

**Backlist to the Future: Updating Orca Book  
Publishers' Hi-Lo Backlist during Ultra-Readable  
Reprints to Support a New Generation of Readers**

by  
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## **Abstract**

In the last twenty years the world has seen great social, technological, and language changes that have left even best-selling backlist titles in need of updating. When Orca Book Publishers decided to print their hi-lo backlist in a new ultra-readable format, they seized the opportunity to update the content, design, and book information in order to better support their readers and serve their mandate.

This report explores Orca's reprint process for the Orca Currents and Orca Soundings series. Chapter One provides information on Orca, the hi-lo genre, reprints, and Orca's decision to update their backlist. The next three chapters follow the editorial, design, marketing, and sales processes for these reprinted titles. The report concludes with project considerations, key benefits, and why other publishers should consider updating their backlist. Overall, this report argues that publishers must consider the context books are reprinted into if they want to continue reaching their audience.

**Keywords:** Orca Book Publishers; reprint; new edition; children's publishing; hi-lo fiction; accessible books

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# Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Orca, Hi-Lo, &amp; the Reprint Journey .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. Orca Book Publishers .....	4
1.2. Hi-Lo and the Hi-Lo Audience .....	4
1.3. What are Reprints? .....	6
1.4. Orca’s Decision to Reprint their Hi-Lo Backlist .....	8
<b>Chapter 2: Editing from the Past to the Present .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. The First Read .....	11
2.2. Editorial Changes .....	14
2.3. Author Approval .....	15
2.4. What Does This Mean for Readers? .....	16
<b>Chapter 3: Finding Balance in Branding, Accessibility, &amp; Contemporary Design .</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1. The Ultra-Readable Format .....	19
3.2. Cover Redesign, Individualism, and Branding .....	22
3.3. What Does This Mean for Audiences? .....	28
<b>Chapter 4: A Quest for Book Data, Institutional Knowledge, &amp; New Sales Life.....</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1. Marketing and Selling Ultra-Readable Reprints .....	29
4.2. Growing Data and Institutional Knowledge .....	30
<b>Chapter 5: Project Takeaways .....</b>	<b>33</b>
5.1. Project Considerations .....	33
5.2. Key Benefits .....	34
5.3. Why Publishers Should Update their Backlists .....	35
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>41</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Ultra-Readable Format Comparison .....	21
Figure 2: Four Covers from Older Editions of Orca Currents Books .....	22
Figure 3: Four Redesigned Orca Currents Covers for Reprint .....	23
Figure 4: Three Covers from Older Editions of Orca Soundings Books .....	24
Figure 5: Three Redesigned Orca Soundings Covers for Reprint.....	25
Figure 6: Comparison of <i>Stolen</i> Full Cover Before and After Reprint.....	26
Figure 7: Comparison of <i>Truth</i> Full Cover Before and After Reprint .....	27

# Introduction

The world has evolved in the last twenty years with movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ rights, Truth and Reconciliation, neurodiversity, accessibility, and mental health awareness. With the growth of social media platforms, it has never been easier for anyone to share their opinions. For publishers this means direct feedback from readers, good or bad, shared with the world. The world changed again in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. During lockdown, many publishers, especially children's publishers, saw an uptick of sales from backlist titles.<sup>1</sup> In these uncertain times, the backlist has never been more important.

Backlist titles are financially beneficial for publishers since pre-press costs have already been paid for with the initial publication, so they have a lower cost per book and a higher profit margin. Backlists can be a reliable source of income; however, publishers cannot benefit from their backlists if they do not keep track of stock levels and reprint books. Reprinting is an opportunity for publishers to make changes to their books before the content is once again locked in its unchangeable printed form. Orca Book Publishers (Orca) noticed that the content of some of their backlist titles was outdated and needed to be updated prior to reprinting.

In 2020, Orca identified two series of books that needed to be updated. The Orca Currents and Orca Soundings high interest/low vocabulary (hi-lo) series have a backlist spanning twenty years. Since newer books in these series are printed in an ultra-readable format, Orca wanted to update the design of the backlist and decided to look at content at the same time. Although changes were made to both print and digital formats, this report will focus mainly on print books since this process starts with the need to restock printed books and the ultra-readable format makes print more accessible. Beginning in 2020, Orca undertook this reprinting project to update their hi-lo backlist to make sure they could stand behind the books they were putting into the world.

Although reprinting is a common process across all fields of publishing, it is not well documented. The following report is an exploration of Orca's decision to update the

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<sup>1</sup> Monique Mongeon, "Everything Old Is New Again: Backlist Sales Growth in 2020," BookNet Canada (BookNet Canada, May 4, 2021), [booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/5/4/everything-old-is-new-again-backlist-sales-growth-in-2020?rq=backlist](https://booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/5/4/everything-old-is-new-again-backlist-sales-growth-in-2020?rq=backlist).

backlist of their Currents and Soundings hi-lo series and the editorial, design, marketing, and sales implications of the process. Compiled through research, interviews, and firsthand experience during my internship with Orca, it is my hope that this report will provide a deeper look into the decisions and processes involved in reprinting backlist titles. In addition, this report shows the value of making changes to backlist titles to reflect the current cultural climate and support the next generation of hi-lo readers.

Chapter One provides background on Orca, reprints, and the hi-lo genre. As well as contextualizing Orca's decision to update their hi-lo backlist, this chapter looks at the selection process for reprinting books. Chapter Two explores the editorial process from the first read-through to how editorial decisions are made. A closer look at these changes shows the importance of updating books for their audience. Chapter Three covers the creation of the ultra-readable format and how Orca found a balance between meeting the needs of those with print challenges like dyslexia while still appealing to general audiences. In addition, a comparison of old and new cover designs shows the overall evolution of Orca's hi-lo book design. Chapter Four explores the marketing and sales implications of this process. The report concludes with project takeaways such as key benefits for Orca and considerations for other publishers that might begin a similar reprint process.

The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed look at the reprint process and the value associated with ensuring backlist titles are up to date. For Orca, reprints have become an opportunity to update their books. They are aware that the hi-lo audience faces many barriers to reading and one barrier they don't need is outdated books. Aspects such as outdated technology or design or lack of inclusive language create books that don't reflect readers' realities and therefore render books less relatable for readers. Since hi-lo books serve as an accessible first step into reading for middle-school and high-school students who are reading below grade level or are reluctant to pick up a book on their own, it is important that design and content do not give readers a reason to put the book down.

The world is constantly evolving, and the new generation of hi-lo readers face different reality than readers twenty years ago. Through Orca's work with their hi-lo reprints, I intend to show that publishers reprinting backlist titles must reevaluate books



within the context they are being published into, otherwise they risk alienating the audience they are trying to reach.

# Chapter 1. Orca, Hi-Lo, & the Reprint Journey

To understand the impact of these reprints on their audience, we must first understand what defines the hi-lo genre, who the audience is for these books, what a reprint is, and what led to Orca's decision to update their books during a format-changing reprint.

## 1.1. Orca Book Publishers

Orca Book Publishers is an independent children's publisher located in Victoria, British Columbia. Founded in 1984, they have over 1200 titles in print and publish more than 95 new titles a year.<sup>2</sup> They cater to both the Canadian and American markets with a keen focus on selling to schools and libraries. Their mission is to "help young readers see themselves reflected in the books they read."<sup>3</sup> They work to uphold high standards for inclusion and help to publish and distribute books by Indigenous authors. Some of Orca's bestselling authors include Eric Walters, Monique Gray Smith, and Sigmund Brouwer. Orca has a history of award-winning books and publishes books in a wide range of genres including both fiction and nonfiction for children and young adults as well as board books and picture books. Orca is a trailblazer in the genre of hi-lo fiction which they have been publishing for almost twenty years.

## 1.2. Hi-Lo and the Hi-Lo Audience

Hi-lo or "high interest/low vocabulary" books have "high interest" subject matter suitable for middle-grade and young-adult audiences written at a lower reading level. These books were developed to help striving or reluctant readers find a way into reading. Hi-lo reading levels fall between grade one and grade five as calculated by the Fry Readability Formula. Reading levels are calculated using software that plots "the average number of sentences and syllables in each 100-word segment" and the "vocabulary and the sentence structure of the text."<sup>4</sup> As well as the calculated reading level, authors and editors work to make sure books have a linear plot that doesn't have any flashbacks with

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<sup>2</sup> "Orca Faces the Loss of Thousands of Books in Victoria Cargo Ship Fire," The Orca Blog (Orca Book Publishers, November 5, 2021), [blog.orcabook.com/orca-faces-the-loss-of-thousands-of-books-in-victoria-cargo-ship-fire/](http://blog.orcabook.com/orca-faces-the-loss-of-thousands-of-books-in-victoria-cargo-ship-fire/).

<sup>3</sup> "About Us," Orca Book Publishers, accessed September 8, 2021, [orcabook.com/About.aspx](http://orcabook.com/About.aspx).

<sup>4</sup> Weizhang Li, "Introducing Canadian High Interest/Low Vocabulary English-Language Books into Chinese School Curriculum: The Case of Orca's Hi-Lo Fiction." (Simon Fraser University, 2012), 17.

simple sentence structure and easier language choices including the spelling of names: “Jackie better than Jacqueline.”<sup>5</sup> Orca’s hi-lo books are around 15,000 words and have short chapters that have less description and more dialogue. Plots are exciting and chapters end in a way that leaves readers wanting more.<sup>6</sup>

These books are written and designed to be easier books that explore themes found in young-adult and middle-grade fiction. The subject matter is relatable, current, and often gritty. Common themes include bullying, suicide, drug and alcohol use, sexuality, illness, and injuries. The design is also an important part of hi-lo, to maintain an age-appropriate appearance. The content and the design work together to make sure that striving readers know they are reading age-appropriate books and hopefully that will alleviate any shame associated with reading below their grade level.

