke

#### **Shakespeare, Elizabethan England and the Jews**

I keep Marlow's Jew of Malta as well as the M of V

And volumes by scholars on their influence then and now

Here I connect w/ older teens & the wonderful *Shylock's Dau*

As a by-product of this interest and a biking tip to Ireland

I collect books on **Irish Jews and James Joyce and the Jews.**

In fact, at a recent LA BJE conference, my speaker on Jonah had a  
Special gift of gab, but no accent and when he told us he was Irish  
I immediately asked him to e-mail me a biblio about Irish Jews and he did

#### **Jesus as a Rabbi or Hassid**

Collect learned books by Oxford and Cambridge dons as well as popular  
Non-Fiction

Did a display when the movie *The Passion* was in theaters and the books

Were very popular (ditto my J sex books when *Kinsey* came out)

### **All Adult Collections Need Classics**

How do you find them?

In several excellent book sources

The old, but tried, true and Invaluable *How to Organize a Jewish Library* by

Margot Berman has a short, but wonderful chapter on starting a collection

She lists almost 20 still useful sources to find a list of those books

From her list I esp. cite two:

Frank and Wollheim's *Book of Jewish Books* which is older, but for classics, it is handy and easy to read & boasts great organization. There are topics that you can match to your Elazar categories. Each topic then has books listed in columns with short and clear descriptions.

The newer *Schocken Guide to Jewish Books* by Barry Holtz also has categories, but the book descriptions are in the form of a narrative. This is chatty to read, but titles are hard to pick out and this is not as handy if you want fast purchasing ideas.

I also add AJL colleague, Merrily Hart's: *Creating A Collection A Resource Booklist for a Beginning Judaic Library from 2000*.

The latest (2004) adult reference source is a jewel by Rosalind Reisner called *Jewish American Literature* and it is just this! Therefore, excellent as it is it cannot be your only source. What I love about this book is her fine description of each literary genre as well as her topic choices which include romance, historical fiction and mystery. Her work has more current stuff – 1980 to 2002 – than classics, but the advantage is that most of her suggested 700 plus titles are still out there. The book is well organized with icons in the outside margin to indicate book type, award winner etc. The guiding philosophy of this compendium is enjoyable works and itself is one - easy to use with endless indexes to help speed you along.

### **How do you know it is worth paying for**

Just because you like it may be enough

Also: lots of sound opinions out there – esp by **AJL reviewers**

There are reviews that do not pass for such, being called **Awards and Accolades:**

Ex: Annual **National Jewish Book Award** Nominees and Winners

Give you not only currently hot individual works, but

Categories and Genres to purchase

Several Jewish Lit Awards out there now: Koret J Bk Awd & E.L.Wallant Awd.

Often Secular Awds as Pulizer, Pen or Natl Bk Awd go to J authors

**Union for Reform Judaism** is bent on establishing a **canon** of J Books

Starting in 1997 they began listing **Significant Jewish Books** in their

Publication: *Reform Judaism* and putting this on their website

Their website is [www.urj.org.rjmag](http://www.urj.org.rjmag). I made a direct link to this on my

Library page on our Temple Website w/ a blurb about it

When you get onto the RJ site, the latest books are listed on the left

Back lists are on the right, if you

Click on “more items” at the end of the right side list, you will get an

Alphabetical list of all their Significant Books

You may find some or all of these books worthy, even if are not Reform

Best advice on new Books comes from **Reviews** whether the **AJL Newsletter** or **Jewish Book World** or the **NY Times Weekly Book Review Section** or your local newspaper. Mine, the **LAT** has excellent daily reviews where I often find solid books of Jewish interest and a Sunday section that usually has at least one Jewish idea.

Remember, the AJL reviews balance good and bad, while the JBW reviews are only positive. If they do not like the book, you will not see it discussed. An additional caveat, the AJLN adult section needs work. It is not as comprehensive, critical or up to date as the children's section. General fiction is behind the time and the non-fiction is overly scholarly and niched; if you find your niche, consider yourself well advised.

