

Isness_vs_Aboutness

0:00

Welcome to LCGFT training Isness versus Aboutness.

0:05

We will discuss isness, what a resource is, and aboutness, what a resource is about.

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The learning objective is to understand the difference between what a resource is and what it is about.

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We will start with an example to explain how to determine a resources aboutness.

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This will be followed by a brief history of Dr. Martha Yee's contribution to the understanding of genre form terms.

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Then we will revisit the example, but this time we will determine the resource's isness.

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After this, we'll look at one more example.

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Lastly, we'll review some common problems when trying to determine what a resource is and what it is about.

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We'll also discuss the problem of using LC Subject Headings as a substitute for LC Genre Form Terms.

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When cataloging, it is important to remember the distinction between between the two controlled vocabularies.

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In the example shown in this video, I present the featured resources covers.

1:02

This is in order to keep this training brief and completely focused on Isness and aboutness.

1:07

We know that examining a resource takes time and includes looking at much more than the cover.

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When we have a resource that needs cataloging, we provide description and subject analysis.

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In order to assign subjects to a resource.

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The first question we ask is what is this about?

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Let's look at our first example.

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This is an image of a comic book cover.

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The title on the cover is Jackie Robinson.

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Jackie Robinson played first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers and most notably, was the first African American to play in the major leagues.

1:41

Besides depicting an image of Jackie, there is an inset of a player sliding onto base and a description of its contents, indicating it's a special issue about Jackie Robinson's experience at the Dodgers training camp.

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Some Library of Congress Subject Headings that we might use are African American baseball players, rookie baseball players, spring training qualified by baseball.

2:04

Before we revisit the Jackie Robinson example, it will be helpful to take a moment for a short history lesson which will further equip us to identify the essence of our example resource.

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In 1988, Dr. Martha Yee, noted cataloging scholar, compiled a standardized list of terms and cross references for genres and forms for moving image materials.

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Yee's standardized list, entitled Image Materials Genre Terms, filled a gap left by LCSH and other controlled vocabularies dedicated to specialty topics.

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Dr. Yee's husband Yeu-Wei made an amusing doodle called Kitty's Vocabulary.

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Like many others,

2:47

Mr. Yee was baffled by the difference between a subject heading and a genre form heading.

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Dr. Yee enlightened him.

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This is attested in the description he wrote below.

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The doodle of Kitty drawing by Yeu-Wei Yee, made circa 1980, after his wife had explained to him the difference between a topical subject heading and a genre form heading.

3:09

3:09

Mr. Yee has given an example of when a fish is a subject and when a fish is just a fish.

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The top drawer of the file cabinet contains file folders with pictures of fish.

3:22

What are the pictures about?

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Put differently, what is the subject of the pictures?

3:28

The subject is, unsurprisingly, fish.

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The lower drawer of the file cabinet contains a fish.

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It is a fish.

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Which do you think Kitty will want?

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Our very short history is over, so let's look again at the Jackie Robinson comic book.

3:45

What is this?

3:47

It's a comic book.

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The LCGFT vocabulary includes 'comics' qualified by 'graphic works'.

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It also includes 'sports comics'.

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What else?

4:00

Recall that our resource is a special issue in the series of the Jackie Robinson comic books.

4:06

We can use the LC Genre Form Term 'special issues' qualified by 'serial publications'.

4:13

We can also consider using the LCGFT 'biographies' because the comic is about a real person, not a fictional one.

4:21

What is this about?

4:23

To answer this question, I've provided the title in Arabic and a translation of the title which tells us that this is a study by Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Haim on a commentary made by Ahmad al Shafari of Janeji on a work by Zakaria al Ansari about algebraic equality and inequality of functions.

4:47

I should note that I used the term title loosely because what I'm calling the title is the description of the work that appears on the first leaf, which you can see [here](#).

4:57

The work was written in the 15th century, and the manifestation of this work was transcribed by Taha Youssef in 1888.

5:06

Subject headings we might use to describe what this work is about are 'functional equations' and 'algebra'.

5:14

Now we'll tackle the Isness question.

5:16

What is this?

5:18

Recall that the transcriber of the work, Taha Yusuf, wrote this by hand in 1888.

5:24

It is beautifully written, with the script fitting perfectly within red double borders.

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It could easily be mistaken for a printed book.

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However, it is not a printed book.

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This is a manuscript.

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LCGFT includes the terms 'manuscript'.

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It is also a commentary.

5:42

LCGFT includes the term 'commentaries', so our LCGFT terms are 'manuscripts' and 'commentaries'.

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Before we end, I want to highlight common problems when determining what LCSH and LCGFT to use in your record.

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Sometimes a resource about a topic might have examples or illustrations which can cause topic genre confusion.

6:07

For instance, a resource about the history of baseball cards would most likely have a lot of visual images of baseball cards to accompany the text like the one presented here.

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There is a subject heading for 'baseball cards'.

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This is the correct heading to assign.

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Here is a different scenario where we see 3 baseball cards which are not part of a book, but individual items in the Benjamin K. Edwards Collection and the Topps Baseball card collection.

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The LCSH 'baseball cards' is not the correct heading to assign because these are not about baseball cards, they are baseball cards.

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In the LCGFT vocabulary, 'trading cards' is the established term that's used instead of 'baseball cards'.

6:53

Keep in mind that there are some differences in terminology between LCSH and LCGFT.

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If there is a subject heading for a form or genre, before you use it in your record, remember that if you were describing what a resource is, you need to use LCGFT.

7:10

I hope you feel confident about distinguishing between a resource's isness and its aboutness.

7:15

That is what a resource is and what it is about.

7:19

Thank you for joining this training.

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If you have questions, please e-mail us at genreform@loc.gov.