Orca produces many lines of hi-lo books, and this report focuses on two: the Orca Currents and Orca Soundings series. Orca Currents are written for middle-grade audiences (ages 10–14). Characters are ages 12–14 and the subject matter is often lighter than the Soundings which are written for young-adult audiences (ages 12+) with characters that are 14–17 years old.<sup>7</sup> Orca Soundings dive into more challenging subject matter like drinking, drugs, and gangs. Both series provide thrilling plots that are enjoyable to read while maintaining a grade two to grade five reading level.

Hi-lo books are mainly sold to schools and libraries as that is where reading intervention occurs for striving readers.<sup>8</sup> However, the audience for these books goes beyond a child who reads below their grade level. Hi-lo books have been used for English as a second language students and Orca translations have been used for learning languages.<sup>9</sup> They are excellent books for students with print-based challenges as the language is less complicated and there is often more white space on the page. They are an excellent step into reading for students who have never picked up a book and they can be a way for younger readers to read about more mature subject matter.<sup>10</sup>

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5 Tanya Trafford, “Orca Hi-Lo Guidelines,” Orca Book Publishers Document, (Accessed September 14, 2021).

6 Tanya Trafford, “Orca Hi-Lo Guidelines.”

7 Tanya Trafford, “Orca Hi-Lo Guidelines.”

8 Shannon Maughan, “ALA 2012: What’s up with Hi-Lo?,” Publishers Weekly (Publishers Weekly, May 28, 2012), [publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/52124-what-s-up-with-hi-lo-ala-2012.html](http://publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/52124-what-s-up-with-hi-lo-ala-2012.html).

9 Eva Sofia Quintana, “Introducing a Canadian Book series for reluctant readers into the Latin American market: The case of Orca Soundings,” (Simon Fraser University, 2010), 7.

10 Sarah Hartley, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 10, 2021).

They can also be a quick read for any student who is looking for a book with an exciting plot. Orca's hi-lo books support striving readers with contemporary stories that introduce students to the joy of reading without drawing attention to the reading barriers they might face.

One of the reasons Orca updated their hi-lo backlist was to ensure that these titles remain contemporary, relatable, and supportive for new readers. But before we get into this decision, we must understand reprints and their role in the publishing industry.

### **1.3. What are Reprints?**

Reprinting is the process of creating more printed stock of a book. A publisher will reprint a book if they are about to run out of stock and it has continued to sell well. Ruth Linka, associated publisher at Orca, joked that "there's no such thing as a straight reprint."<sup>11</sup> A straight reprint involves no more than updating the copyright page to include the new number of reprintings, reformatting the book for the printer, and sending the book to print. However, before a book is sent to print, publishers have an opportunity to make changes. During the first reprint, publishers can correct mistakes in the text that were caught after the publisher sent the book to print. Publishers keep track of changes for the next reprint in a "reprint log" that can contain errors that were caught in-house or pointed out by readers.<sup>12</sup> Quick changes like fixing typos and updating the copyright page are cost effective because reprints do not incur nonrecurring costs like editing, design, and marketing, making them more profitable than the first printing.<sup>13</sup> There are still some costs to a straight reprint such as the time needed to make changes, proofread, reformat the book for the printer, and print costs. Compared to the time that goes into a new book, the overall costs for reprints are low.

A publisher may use reprints to change other aspects of a book. Harper San Francisco changed their name in 2007 and even though frontlist titles started bearing the HarperOne logo that year, they only updated backlist titles during reprints.<sup>14</sup> Updates can

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<sup>11</sup> Ruth Linka, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Linka.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Langstaff, "The Business of Backlist: Serving the Bread and Butter," Publishers Weekly (Publishers Weekly, October 18, 1999), [publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19991018/34651-the-business-of-backlist-serving-the-bread-and-butter.html](https://publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19991018/34651-the-business-of-backlist-serving-the-bread-and-butter.html).

<sup>14</sup> "HarperSF to Become HarperOne," Publishers Weekly (Publishers Weekly, March 9, 2007), [publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20070312/17036-harpersf-to-become-harperone.html](https://publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20070312/17036-harpersf-to-become-harperone.html).

be made to book covers for many reasons. Maybe a “movie or a political campaign” creates attention for a book and marketing copy or the cover needs updating.<sup>15</sup> A newer bestselling author could have their books branded by a publisher and have backlist books reprinted with covers that have similar “visual echoes” for better discoverability.<sup>16</sup> In 1999, the senior vice president of Simon & Schuster, Christine Lloreda, told *Publisher’s Weekly* that “it is so important to keep books fresh” and as a company they “repackage [books] on a regular basis and so have books selling 10-15 years after they were first published.”<sup>17</sup> As well as covers, interiors can be changed. Even as far back as the Victorian period changes were made to books between printings. Dicken’s famously changed many references of “the Jew” to “Fagin” in *Oliver Twist* before the 1867 edition after a letter from a Jewish acquaintance expressed disappointment in the book’s antisemitism.<sup>18</sup>

If a “significant amount of content has been changed or has been added” to a backlist title, that book may be considered a new edition.<sup>19</sup> Book Industry Study Group defines the significant amount of changes needed for a book to be considered a new edition as “20% or more new content.”<sup>20</sup> Due to the amount of changes made, a new edition “warrants a new ISBN because the product is sufficiently changed... so that retailers and librarians can expect new sales or new use, even from previous buyers or readers of the earlier edition.”<sup>21</sup> New editions of books differ from reprints in the amount of content added as well as how they are marketed. New content added might include an author foreword, an additional chapter to tie in to a current event (as Greystone did with *On Pandemics: Deadly Diseases from Bubonic Plague to Coronavirus in 2020*), a new subtitle, or updated information.<sup>22</sup> Orca’s non-fiction book *Pride: Celebrating*

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15 Margaret Langstaff, “The Business of Backlist: Serving the Bread and Butter,” *Publishers Weekly* (Publishers Weekly, October 18, 1999), [publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19991018/34651-the-business-of-backlist-serving-the-bread-and-butter.html](http://publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19991018/34651-the-business-of-backlist-serving-the-bread-and-butter.html).

16 Robert Dahlin, “Show Me the Bodies,” *Publishers Weekly* 244, no. 43 (October 20, 1997), [search-ebshost.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9710303419&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebshost.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9710303419&site=ehost-live), 44.

17 Margaret Langstaff, “The Business of Backlist: Serving the Bread and Butter,” *Publishers Weekly* (Publishers Weekly, October 18, 1999), [publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19991018/34651-the-business-of-backlist-serving-the-bread-and-butter.html](http://publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19991018/34651-the-business-of-backlist-serving-the-bread-and-butter.html).

18 Susan Meyer, “Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens’s “*Oliver Twist*.”” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2005) [jstor.org/stable/25058705](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058705), 239-241.

19 Renée Register, *Best Practices for Product Metadata: Guide for North American Data Senders and Receivers* (New York, NY: Book Industry Study Group, 2015), 95.

20 Renée Register, 95.

21 Renée Register, 95.

22 David Waltner-Toews, *On Pandemics*, Greystone Books, May 26, 2020, [greystonebooks.com/products/on-pandemics](http://greystonebooks.com/products/on-pandemics).

*Community and Diversity* became dated as it was headed for the press in 2016.<sup>23</sup> The book had a celebratory tone that felt out of place in the shifted political climate of many countries such as the U.S. under President Trump. When it was time to reprint the book, the author, Robin Stevenson, worked hard to update every chapter as well as add new chapters and sections to the book. In 2020, Orca released a new edition that showed the broader picture of the fight for LGBTQ+ rights called *Pride: The Celebration and the Struggle*. Publishers also provide more marketing attention to a new edition than a reprint. Reprints are more about maintaining stock whereas a new edition will be treated like a new book from a marketing and sales perspective. Orca's treatment of their hi-lo backlist falls somewhere in between a reprint and a new edition. Like a new edition, hi-lo reprints get new ISBNs and are pitched as new books by the sales team but are marketed as a series rather than individual books (see Chapter Four).

Decisions about reprinting books are often complex. Orca looks at the averages of a book's annual sales, however, yearly averages can be swayed by large orders. "When you sell into classrooms as we do, getting a book adopted into a course by a school or school board can result in an unexpectedly larger order seemingly out of nowhere," said Leslie Bootle, marketing director at Orca.<sup>24</sup> These large orders can sway sales numbers and wipe out stock, leaving Orca to decide whether that large order was an anomaly or if there is demand for a book.<sup>25</sup> If there is not enough demand, a publisher likely won't reprint the book. Even if a book is selling moderately, a publisher must consider book storage costs especially with a large backlist. When Orca began looking at their backlist, they were struck with the question: if a book can be reprinted, should it be reprinted? Orca began looking beyond the sales numbers to the books' content and asked themselves whether or not those stories still had a place in the world.