There are outstanding **secular** sources - **Library Journal**, ALA's **Booklist**, **Kirkus** and **Publishers Weekly** which I cannot afford and have managed to do without because I use the other named sources. I may find a book later than users of these excellent lists, but this is the price of poverty. Any money I spend on advice subscriptions, means less money for the actual book. Since I do not stock secular, these references cost a lot and only a small percentage of their advice applies to me. Time also / need to hunt for J among the nons.

There are publishers' catalogs,

But, I rarely use them until I hear advice from one of the sources noted above

Catalogs are for sales, not critical thinking or appropriate placements

The past several years, AJL **Convention** has hosted a dynamite **session on Adult Fiction** thanks to the superb readers of the Cleveland Chapter. Their list is always a fabulous resource. Ironically this session is going on as I speak, so we will have to be content with their bibliography. It is possible that soon AJL Website's **FAQ** section will consider queries on adult collections/titles. (None now) AJL's **Bibliography Bank**, org'd by topic has too few adult offerings (One that actually works now).

For what is current, see the titles and authors being sponsored for Jewish Book Month and other book tours by the **Jewish Book Council** and the JCC's. You can find their book choices reviewed in other venues to see if you agree with them. Like most advice, their lists include some good choices and some not so.

For advice on **periodicals, CD's and Websites**, I suggest you see the excellent lists in both Merrily Hart's 2002 Convention talk and the list yet to come from my colleague Linda Silver. Most of her lists apply to adults as well as children, the topic of her talk. Both of their papers offer an array of Web searching for titles for adults including **Amazon** where you can narrow your search by trying Jews, Judaism or Israel, etc. and World Cat.

## WHERE TO PLUCK

I am lucky. I use Ingram which gives me a terrific discount

They do not take small libraries any more

Ask them, maybe you can join w/ another local lib for a consortium

In LA several people have tried to a NO – but here is their phone:

**1-800-937-8100**

Some people use other jobbers as Baker and Taylor

My advice is to ask AJL members in your city or state – who work in

Similar institutions and ask who they use and how they got to them

Look for local Judaic Bookstores

These tend to be expensive,

Usually at listed price, but you may be able to establish a discount

Talk to the local branch of the big chains in your area

Borders and Barnes & Noble gave me a corporate discount

Not as good as the jobber, but it helps in a pinch

If you are ordering on line, see if your Temple has a deal

For example, our Temple set up a discount for purchases to Amazon

Also, if you purchase on line, look for savings as their offers which

Waive shipping costs if you purchase so much

See if your AJL chapter will set up a purchase consortium

Frankly, in LA we talk about this a lot, but have never made it

I know that in the R&S Division, my colleague Rick Burke set one up for univ.

He is at the UJ - see what advice he has

Order directly from the publisher's catalog

This again is often list price, but you may find some discounts.

Sometimes I find this is the only source of a book for me

Closing my purchasing ideas with final thought

May I suggest free bees!

This is books for sweat equity

Contact the editor of the AJLN or JBW adult sections

Offer to review in return for the book

## HOW MANY TO PLUNK ON THE SHELF

Time, Space, and money are our constraints

Most of us have too few hours to catalog and teach let alone purchase

I search for books at home

Space is a sincere heart ache

My rabbi has decreed the number of cases we have is now finite

They want the floor space

I spend a lot of time weeding

Weeding sends a message

It definitely gives you a sense of priorities and patron wishes

Alas, budget is the biggest hurdle.

We never get enough, even if we can prove our past costs and needs

Supplement with cash donations and book fairs

Over the years I have been very discouraging of actual books being donated

Usually their condition is not good

Or the title is not appropriate  
Remember, you are the friendly adult librarian and not the closest tax haven  
Suggest to donors they go to a neighborhood local public or school library  
Don't accept unsatisfactory books: you bear the guilt of throwing them away  
This is hard enough to do when you weed your own collection

I hope I have helped

Don't forget to click onto: [www.aljsc.org](http://www.aljsc.org) and its resource page to find the resources I rattled off to you today. Remember my broad philosophy; the bibliography will follow.