

BIC Subject Category Review

Proposals for classification of Young Adult material

Howard Willows, 16 June 2010

Background

At the recent BIC Categories Steering Group, the handling of material designated as 'Young Adult' was discussed with a view to its appropriate categorisation within the BIC scheme. It was recognised that this was an important and growing area of publishing, but that the term was being inconsistently understood and applied by publishers.

Interestingly, it was established that whereas Little Brown do not publish children's books, they do publish YA. Conversely, the CBG Age Ranging scheme, clearly focussing on younger readers, stopped at "Teen" and did not consider any explicit reference to YA. The YA sector clearly hovers between the well-defined Children's and Adult markets.

Importantly, the Group accepted that Young Adult is not a synonym for Teenage, though there is clearly some correlation with teenage years. It is more to do with the issues and themes of the material than any specific age.

This paper attempts to draft a definition of Young Adult for dissemination to the trade, and put forward proposals, within the limited scope of the planned interim release BIC2.1, for the handling of such items within the BIC scheme.

Definition of Young Adult

From the discussion at the meeting, the following definition is proposed

Young Adult material, generally but not exclusively fiction, features topics (including sex and drug use) that may be regarded as unsuitable or unsettling for some, especially younger, readers, often introducing these topics to the reader for the first time. Young Adult material is intended broadly for readers from mid-teens upwards into early adulthood, but depends more on the readiness and maturity of the reader than the attainment of any specific age.

It is imperative that a clear unambiguous indication of YA readership be provided by the publisher, and it cannot be left to the bibliographic agencies, librarians or retailers to identify this material.

The following proposed changes to the BIC scheme are intended to provide precisely a means of enabling publishers to do so.

Changes for BIC2.1: Categories & Qualifiers

A review of the use of the term "Young Adult" in BIC2.0 indicates that it has been broadly used as a synonym for "Teenage". In order to reflect its more specific meaning outlined above, we need to amend all instances of the term.

Subject Categories: Generic change to Section Y

In the light of proposals for the BIC scheme to present a tighter and more meaningful definition of the term “Young Adult”, including the addition of a specific Interest Age & Special Interest Qualifier for “Young Adult”, a generic change is required to all headings in Section Y that include the term “Young Adult” or are suffixed with “(Children’s/YA)”. Young Adult or YA, if it is to mean anything at all, must be used in specific circumstances only, and not included in Section Y headings as a catch-all reference to older children or teenagers generally.

The simplest proposal is to replace Young Adult/YA with Teenage. The argument here is that Teenage IS an appropriate term for the ages 13 and up, and does not carry any further connotations. Thus:

YF CHILDREN’S & YOUNG ADULT FICTION & TRUE STORIES

becomes

YF CHILDREN’S & TEENAGE FICTION & TRUE STORIES

Similarly, headings with the suffix (Children’s/YA) are amended eg

YNX Mysteries & the supernatural (Children’s/Teenage)

YFM Romance & relationship stories (Children’s/Teenage)

The section heading should also be changed such that

Y CHILDREN’S, YOUNG ADULT & EDUCATIONAL

becomes

Y CHILDREN’S, TEENAGE & EDUCATIONAL

An alternative proposal would be to replace all instances of both “Children’s” and “YA” with the single term “Juvenile”. While this chimes with BISAC and library (MARC, DDC) usage, I don’t think the term is commonly used in the UK book trade. Although the dictionary definition “of or for young people” is entirely appropriate, the term may even carry pejorative connotations (“juvenile delinquent”, “juvenile behaviour” etc).

Qualifiers: 5 Reading Level & Special Interest

It is recognised that YA is not a “subject” in itself or a genre of fiction (and may in some cases apply to material other than fiction), but rather a characteristic of the item relating to age and interests. The Reading Level & Special Interest Qualifiers would seem to be the obvious location for a code indicating YA material. Indeed, there is already a reference to YA, used to indicate merely “mid-teenage”, as follows:

5AQ Reading age: from c 14 years (Young Adult)

Clearly a great deal of material may be intended for readers of c14 years which is not Young Adult material as we now understand it.

(Incidentally, there is a need, identified by publishers of material specifically designed for reluctant readers, whose reading ability is significantly lower than is expected for their age, to amend the terminology of section 5A. The qualifiers would be more accurately described as indicating the “interest age” rather than the “reading age”. This amendment is assumed in the following proposal.)

Proposal:

Amend heading

Code	New Heading	Previous Heading (<i>Reason</i>)
5AQ	Interest age: from c 14 years	Reading age: from c 14 years (Young Adult) (<i>Re-word to clarify meaning, and to allow separate specific indication of YA material at 5Y</i>)

Add new Qualifier

Code	Heading	Notes (<i>Reason</i>)
5Y	Young Adult (<i>Class here: material for mid-teens & upwards featuring topics which may be regarded as unsuitable for some readers. Assign both a Y* and non-Y* subject code to all YA items.</i>)	(<i>Enables specific indication of YA content independent of interest age</i>)

The new Qualifier is placed at 5Y partly as a useful mnemonic, but also because it is perhaps more akin to the 5S Qualifiers than it is to the 5A sequence which relates solely to age and reading ability.

Change to classification usage and policy

In recognition of the fact that YA material is intended for adults as well as for teenagers, thus literally spanning the divide between Section Y and the other (adult) Sections, it is appropriate to assign both a Y* code and an equivalent non-Y* (typically F*) code for all YA material. Any accompanying Audience or Readership codes should also reflect this dual Teenage/Adult readership.

Thus, a Young Adult vampire romance should be classed (using new codes proposed for BIC2.1) as:

BIC Subj: YFHR *Fantasy romance (Teenage)*
 FMR *Fantasy romance*
BIC Qual: 5Y *Young Adult*
Audience: *Teenage*
 Adult

Similarly, Young Adult manga should be:

BIC Subj: YFW *Comic strip fiction / graphic novels (Children's/Teenage)*
 FXA *Graphic novels: Manga*
BIC Qual: 5Y *Young Adult*
Audience: *Teenage*
 Adult

When mapping BIC classifications to proprietary schemes, this double-classification will facilitate the consistent handling of YA material as required, ie whether it is mapped to a Children's, Adult or intermediate Teenage/YA category

The BIC User Guidelines would need to be updated to reflect this policy, as part of the general revision to accommodate release 2.1.