## **1.4. Orca's Decision to Reprint their Hi-Lo Backlist**

Orca developed their ultra-readable format and began using it for their frontlist books in the Currents and Soundings series. With a larger trim size, more white space, and a dyslexic-friendly font, the new format made the books more accessible. Since books in these series are often bought as sets, Orca wanted to transition all series titles to the

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<sup>23</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Leslie Bootle, "Re: MPub Project Report Feedback," E-Mail, (November 22, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

new format, so all the books have a contemporary design and support Orca's commitment to making books more accessible to all readers. This meant updating the Currents and Soundings' backlist to the new ultra-readable format as they were reprinted. Due to the change in format, design, and content, these reprints receive new ISBNs, and "To some accounts are being presented as new books. We need to know that we can stand behind them and behind the content," said Bootle.<sup>26</sup> Due to normal staff turnover such as changes in the editors of these long-standing series, Orca's in-house knowledge of the twenty-year backlist was unspecific, and they decided to review books before reprinting in the new format. "We're learning in all of our books how quickly the world is evolving and whether it be language, whether it be themes, whether it be what is considered appropriate to have in a classroom," said Bootle. "In doing a couple little spot checks, it sort of opened our eyes."<sup>27</sup>

With the help of interns, Orca reviewed hi-lo books prior to reprinting and made changes to content and design to make sure the books are contemporary and properly serve their audience. Some outdated elements in Orca's hi-lo books are easy to change, like language, but other elements that are deeply ingrained in the story are harder to alter. "We haven't published anything that's awful, but things change, and attitudes change, and we want to continue to be modern," says hi-lo editor Tanya Trafford. Some books did not make it through the editorial process. "We're actively making sure our voices are true and representative," said Trafford, "putting [a book] into a new format, that's a statement," so, the books being reprinted have to be ones that Orca believes in.<sup>28</sup> For the first time, Orca considered removing books from their backlist even when these were continuing to sell in order to make sure that everything they published fit with their mandate.

Like most reprint processes, this one revolved around continued discussions about the reprint list. Books had to be selling well enough to reprint and timelines had to be evaluated so that they prioritized the books that were going to run out of stock first. Sales are hard to predict, so the list constantly changes and grows. Once books were

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<sup>26</sup> Leslie Bootle.

<sup>27</sup> Leslie Bootle.

<sup>28</sup> Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

selected for reprint, they were passed on to one of two interns working on the project and the editorial process began.



## Chapter 2. Editing from the Past to the Present

In children’s publishing, the audience is constantly changing. In only a few years, teenagers become adults and children go from reading picture books to middle-grade books. Much like the ever-evolving audience, so too does language change and evolve with time. With movements striving for equal rights, inclusion, and proper representation, the language and characters in stories must meet cultural standards or else risk causing harm. In order to connect with readers, the characters and situations presented in books must also reflect their reality. This is even more important in hi-lo fiction, since readers already face barriers to reading and a dated reference could cause a potential reader to put a book down. The following section will follow the editorial work done on backlist titles and show why these changes were important for the next generation of hi-lo readers.

### 2.1. The First Read

With busy in-house operations, Orca hired two Master of Publishing students to execute the initial read-through of backlist titles and flag any subject matter that was dated, offensive, or otherwise in need of review. In the summer of 2021, I took over the project from Orca’s previous intern, Emily Horn. The project was already running, and I had the benefit of learning from Horn’s notes while also implementing a more structured approach to reading and writing notes on these books.

Before the initial read of a book, I looked up information about the author to make sure I understood a little bit about the perspective they were writing from. On the initial read, I used that information to make sure that characters of a different gender or race than the author were well researched and written. In addition, I looked for any themes, recurring elements, treatment of characters, or written tone that needed to be updated. Recurring elements that might be flagged include marijuana being grown and sold in illegal situations, characters described as “stupid” because they are not the best student, or a female character described as talking too much. Tanya Trafford, editor of the Orca Hi-Lo series, said that there have been books where “the tone was very much ‘boys will be boys’... that attitude is not okay anymore.”<sup>29</sup> Flagging instances like male characters

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<sup>29</sup> Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

exhibiting a “boys will be boys” attitude toward female characters or characters making jokes at the expense of someone’s identity helps to ensure that characters are more than just a stereotype of their race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Many of the books reviewed were published in the 2000s and had elements that clearly set the books during that decade, like dated slang terms or technology such as tape recorders, film cameras, and flip phones. If a book featured text messages, they were written with abbreviations and shortened words that were commonly used when texting with flip phones but are no longer used in text speech. Shortening words like “you” and “are” to “u” and “r” could make the exchanges harder for hi-lo readers to read. A common edit might be taking a text exchange like “Kno wot? I got a job!! Babysitting 2 kids. WDYT?” and suggesting that it be written out in full, “Know what? I got a job!! Babysitting two kids. What do you think?”<sup>30</sup> Even though friends might shorten their speech in text messages, books allow for a suspension of disbelief and with hi-lo fiction, clarity in the language is more important. Many books also relied heavily on Facebook which is not really used by teenagers anymore. Whenever possible, specific social media platforms like Facebook were changed to a more generic “social media” to update these titles while increasing the longevity of the terms used. Slang also dated a book. Characters used 2000s slang terms like “hate-on” that are no longer used. If a reader came across a slang term and didn’t know what it meant, it could make them feel discouraged. Word choice must be thought through since unfamiliar terms could be a barrier for readers. The writing of hi-lo books should be exciting without any road bumps for a reader, so updating dated language is extremely important to the overall reading experience.

After the initial read, I searched within the document for specific words that I may have missed because they are commonly used in speech. Despite being used in conversation, some words should be reviewed and not put into print. I would search for gendered language like *man*, *men*, or *guys*. Masculine words like “fireman” or “policeman” are often used as the default term, but Orca uses gender-neutral terms such as “firefighter” and “police officer” instead. Some masculine terms have no gender-neutral alternatives but these jobs or sports positions are not gender specific and therefore, when they can be changed, they should be. Another common use of gendered

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30 Lois Peterson, *Disconnect*, (Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 2012), 18

language is saying “guys” to address a group of people. If “guys” describes a group of teenagers that includes both boys and girls or only girls, the language was flagged and changed if possible. Another word I searched for was “crazy.” Brenda Curtis, assistant professor of psychology, told *Penn Medicine* News that “ideas around mental illness perpetuated by words like ‘crazy’ include the idea that people with mental illness are divorced from reality, irrational, or incapable of making decisions. These stereotypes and the sense of blame they place on a person with mental illness tend to cast people in a category of ‘others’.”<sup>31</sup> By replacing “crazy” whenever possible Orca is not only ensuring that their books do not add to the stigma around mental illness; replacing the word also often leads to a clearer meaning behind a character’s speech. “That’s crazy” could mean that something is ridiculous, unbelievable, or risky. Some uses may not be able to be changed, but if they can be changed, replacing “crazy” can contribute to clearer writing. After reading several books, I noticed common words like “guys” and “crazy” that appeared across many books. I kept track of these words and created a list of common words to search in each book I read. This basic list included gendered terms like *man*, *men*, and *guys*; technology-based language like *phone*; offensive language like *crazy*, *insane*, *nuts*, and *lame*; and style guide considerations like “eleventh grade” instead of “grade eleven.” I used that basic list on all the books but added book specific words as well. If a book included a tape recorder or if the character listened to CDs I would add “tape” and “CD” to the list for that book. By using the search tool, I was able to remove human error and better find and flag all instances of a dated reference or offensive term.

Some flags were very specific to a particular book. One book had an autistic character and used language that was acceptable when the book was originally published but has since evolved. “Special needs” was one of the terms used that was common in the 2000s but has since been replaced. It is better to be specific about someone’s neurodiversity or disability rather than lumping them together under a term like “special needs” which “stigmatizes that which is different.”<sup>32</sup> Research is continuing to be done to find what language is appropriate when describing autism but from the research already conducted it is clear that “the language that we use has the power both

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31 Rachel Ewing, “‘That’s Crazy’: Why You Might Want to Rethink That Word in Your Vocabulary,” *Penn Medicine* News (Penn Medicine, September 27, 2018), [pennmedicine.org/news/news-blog/2018/september/that-crazy-why-you-might-want-to-rethink-that-word-in-your-vocabulary](https://pennmedicine.org/news/news-blog/2018/september/that-crazy-why-you-might-want-to-rethink-that-word-in-your-vocabulary).

32 “National Center on Disability and Journalism,” National Center on Disability and Journalism (Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication Arizona State University), accessed May 27, 2021, [ncdj.org/style-guide/](https://ncdj.org/style-guide/).

to reflect and to shape people’s perceptions of autism.”<sup>33</sup> A study published about language use by autistic adults, professionals, and parents of autistic children found that the majority of autistic adults preferred disability-first language like “autistic person” rather than person-first language like “person with autism.”<sup>34</sup> They felt that autism is a part of their identity and many autistic adults surveyed “suggested that the use of language that separates a person’s autism from their identity not only undermines the positive characteristics of autism but also perpetuates the notion that autism is an inherently ‘wrong’ way of being.”<sup>35</sup> By looking at how the autistic characters were described in their books, Orca strove to properly represent autistic characters with disability-first language and without language that can “be perceived negatively by young children/adults who have autism and can lead to them believing (unhelpfully) that there is something wrong with them.”<sup>36</sup> Books showing autistic characters need to be accurate and relatable for autistic readers and show all readers the proper way to talk about autism.

Once I read a book, I added flags to a PDF copy of the book and a spreadsheet with notes from all the books read. The spreadsheet included a section to provide insight into whether a book should be reprinted. If there were too many references that were dated or offensive and especially if those were integral to the plot of the book, the book may not be able to be reprinted. If changes could be made to make the story up to date and inclusive, a reader might mark it as able to be reprinted with changes. I worked on sixty-three backlist titles and only one book did not get reprinted.

## **2.2. Editorial Changes**

Tanya Trafford, the editor of the hi-lo series, takes the notes from the reader and selects which changes are made. “My job, after that first review, is going, how much of this is intrinsic to the structure of the book,” said Trafford. “Where [will changes] leave a gaping hole or change the feel as you’re reading the new content and is that worth it?”<sup>37</sup> There is a certain amount of freedom granted because books will be printed in a new format:

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33 Kenny Lorcan et al., “Which Terms Should Be Used to Describe Autism? Perspectives from the UK Autism Community,” *Autism* 20, no. 4 (May 2016): pp. 442-462, doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315588200.

34 Kenny Lorcan et al.

35 Kenny Lorcan et al.

36 Kenny Lorcan et al.

37 Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

“Before...the new design, I had to factor in things like line breaks and reflow and text because we didn’t want to create more work for the designers,” said Trafford.<sup>38</sup> With the text being reflowed into the new ultra-readable format, Trafford has the freedom to remove things; “if it doesn’t have to be there, get rid of it.”<sup>39</sup> Because reprints can be on a tight timeline, some changes are given priority. “If one of the characters says, ‘hey guys’ or ‘guys’ hundreds of times in a story, I’m probably not going to change it out,” said Trafford. “I have to find that balance of our time, our goals of getting them out, the designers having to change everything, the proofreaders having to check everything for reprints, sometimes it’s not worth the trouble.”<sup>40</sup> Of course this is only for smaller changes as Trafford says, “if it’s not causing harm, then I may choose to focus on any more important changes.”<sup>41</sup>

Once Trafford goes through the manuscripts and removes sections or changes out offensive language, the book is sent on to the designer to be typeset. At the same time, Trafford communicates with the authors for approval of the changes made.

### **2.3. Author Approval**

Due to the time constraints of reprints, authors are not as involved as they would be with a new book. Trafford had to find a balance between communicating with the author and keeping the reprint on track. To maintain the faster pace needed for reprints, Trafford makes the edits in the manuscript herself instead of sending notes for the author to make changes as Orca would for a new book. Although this is a faster way to make changes, Trafford still communicates with authors for their approval.

When Trafford reaches out to authors via email, she starts by introducing herself to authors she has not worked with before and outlines the reason for the changes. She makes it clear to authors that Orca is “trying to make sure [the books] continue to appeal to the new readers that you’re getting.”<sup>42</sup> In the same email, she attaches a sample of the changes. “I try to keep it as streamlined as I can,” said Trafford, “but I offer [authors]

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38 Tanya Trafford.

39 Tanya Trafford.

40 Tanya Trafford.

41 Tanya Trafford.

42 Tanya Trafford.

all the options to see everything.”<sup>43</sup> Authors generally have a positive response to the changes. “They are very happy to know that we are still thinking about their books,” said Trafford, “and that they’re still being appreciated by readers.”<sup>44</sup>

## 2.4. What Does This Mean for Readers?

A book published to a general audience may be suitable for readers from age 20-95 whereas middle-grade and young-adult books are targeted at a much smaller age range. The students who read Orca’s hi-lo books twenty years ago are not the same students reading them now. Like the readership, the world has changed between the 2000s and 2020s with technological advancements, movements pushing for inclusivity and diversity, and the evolution of language. With so many changes and a constant audience turnover, it is very likely that older backlist young-adult and middle-grade books will no longer connect with their audiences after an extended period of time. A BookNet Canada study on backlist titles showed that in young-adult books, the frontlist holds around 33% of all sales and backlist titles continue to sell well for between one to ten years, but once a book ages to eleven years or more the sales average only about 6% of total sales.<sup>45</sup> Many of the hi-lo books selected for reprinting fall into the eleven-year-plus category. By updating these books, new readers will be able to connect to the stories and the books will have an increased longevity of backlist sales.

With hi-lo readers, updated content is especially important because the books’ purpose is to be a gateway into reading. Hi-lo readers face barriers to reading like print-based challenges, learning a new language, or finding traditional offerings too difficult. Despite having a lower reading level to support readers, Orca’s hi-lo needed edits to ensure no language caused confusion or was the catalyst for a reader to stop reading. Dated technology might be confusing and unfamiliar language might cause a reader to feel discouraged by a word they don’t understand. “We need to take a look at some [books] that are ten, fifteen years old and make sure that they’re still serving the purpose

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<sup>43</sup> Tanya Trafford.

<sup>44</sup> Tanya Trafford.

<sup>45</sup> Monique Mongeon, “Aged like a Fine Wine: What’s The Ideal Age for a Backlist Title?,” BookNet Canada (BookNet Canada, August 13, 2021), [booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/8/13/aged-like-a-fine-wine-whats-the-ideal-age-for-a-backlist-title](https://booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/8/13/aged-like-a-fine-wine-whats-the-ideal-age-for-a-backlist-title).

which is informing our readers but also making sure that our readers are seeing themselves in our books,” said Trafford.<sup>46</sup>

In recent years, more questions have risen about whether classic children’s literature should be given to children if it contains harmful imagery and depictions of people. In 2021, Dr. Seuss’s estate removed six books from print due to racist content, sparking huge media attention. CBC spoke with Nadia Hohn, a children’s book author and teacher, who shared that, “It’s important for the books in her classroom to affirm students... not make them feel embarrassed or like they have to hide who they are. Children’s books that reinforce negative stereotypes can do the opposite.”<sup>47</sup> In another interview, CBC talked to Lance McCreedy, associate professor for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, who spoke about the decision to remove these books: “I think many people underestimate the depth of the racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist and anti-immigrant representations that really run through so many of the books and curriculum we use in education. We need to discuss them a lot more and confront them.”<sup>48</sup> Schools are where most readers are introduced to hi-lo books and therefore they should serve as a way to show “this is the acceptable way to treat people, this is how you deal with a problem,” said Trafford, “kids are sucking in all that as they’re reading, that’s why I feel it’s important to continue...to ask the question of, is this story still having worth and still having the impact it should and if not what can we do to tweak that?”<sup>49</sup> No child should pick up a book and feel alienated by the negative treatment of characters who are BIPOC, identify as LGBTQ+, or have a disability. Many changes during this process have been to ensure that these books properly represent all different experiences and do not contain content that is harmful for readers.

By looking at the language in these books, Orca is continuing to create contemporary offerings for striving readers that are accurate and relatable. Hi-lo readers already face many barriers to reading and by removing any dated and unfamiliar references, Orca ensures that readers will be better able to enjoy the books without any confusion or frustration over lack of comprehension. In making these changes, Orca is

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<sup>46</sup> Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> “6 Dr. Seuss Books Will No Longer Be Published Due to Racist Imagery,” CBC News (CBC, March 3, 2021), [cbc.ca/news/entertainment/dr-seuss-books-publication-racist-images-1.5933033](https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/dr-seuss-books-publication-racist-images-1.5933033).

<sup>48</sup> “6 Dr. Seuss Books Will No Longer Be Published Due to Racist Images,” CBC Kids News (CBC, March 4, 2021), [cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/six-dr.-seuss-books-will-no-longer-be-published-due-to-racist-images](https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/six-dr.-seuss-books-will-no-longer-be-published-due-to-racist-images).

<sup>49</sup> Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

striving to ensure that these books are vessels that show how the world could be and foster empathy for diverse experiences and stories.



## Chapter 3. Finding Balance in Branding, Accessibility, & Contemporary Design

Hi-lo books are designed to look like trade young-adult and middle-grade books with recognizable hi-lo branding for educators. The balance between individualized book design and hi-lo branding allows students to read books without feeling like an outsider and educators to be able to easily identify books for striving readers. The following chapter explores this balance as well as shows the additional accessibility added by Orca's new ultra-readable format.

### 3.1. The Ultra-Readable Format

Orca created the ultra-readable format to make their hi-lo books more accessible to readers with dyslexia while at the same time maintaining readability for all striving readers. The decision to print books in a more accessible format came down to the question: "if [a book] was more accessible to a child with dyslexia would it become less accessible to other readers?"<sup>50</sup> After research, Ruth Linka, associate publisher of Orca, said, "We found 'no' was the answer."<sup>51</sup> With a format that provides more support for readers with dyslexia, Orca would be able to reach a larger audience with their hi-lo books than if they printed without accessibility considerations. "Most people use the word accessibility to mean visual accessibility either having audio or the navigation of an ebook," said Linka, "We want kids to be able to read books even if they are struggling with their literacy, so we were thinking about accessibility in that way."<sup>52</sup> By making a printed format that was more accessible and inviting for all readers, Orca continues to work towards ensuring that all children have access to a book they can read.

To create this format, Orca needed a font that would support readers with dyslexia. They considered commissioning a font but, in the end, found a font that suited the series and met the accessibility goals during testing.<sup>53</sup> However, finding the font was difficult since personal preference varies among people with dyslexia. "Some people have a good response to more handwritten fonts like comic sans," said designer Ella

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<sup>50</sup> Ruth Linka, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> Ruth Linka.

<sup>52</sup> Ruth Linka.

<sup>53</sup> Ruth Linka.

Collier, “then other people with dyslexia are saying the opposite.”<sup>54</sup> But finding a font that supports all people with dyslexia is only one of the challenges that had to be overcome while creating the ultra-readable format. “If we typeset a 128-page novel in comic sans, we are going to lose out the rest of our audience,” said Ella, which meant walking a tricky line between choosing a supportive font for those with print-based challenges while maintaining an appealing look for all readers.<sup>55</sup> The body font chosen was a serif font with a handwritten feel.<sup>56</sup> Characters such as *a* and *g* are typeset with single story characters in order to look more like a letter printed by hand.<sup>57</sup> Because many of the books contain texting, a sans serif font with a similar handwritten feel differentiates texting from the main body text.

Many studies on dyslexia led to font recommendations like the British Dyslexia Association’s recommendation for “sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Comic Sans, as letters can appear less crowded.”<sup>58</sup> But researchers also investigated spacing of letters and words and their impact on readers with dyslexia. One 2018 study found that participants with dyslexia “benefited from increased letter spacing, whereas no significant effect was observed in typical readers.”<sup>59</sup> The study showed that extra spacing even made difficult font types like italics easier to read.<sup>60</sup> The study also found that much “larger interletter spacing is not helpful” for children without dyslexia.<sup>61</sup> Collier recognized the challenges with spacing as they find that “having a lot of space sometimes [is] a bit more difficult for [them] to read.”<sup>62</sup> With spacing, Collier had to find a “happy balance” to make it approachable for readers with and without print challenges.

The new format also allows for more white space on the page. The books were originally printed at 4.25 inches by 7 inches, but Orca opted for a larger size of 5 inches by 7.5 inches. The larger trim size allows for more space between letters and a larger

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54 Ella Collier, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

55 Ella Collier.

56 Ella Collier, “New Hi-Lo Design Style,” Orca Book Publishers Document, (Accessed September 13, 2021).

57 Ella Collier, “New Hi-Lo Design Style.”

58 “Dyslexia Friendly Style Guide,” British Dyslexia Association (British Dyslexia Association), accessed October 5, 2021, [bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide](https://bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide).

59 Mirela Duranovic, et al., “Influence of Increased Letter Spacing and Font Type on the Reading Ability of Dyslexic Children,” *Annals of Dyslexia* 68 (3) (2018): pp. 218-28, [doi.org/10.1007/s11881-018-0164-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-018-0164-z).

60 Mirela Duranovic, et al.

61 Mirela Duranovic, et al.

62 Ella Collier, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

leading between lines of text. The books are printed on a cream stock which “helps minimize the contrast and glare.”<sup>63</sup>

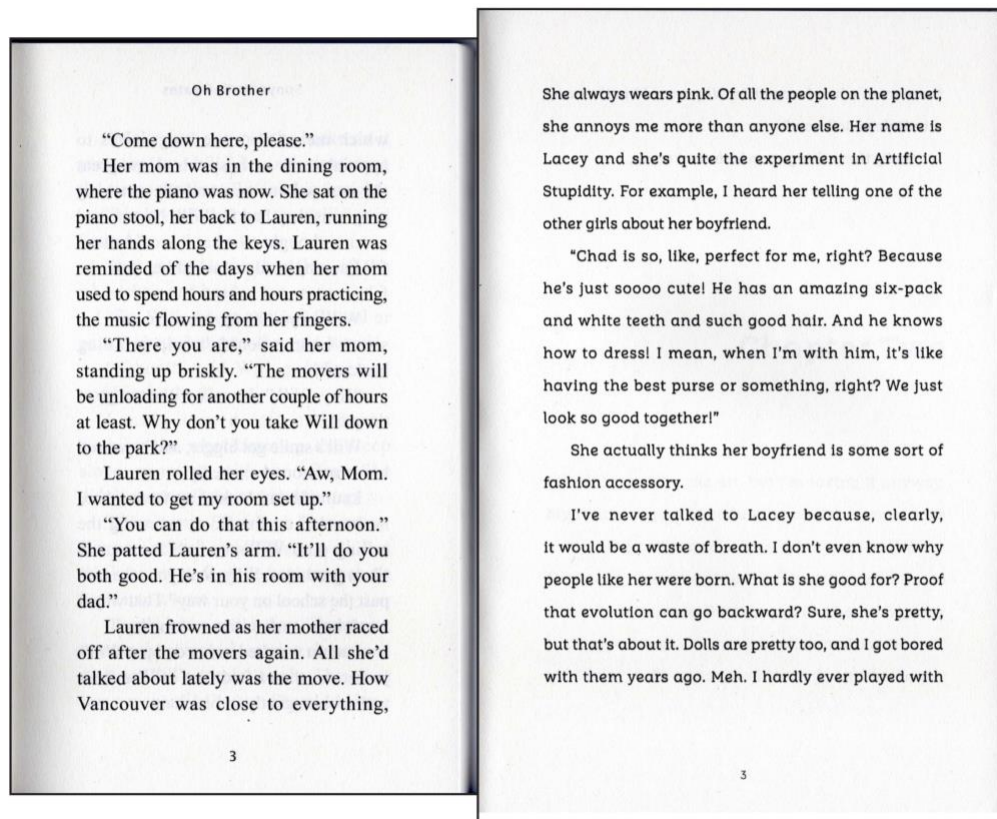


Figure 1: Ultra-Readable Format Comparison of One Page from *Oh Brother* (left) in the Old Hi-Lo Format and One Page from *Mirror Image* (right) in the Ultra-Readable Format

Figure 1 shows the interior of an Orca Currents title printed in the old format (left) and a reprint of a bestselling Orca Currents title in the new ultra-readable format (right). The old format looks similar to a regular middle-grade book. Even though the text is larger than the ultra-readable format, it is tighter packed and looks more daunting to read. The larger trim size of the ultra-readable book makes for more space for the words. The text is more inviting and doesn’t look challenging to read. There is nothing in the ultra-readable format that would make it stand out as something purposefully made easier. No one reading an ultra-readable hi-lo would feel self-conscious if someone looked over their shoulder while they were reading. Overall, this format feels inviting to read while making the reading process easier.

63 Inderjit Deogun, “Orca Book Publishers Redesigns Its Bestselling Lines for Greater Accessibility,” Quill and Quire, June 18, 2021, [quillandquire.com/omni/orca-book-publishers-redesigns-its-bestselling-%E2%80%A8lines-for-greater-accessibility/](https://quillandquire.com/omni/orca-book-publishers-redesigns-its-bestselling-%E2%80%A8lines-for-greater-accessibility/).

### 3.2. Cover Redesign, Individualism, and Branding

The cover design for the Currents and Soundings series must also maintain a delicate balance. These books are marketed and sold primarily to an educational market. Because of that, it is important that the series are recognizable to teachers and librarians. On the other hand, one of the key aspects of the hi-lo genre is that the books are designed to fit the age group reading them. It is important that the books feel like trade young-adult and middle-grade books. “I think one thing about hi-lo books in general, not just the Orca hi-lo, is there’s a bit of a stigma attached to reading them,” said Collier. “They all kind of seem to have this uniform style and I think kids come to recognize that style and maybe associate it with a low reading capacity.”<sup>64</sup> With the cover updates, Collier remarks that Orca is “trying to move away from [uniformity] by offering something that looks a bit more individual.”<sup>65</sup> Figures 2–7 show the evolution of some of the Currents and Soundings’ covers before and after reprints.

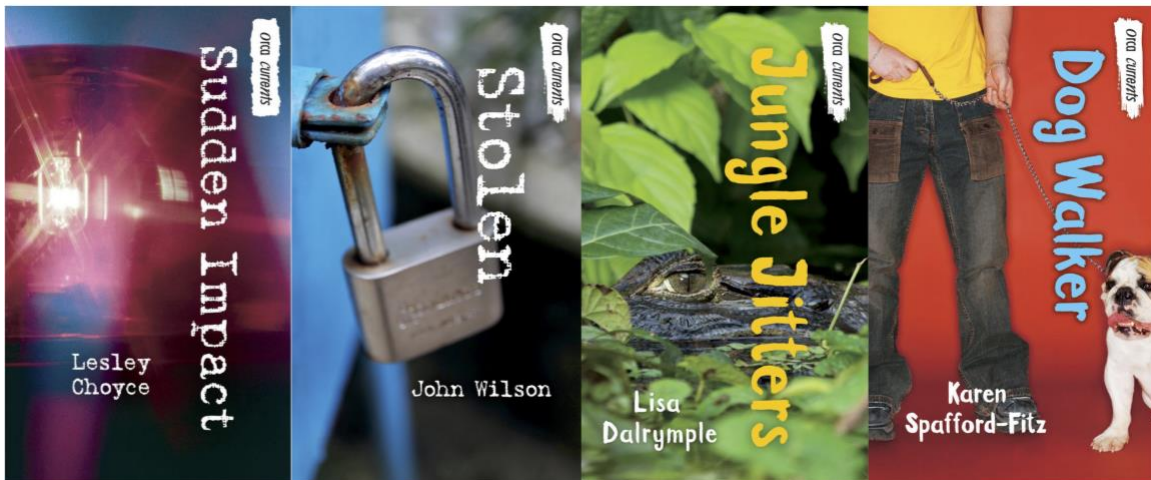


Figure 2: Four Covers from Older Editions of Orca Currents Books

Figure 2 shows the covers for *Sudden Impact*, *Stolen*, *Jungle Jitters*, and *Dog Walker* (left to right) before reprint. Together they show the formulaic quality of the Currents titles before Orca updated the cover design. Each has a background image with a title down the right side of the cover and the Orca Currents logo in the top right.

<sup>64</sup> Ella Collier, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021)

<sup>65</sup> Ella Collier.

The author name placement varies but the fonts used across titles are very similar and interplay between the text and image is minimal.



Figure 3: Four Redesigned Orca Currents Covers for Reprint

Figure 3 shows the updated covers for *Sudden Impact*, *Stolen*, *Jungle Jitters*, and *Dog Walker* (left to right) which are the same books as in Figure 2. The covers in Figure 3 have less consistency across cover designs, giving each book its own identity. The images did not change for all the reprint covers but two of the covers, *Stolen* and *Sudden Impact* (fig 3), changed to images that better represent the story. In *Stolen*, artifacts go missing from a shipwreck off the coast of Australia.<sup>66</sup> By having multiple images on the new cover, there is movement and urgency from the boy running and a connection to the plot with an image of a shipwreck that together represent the book better than an image of a rusted lock. The cover for *Sudden Impact*, a book about a boy who needs a rare blood type transfusion, went from a generic siren to a more specific bag of blood.<sup>67</sup> The new cover has the title on the blood bag which makes for a more interesting interplay between the text and image. *Dog Walker* and *Jungle Jitters* kept the same image as before but with a different text treatment that makes the covers feel less uniform. Although these covers all have a more individual feel, they maintain the Currents logo on the top right where teachers can easily find it.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> John Wilson, *Stolen*, Orca Book Publishers, April 13, 2021, [orcabook.com/Stolen-P5257.aspx](http://orcabook.com/Stolen-P5257.aspx).

<sup>67</sup> Lesley Choice, *Sudden Impact*, Orca Book Publishers, September 22, 2020, [orcabook.com/Sudden-Impact-P4826.aspx](http://orcabook.com/Sudden-Impact-P4826.aspx).

<sup>68</sup> Ella Collier, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).





Figure 4: Three Covers from Older Editions of Orca Soundings Books

Figure 4 shows Orca Soundings covers for *Stuffed*, *Viral*, and *Truth* (left to right) before the updated cover design. Like the Currents covers, the Soundings covers have a single image, the same title placement across all covers (a vertical text treatment on the left), and all covers use the same fonts. Unlike the Currents, Soundings don't have the series logo on the front cover. When updating the covers, Collier found that, "Sometimes the images were very, very outdated: super big pants, humongous skater shoes."<sup>69</sup> *Viral* (fig 4 and fig 5) was one of the many cases where Orca had to update the cover image because of dated subject matter, in this case a flip phone (fig 4).

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69 Ella Collier.



Figure 5: Three Redesigned Orca Soundings Covers for Reprint

Figure 5 shows the updated cover design for *Stuffed*, *Viral*, and *Truth* (left to right), the same books shown in Figure 4. Two of the three titles in Figure 5 have new images, but *Truth* is an example of a cover image that “maybe needed a little bit of photoshopping to change the mood and then adding in a bit of texture.”<sup>70</sup> Collier described the mood of Soundings as “quite a bit darker than the Orca Currents,” which they “try to reflect in the cover design.” With the added texture and grunge, *Truth* (fig 5) fits in better with the overall feel for the series. It is important that both Currents and Soundings look cohesive even though the covers are more individual.<sup>71</sup> Tone is one way that designers maintain a cohesive series look since Soundings are usually darker stories and Currents have lighter subject matter. “It also depends on the book itself,” said Collier. “There’s no sense making a lighthearted fun cover for something that is quite sad or dark.”<sup>72</sup> New covers are put to the test in “Look of the Book” meetings where staff compare new covers to a selection of titles from the same series and make sure they “look like they could be for the same audience.”<sup>73</sup> Other series-wide elements in the new

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70 Ella Collier.

71 Ella Collier.

72 Ella Collier.

73 Ella Collier.

updated covers are clearer in full covers as Orca uses the back cover to help maintain consistency while keeping the front cover more individual.

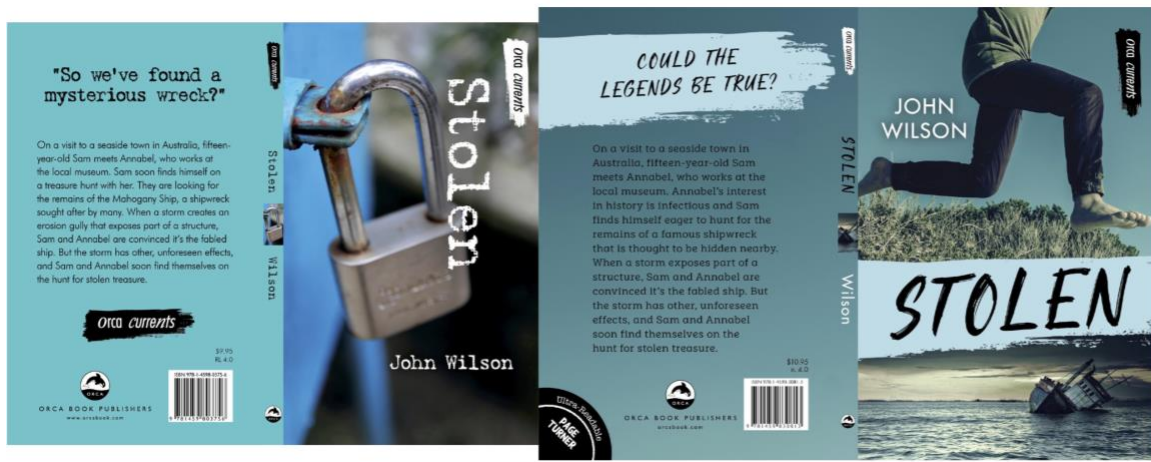


Figure 6: Comparison of *Stolen* Full Cover Before (left) and After (right) Reprint

Figure 6 provides a comparison between *Stolen*'s cover before reprint (left) and *Stolen*'s cover after the design was updated (right). *Stolen*'s old cover matches with the formula used in older cover designs. The tagline font is the same as the title font and below that is the book summary. At the bottom are the Currents and Orca logos with the ISBN. Currents titles had a single colour background for their back cover and some older titles differentiate the tagline or excerpt from the rest of the back cover with font, a dark band at the top (see fig 7), or a paint swoosh like in the newer cover design. In the new covers, the trim size is larger and the summary font is the same as the ultra-readable font used inside. Like the old cover, the title font is used for the tagline but the title font differs across titles to add more individuality. The background of the back cover is still a single colour, but the blue has some variation to add more interest. The Currents logo only appears on the front cover and instead the ultra-readable logo features on the bottom left of the back cover. Because not all of the Currents or Soundings will have the ultra-readable format, this logo is a great way for teachers to see how the book is formatted. The logo says nothing about the format being easier to read for those with print difficulties; instead by adding "Page Turner" the logo could very much be dismissed as just marketing copy for promoting an exciting book. This way, the logo shows that this book has an ultra-readable format to educators and only reveals that the book is a fast, exciting read to those who don't know about the format.





Figure 7: Comparison of *Truth* Full Cover Before (left) and After (right) Reprint

Figure 7 shows a larger shift between an older version of *Truth*'s full cover (left) and the new cover design (right). One of the big changes is the back cover image. The back cover image of a grungy wall that remains consistent across Soundings titles.<sup>74</sup> Unlike the Currents, Soundings don't have the logo on the front, so it is important that logo placement is consistent on the back cover to show teachers and librarians that these books belong to a series. The older cover has a black bar at the top for an excerpt or tagline that is common across many older Currents and Soundings covers. In the newer cover, the tagline is differentiated with a paint splatter that is similar but different from Current's back covers. Like in Currents, the new Soundings cover uses the ultra-readable font for the body text of the book summary and the title font to accent the tagline and first four words of the summary. The full cover balances consistent branding across the series with individualism, so books are not easily identifiable as hi-lo books to anyone other than teachers and librarians.

In updating the cover design for both the Currents and Soundings series, Orca has given these books their own identity. Yet, both series still have a consistent tone across their books and when the covers are placed side by side, they look like they are designed for the same audience. Orca has struck a balance between branding and individuality that will serve both their audiences.

<sup>74</sup> Ella Collier.

### 3.3. What Does This Mean for Audiences?

The cliché that people judge books by their covers is a big factor in many of the design changes for Orca’s hi-lo books. It is extremely important for hi-lo books to look exciting, current, and age appropriate for their audience. Currents and Soundings are accessible books but that should not mean that their audience isn’t getting an excellent story in an excellent package. Orca’s older designs (fig 2 & fig 4) are formulaic, easily recognizable, and could make a reader feel self-conscious. Striving readers want to be reading the same things as their peers, so it is important that these books look like young-adult and middle-grade books rather than formulaic “readers” used to teach children to read. However, hi-lo books need to also be easily recognizable for teachers and librarians. Orca’s consistent branding across Currents and Soundings books allows for a more individualistic design while also having markers for educators to easily be able to find these books. Even in the approach to the ultra-readable logo, Orca found a balance between providing information to help librarians and teachers support striving readers while ensuring readers don’t feel embarrassed to read these books. Leslie Bootle, marketing director at Orca, describes her hopes for the new ultra-readable format and cover design: “The hope is that this new format might remove any other little barriers [a reader] might have. There’s a chance that they may have a language-based learning difficulty and so, this new format ideally would help to alleviate that without making the books look like primers, baby books. We want them to look like something a teenager might be okay spotted reading, be okay carrying down the hallway.”<sup>75</sup> Design has been an essential part of updating these books for readers to remove any barriers to reading the text. Through contemporary and individual book design, Orca’s hi-lo will help foster new readers and alleviate the shame that can be associated with reading below reading level.

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<sup>75</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

## Chapter 4. A Quest for Book Data, Institutional Knowledge, & New Sales Life

Once books are updated, they get a new ISBN, more comprehensive data, and are treated like new books by the sales team. The new ultra-readable format gives marketing a chance to promote the updated titles and inform educators how the ultra-readable hi-lo books support striving readers. Since teachers and librarians introduce striving readers to hi-lo books, Orca's hi-lo books are sold primarily in the educational market. This chapter focuses on the marketing and sales of the Currents and Soundings reprints and how the additional information gathered during the reprint process helped the marketing and sales teams.

### 4.1. Marketing and Selling Ultra-Readable Reprints

The reprinted hi-lo books are not treated like straight reprints or new editions by marketing and sales. Due to the updated content and format, these books are given new ISBNs. The new ISBN means that these reprints are considered new books in the data feed and warrant more attention than a straight reprint would. "The sales team will present [these reprints] as though they are new books at all their presentations to accounts," said Leslie Bootle, Orca's marketing director. "So, in terms of the sales team, they get a whole fresh set of eyes" on these books.<sup>76</sup> The marketing team rely on Orca's brand awareness in the educational market. "We let [educators] know that we have this growing list of books now in this ultra-readable format," said Bootle.<sup>77</sup> Unlike new editions, these reprints are not marketed as individual books. They are presented together in catalogues on pages that focus on presenting the series and promoting the new ultra-readable format.<sup>78</sup>

Sarah Hartley, the educational sales manager at Orca, sees the ultra-readable format as a great sales feature for all readers. "[Kids] can get turned off a book if it looks too hard to read," said Hartley, "Graphic novels and comic books are so popular with kids, and pictures aside, I think the other reason they're popular is they're not

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<sup>76</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>77</sup> Leslie Bootle.

<sup>78</sup> "Orca Book Publishers Fall 2021 - August to December" (Orca Book Publishers, 2021), [orcabook.com/assets/PDFs/CDNCatalogFall2021.pdf](http://orcabook.com/assets/PDFs/CDNCatalogFall2021.pdf), 44.

intimidating to read.”<sup>79</sup> The ultra-readable format is a sales feature but only if teachers know what it means for a book to be “ultra-readable.” Informing educators about the features of this new format is an important part of selling these books. As well as highlighting features during sales pitches, Orca included information about the ultra-readable format in their educator newsletter, provided informational flyers with their orders to schools, promoted the ultra-readable format with ads in magazines like *SLJ* and *Booklist*, and sent out press-releases resulting in an article in *Quill & Quire*.<sup>80</sup>

Another way Orca sells hi-lo books is in bundled collections. In the past, books have sold in collections like “Essentials” and “New Titles Pack,” but now the sales team is planning to group books based on subject matter. Educators often look for books that cover certain subjects and by building collections thematically, the sales team will be able to match educators to book bundles covering the topics they are looking for. Themed collections might include books grouped together that cover topics like social emotional learning, social justice, or bullying. These themed collections would not have been possible without the additional book information gathered during the reprint process. With more information on backlist titles, Orca can bundle books in new ways that would not have been possible without detailed plot summaries and new keywords.

## **4.2. Growing Data and Institutional Knowledge**

When Orca started reprinting the backlist in the ultra-readable format, they ran into issues with a lack of in-house knowledge about the books. “We realized that due to the completely normal staff turnover you have over the [twenty] years that these books had been around we didn’t have as much institutional knowledge about what was in the books,” said Bootle.<sup>81</sup> This sparked the editorial process discussed in Chapter Two but also led to seizing the opportunity to grow keywords, add content flags, record detailed plot summaries to help new staff, and use knowledge gathered to grow discoverability.

The readers who provided editorial suggestions also provided new keywords, updates to marketing copy, and detailed book summaries. This vital book information helps to update backlist book data and increase discoverability. “For the first decade or

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<sup>79</sup> Sarah Hartley, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 10, 2021).

<sup>80</sup> Leslie Bootle, “Re: MPub Project Report Feedback,” E-Mail, (November 22, 2021).

<sup>81</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

so of these books being in existence, we never needed more comprehensive descriptions, or keywords, multiple BISACs, thema, etc. because they weren't industry-standard," said Bootle.<sup>82</sup> Revisiting these books pushed Orca to create stronger data for backlist titles to ensure that all of their books have data that meet industry standards.<sup>83</sup> "We do know that better data—and by better, I mean more comprehensive, more specific, more targeted, more on track with terms used in the industry—does get our books more widely discovered," said Bootle.<sup>84</sup> "A lot of these old books, we only had three to five keywords."<sup>85</sup> With more keywords, not only have books gained better ONIX data for external searchability, but keywords have also helped with searchability in internal databases. If someone calls Orca and asks for all the hi-lo books that are mysteries or set in Vancouver, "someone could do a keyword search and get a far better... list based on that than what they would have been able to pull before" says Bootle, allowing for faster sales and better customer service.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to keywords, the editorial readers kept track of content flags in books such as language, drugs, drinking, sexual references, and violence. "I never think that we need to be censoring books or authors, but just that we need to know what's in them at a glance," says Hartley.<sup>87</sup> These books serve many audiences and by knowing about the subject matter, teachers can avoid causing harm. For example, a student who immigrated to North America from a war-torn country might find some instances of violence triggering to them. Hartley also noted that "these books are really appealing to younger readers who aren't necessarily the intended audience" and it is important educators know if the books are appropriate for younger readers. Drinking and drugs may not be an appropriate subject for someone in grade three who is interested in books with more mature subject matter.

To sell books, Orca staff need to have knowledge about the books on their list. With a twenty-year-old backlist, the internal knowledge of the hi-lo backlist was minimal before the start of this project. In the summer of 2021, Sarah Hartley joined the staff at Orca and benefited from edits, summaries, and marketing notes for all of these reprinted

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82 Leslie Bootle, "Re: MPub Project Report Feedback," E-Mail, (November 22, 2021).

83 Leslie Bootle, "Re: MPub Project Report Feedback."

84 Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

85 Leslie Bootle.

86 Leslie Bootle.

87 Sarah Hartley, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 10, 2021).

titles. “I have been trying to read the books,” said Hartley, “but it’s a really extensive list. So, [the notes] gave me that go to knowledge right away.”<sup>88</sup> When Hartley didn’t have the information she needed on a sales call, she was able to use the notes to find books that fit with the client’s criteria before she had fully been able to familiarize herself with the whole backlist. These spreadsheet notes also sparked new ideas for Hartley on how to organize book information to make it easier to find and group books. Books are generally organized by title or publication date, but Hartley considered building a grid organized by theme.<sup>89</sup> This grid would allow Hartley to better connect educators to books on a particular subject. This kind of internal document would not be possible without the addition of new and more comprehensive keywords. Better book data has also increased discoverability and allowed for new theme-based avenues to market books. Although book information was not the original purpose of this reprint project, the information gathered has greatly benefitted Orca’s sales and marketing processes.

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88 Sarah Hartley.

89 Sarah Hartley.

## Chapter 5. Project Takeaways

The previous chapters laid out the process of selecting backlist hi-lo titles for reprint, the stages of editorial and design work completed, and how the additional book information benefitted marketing and sales processes. The following chapter contains information about the key benefits of this project for Orca, how some of these benefits would apply to other publishers, as well as some considerations for other publishers who want to review backlist titles.

### 5.1. Project Considerations

Due to the editorial and design work needed to update the Currents and Soundings' backlists, each book cost more than a straight reprint. Ruth Linka, associate publisher at Orca, estimated that the time differential was three hours in-house for a straight reprint versus closer to thirty hours for the ultra-readable reprints.<sup>90</sup> The amount of time and the cost to reprint varied from book to book, but Linka said the cost for each reprint was approximately 75% of that of a new book.<sup>91</sup> "We decide carefully which books we put into [this ultra-readable reprint process]," said Linka. "We feel that if we're doing a reprint we're essentially saying to the world we believe in this book... we're investing X number of thousands of dollars to reprint it, therefore you should use it in your school and we feel we can only do that wholeheartedly if it meets our current standard."<sup>92</sup> In addition to the extra time and cost, Orca was not capable of doing this project in-house. "We knew that it was beyond the capacity of any of our current staff," said Leslie Bootle, marketing director. "The ability to go as deep into this project as [we] did was because we had [interns]. If we didn't have someone who did [the initial read and notes] then we probably would have been more surface."<sup>93</sup> With additional costs and more staff needed, this kind of project may not be plausible for some smaller publishers. For Orca, though, the benefits outweighed the costs.

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<sup>90</sup> Ruth Linka, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>91</sup> Ruth Linka.

<sup>92</sup> Ruth Linka.

<sup>93</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

## 5.2. Key Benefits

Orca's work updating their hi-lo backlist resulted in many benefits including better discoverability, upholding Orca's mandate, and supporting more readers. Orca's ultra-readable reprints show the value of updating backlist titles to give them new life in the market. Orca's hi-lo books have crossed into new markets because of their individualistic design approach. New Currents titles that follow the same design principals discussed in Chapter Three made it onto CBC book lists including "35 Canadian middle-grade books to watch for in fall 2021"<sup>94</sup> and "28 Canadian middle-grade books coming out in spring 2021."<sup>95</sup> These lists show that Orca's hi-lo are great stories on their own and the new covers have allowed these books to fit in on lists with other middle-grade books. Although they are still part of a series, Orca's hi-lo books can stand on their own, reach new audiences, and receive recognition in mainstream media and sales channels in ways they have not been able to before.

Not only do Orca's ultra-readable reprints have a stronger design and better discoverability, they are also more accessible for all readers. Orca has been making strides to publish accessibly and this ultra-readable format will make print books more accessible to readers with print-based challenges like dyslexia. "The library must be filled, I don't know, 80% with books that are in regular fonts and don't take into consideration those readers," said Linka. These books are for "that kid who goes into the library and maybe is feeling shy or awkward and isn't sure what to do. And then this world opens up to them by getting a book and seeing that there are books for them."<sup>96</sup> The language in Orca's hi-lo books has always been maintained at a supportive reading level but by ensuring content is up-to-date, the books will not have dated language that could be confusing for striving readers. These books are exciting and are intended to be an accessible first step into reading, so the last thing a hesitant reader needs is a reference that gives them a reason to put the book down. "[These changes] will benefit [striving readers] by helping to casually address and remove any of the other barriers

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94 "35 Canadian Middle-Grade Books to Watch for in Fall 2021 | CBC Books," CBC Books (CBC, September 22, 2021), [cbc.ca/books/35-canadian-middle-grade-books-to-watch-for-in-fall-2021-1.6157978](https://cbc.ca/books/35-canadian-middle-grade-books-to-watch-for-in-fall-2021-1.6157978).

95 "28 Canadian Middle-Grade Books Coming out in Spring 2021," CBC Books (CBC, March 26, 2021), [cbc.ca/books/28-canadian-middle-grade-books-coming-out-in-spring-2021-1.5962503](https://cbc.ca/books/28-canadian-middle-grade-books-coming-out-in-spring-2021-1.5962503).

96 Ruth Linka, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).



they might have to reading,” says Bootle.<sup>97</sup> By making editorial changes to the books, removing offensive language, updating dated references, and formatting books with accessible features, Orca’s hi-lo series will be an exciting and supportive first step into reading for striving readers.

Some of the Currents and Soundings’ backlist titles have been in print for twenty years and by making editorial, design, and data updates it is possible that reprinted titles will remain viable backlist titles for another twenty years. The cost of ultra-readable reprints may be closer to the cost of a new book, but unlike with new titles, Orca knows that these books have a good sales track record and will continue to sell. The new ISBNs means the books will be pitched as new titles to educators and get new data entries that will garner more attention in the market. The added attention will likely create more sales and bring these reprints to the attention of new audiences in addition to audiences who already know and love the Orca Currents and Soundings series.

As an educational publisher, Orca is a trusted source for educators. To maintain that trust, it is important that all of Orca’s titles meet with their mandate to publish inclusively. Every child should see themselves in the books they read and be supported in their reading regardless of needing accessible formats, never having read a book, or reading below grade level. To make that a reality, Orca put their hi-lo backlist through editorial and design changes to make sure every book is supportive and up to date. By ensuring that books meet and exceed current cultural standards, these books will not spread language and stereotypes that are harmful and can perpetuate hate against marginalized communities. In staying true to their mandate, Orca will fulfill their promise to readers and educators as well as continue to build a better future. As Orca says in their mandate: “Providing young people with exposure to diversity through reading creates a more compassionate world.”<sup>98</sup>

### **5.3. Why Publishers Should Update their Backlists**

Orca’s hi-lo reprint project shows the wide-ranging benefits of updating backlist titles. Hopefully other publishers can learn from Orca even if their only take-away is an awareness for how time affects the backlist. Language changes, what is acceptable

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<sup>97</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>98</sup> “About Us,” Orca Book Publishers, accessed September 8, 2021, [orcabook.com/About.aspx](http://orcabook.com/About.aspx).

subject matter changes, the needs of readers evolve, and publishers have an obligation to serve readers and promote works that reflect the world's diversity and evolution. Researchers are continuing to study accessible formats. By being aware of the research, Orca increased the accessibility of their hi-lo books with an ultra-readable format that will support even more readers. In terms of searchability and internal knowledge, Orca gained more comprehensive data about backlist titles and can use that information for marketing and sales. In a world dominated by online retailers, discoverability is extremely important. By filling gaps in backlist book data, publishers can greatly improve discoverability and keep the backlist selling.

Publishers should think about the subject matter in their books and whether it is still acceptable to be reprinted. Social media has made it easier than ever for readers to share their opinions about books and bring to light subject matter that is not acceptable. In 2021, there have been many media storms about books including Elin Hilderbrand's book *Golden Girl* which will be reprinted without a line of dialogue that references Anne Frank.<sup>99</sup> In the children's publishing sphere, content becomes even more important. Children absorb what they read and if books present a world that is accepting and fosters empathy between people, it is likely that our world will be better for it. Lance McCready, associate professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, told CBC, "When a child learns to read, and those reading materials contain stereotypical images, and there isn't an opportunity for them to actually interact with people or groups they're reading about, then that becomes how they see those people."<sup>100</sup> If publishers take the time to properly represent all people regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, or disability, then more children will see themselves properly represented in the books they read and at the same time, learn about other people's experiences.

If publishers can put numbers aside and really think about the books they are reprinting, they might gain a new perspective into their backlist. Publishers should ask questions like: Does this backlist title meet our current standards as a publisher? Does

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99 Alex Green, "Readers Angered over Anne Frank Reference in New Hilderbrand Novel," Publishers Weekly (Publishers Weekly, June 3, 2021), [publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/86562-readers-angered-over-anne-frank-reference-in-new-hilderbrand-novel.html](https://publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/86562-readers-angered-over-anne-frank-reference-in-new-hilderbrand-novel.html).

100 "6 Dr. Seuss Books Will No Longer Be Published Due to Racist Images," CBC Kids News (CBC, March 4, 2021), [cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/six-dr.-seuss-books-will-no-longer-be-published-due-to-racist-images](https://cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/six-dr.-seuss-books-will-no-longer-be-published-due-to-racist-images).

this story still have value? Could this book be harmful to a reader? And, Can we stand behind this book for years to come? By asking these questions, publishers can make decisions that go beyond whether a title is financially viable to be reprinted. If a book serves a publisher's mandate and can stand up to current societal standards, then it is a book worth reprinting because it will continue to be of value to readers.

## Conclusion

Orca Book Publishers have published hi-lo books since 2002. In their quest for more accessible books, they began transitioning their Orca Currents and Orca Soundings backlists to their new ultra-readable format. They realized that many of the backlist titles were dated in the wake of increased competition in the hi-lo market, language evolution, and diversity and inclusion movements. To be able to promote these titles as new books in a new format, Orca began a project to update all aspects of the books during the reprint process.

Orca made editorial changes to ensure that language was up-to-date and didn't cause harm or frustrate readers. These books are already accessible in their reading level, but editorial changes removed any other barrier in the content that might cause a striving reader to stop reading. In design, the ultra-readable format made reading the text easier for those with print-based challenges while at the same time looking like a trade young-adult or middle-grade book. Walking a balance between series consistency and individuality, Orca managed to give these books their own identity while also making them recognizable for educators. They updated covers to look less like formulaic "readers" and more like the other books in the library so hi-lo readers can read the books without feeling embarrassed or ashamed.

We have an "obligation to new readers and new generations," said Tanya Trafford, hi-lo editor. Trafford believes strongly in the importance of updating content because she notices the "higher generosity" in her children's generation. Trafford feels like this generosity and acceptance is "tenuous" when hate and division can so easily find their way back into society.<sup>101</sup> Looking at these books "has enabled us to do better and put better things out there," said Leslie Bootle, marketing director.<sup>102</sup> "We take our role pretty seriously. If we're putting books into schools, we want them to have values that we stand behind," Bootle continued. "Content that was socially acceptable eight years ago may not be anymore," and being able to change that has been extremely important to Orca.<sup>103</sup> Children absorb what they read and if books present a world where

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<sup>101</sup> Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

<sup>102</sup> Leslie Bootle, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 13, 2021).

<sup>103</sup> Leslie Bootle.

characters of all backgrounds and experiences are treated with acceptance, it may go a long way into teaching them to accept and empathize with people different than themselves. Readers who do identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or have a disability will also be able to see themselves presented in a way that is honest and representative of their experience without inaccurate language and harmful stereotypes.

“We’re going to the trouble of putting [these books] into a new format,” said Trafford, “That’s a statement.”<sup>104</sup> In making that statement, Orca is saying that they believe in the book, it meets their mission to publish inclusively, and it is a story that has worth for readers. In this process, Orca has made accessible, inclusive books that better serve the hi-lo audience. With a new ISBN and more keywords, the books will be more discoverable on online shops and the sales team members have another opportunity to pitch them to educators.

Overall, this process has allowed Orca to make sure that the books they are putting out into the world are ones that fit with their values. They are maintaining the trust they have built with educators by only publishing books that fit with their mandate. By spending the extra money to update these books, Orca is increasing the longevity of their bestselling backlist titles. They are removing any references or books that could be harmful to a child and therefore, putting into practice their mandate and striving to build a more empathetic world through their books.

For readers, this work has made more accessible and contemporary hi-lo offerings that look and feel more like the books their peers are reading. When they open the book, the extra space from the ultra-readable format will make the pages less daunting. With a font that is more friendly to all readers, those with print-based challenges will have an easier and more enjoyable time reading. With libraries filled with books that don’t support all readers, these hi-lo books serve as an inclusive gateway into reading. Middle-grade and young-adult audiences are constantly changing, and publishers have an obligation to new readers to provide them with books that fit their experiences, show diverse perspectives, and are accepting of our differences. With the changes Orca has made, they can be confident that a hi-lo reader can pick up any one of their Currents or Soundings books without worrying about being alienated by their

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<sup>104</sup> Tanya Trafford, personal interview by author, transcript, (September 14, 2021).

peers, not being able to understand the language used, or having difficulties reading the text because of hard-to-decipher fonts. The only thing readers will be thinking about while reading is what happens next.

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