

# Neutrality Is Not An Option

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Book Bans, “Culture Wars,” and Advocating for the Library



By Kelly Jensen  
Wild Wisconsin Winter Web  
Conference, January 2024  
<http://tinyurl.com/wi-web-2024>



# Who I Am

- Editor at Book Riot (bookriot.com), including writing and editing the weekly Censorship News/Literary Activism Newsletter (literaryactivism.substack.com)
- Former public librarian in Wisconsin and Illinois
- Author and editor of 3 acclaimed and award-winning YA anthologies
- Currently a practicum student in clinical mental health counseling

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- [stackedthoughts.substack.com](https://stackedthoughts.substack.com)



# What We'll Cover

1

Who are the book banners  
(& why do they insist they don't ban books?)

2

Preparing for and responding to challenges

3

Engaging citizens and protecting library  
workers



# 01

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## Who Is Banning Books?



# Why Books? Why Now?

- “Reopen the schools” shifted to anti-masking debates shifted to anti-vaccination debates led to “parental rights”
- Post 2020 election, right-wing groups found ways to give their voice—and money—to censorship efforts
- Ongoing rhetoric around “Marxist” “government” schools meant to destabilize public institutions, with an end goal of public funding for private education.

Books are a very easy tool because they require time and effort to read, and cherry-picking passages as evidence can appear good enough evidence. Create panic --> gain power --> own the outrage cycle

[Read more here.](#)



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread. At the top right, there are four circles, the first of which is purple. The main tweet is from Christopher F. Rufo (@realchrisrufo) dated Mar 15, 2021. The text of the tweet reads: "We have successfully frozen their brand—'critical race theory'—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category." Below the text are icons for replies (117), retweets (377), likes (928), and a share icon. Below this is a reply from the same user, Christopher F. Rufo, which says: "The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think 'critical race theory.' We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans." At the bottom of the screenshot, it says "3:17 PM · Mar 15, 2021 · Twitter Web App" and "66 Retweets 193 Quote Tweets 522 Likes".

# “We’re Not Banning Books”



## Are you trying to get these books banned?

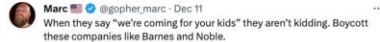
We do **not** support 'banning' books. First and foremost, our mission is to inform parents on what is in these books being made available to children in schools. Parents can use this information to provide the proper guidance to children reading any of these books. Parents can also use this information to individually, or through groups representing their interests, engage with school boards to determine what works should be made available to their children while under the custodial care of their schools. We fully support both of these use cases, though we are not directly engaged in the latter. Any books that may be excluded from school libraries would still be available in public libraries or in stores for interested students to procure with parental consent.

itsnotabookban.com

## Are You Being Told This Is An Attack on 'To Kill A Mockingbird'?

## Are You Hearing Others Being Called "Book Banners"?

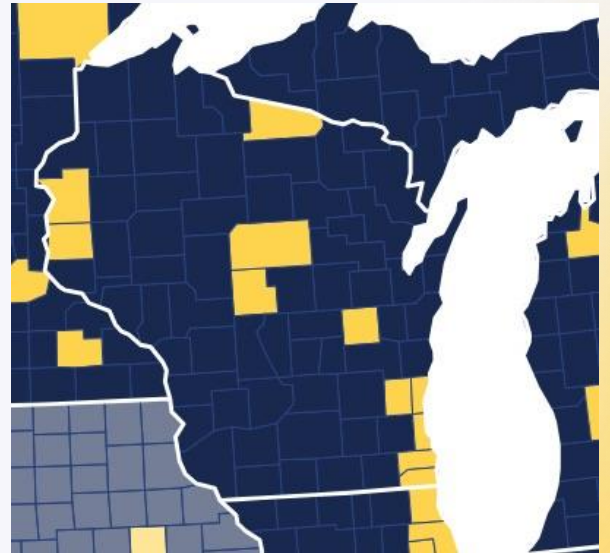
## You Should Be Upset...

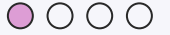


# Moms For Liberty

- “Biggest” players in the book banning game
- 200 chapters, 40 states, 100,000+ members
- Operate on the county level

Wisconsin chapters: Polk, St. Croix, Vilas, Marathon, Wood, Winnebago, Washington, Ozaukee, Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha





# Moms For Liberty

- It only takes 10 “liberty minded” people to form a chapter.
- No requirements for a chapter other than to show up for meetings.
- Active omission of information fuels their success
- Their review system, BookLooks, is entering school systems nationwide & actively cited by media as though it is a legitimate review source.

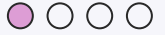


# BookLooks.org [BookLook.Info]

- “Review” database used to distribute biased information about “inappropriate” books.
- Uses “UBC” ratings which amounts to counting curse words, “sexual” scenes, religious beliefs
- Group insists that it is not theirs, but the receipts are there.

Profanity/Derogatory	Count
Ass	9
Bitch	10
Clit	2
Cock	9
Cunt	2
Dick	8
Dyke	1
Fag	1
Fuck	47
Goddamn	3
Piss	1
Pussy	4
Queer	7
Shit	11

The naughty word count from Roxane Gay's "Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture." It's rated 4, meaning no one under 18 should access it.



# BookLooks.org [BookLook.Info]

## Do you perform the full "Miller Test" for obscenity for each work?

We are not determining if a work, as a whole, is obscene, per the legal definition. Our rating system gives a recommendation for the level of parental guidance or action based on the work as a whole. Suffice it to say, most works we rate as "No Minors" (4) or "Aberrant Content" (5) would likely be considered obscene by most standards, but that is not what we are determining.

Some astute critics have opined on the fact our definition for "obscene" mirrors the definition from the Miller test but leaves out the wording "taken as a whole." This is because we are only applying the word "obscene" to instances contained within the work (evaluated in context), not the work as a whole. Again, our rating system is not evaluating obscenity (in the legal sense) for the overall work. This should not be misunderstood to construe that we do not evaluate the work as a whole when we assign a rating- we most assuredly do.

**TLDR:** We do everything one would do to perform a Miller test, evaluating all "obscene" instances in context and taking the work as a whole. We **don't** make a determination of the legal "obscenity" status of the work as a whole because lawyers are expensive. We **do** make a determination of where the work as a whole (with everything evaluated in context) lands in our rating scale. We also offer our opinion that anything with a 4 or 5 on our scale would likely be determined to be "obscene" in the eyes of the law.



# BookLooks.org [BookLook.Info]

Rating ↓	Title	Author ↑
5	Lucky	Alice Sebold
5	Push	Sapphire
5	Sold	Patricia McCormick
5	TRIANGLES	Ellen Hopkins
5	Tricks	Ellen Hopkins
5	YOU: A NOVEL	Caroline Kepnes
4	SEX PLUS: LEARNING, LOVING, AND ENJOYING YOUR BODY	Laci Green
4	SEX IS A FUNNY WORD	Cory Silverberg and Fiona Smyth
4	BREATHLESS	Jennifer Niven
4	A COURT OF MIST AND FURY	Sarah J. Maas
4	A Court of Silver Flames	Sarah J. Maas
4	BREATHLESS	Jennifer Niven
4	Crank	Ellen Hopkins
4	Damsel	Eiana Arnold
4	Forever...	Judy Bloom
4	INFANDOUS	Eiana K. Arnold
4	LAST NIGHT AT THE TELEGRAPH CLUB	Malinda Lo
4	Red Hood	Eiana Arnold
4	The Haters	Jesse Andrews
4	THE INFINITE MOMENT OF US	Lauren Myracle
4	THE NOWHERE GIRLS	Amy Reed
4	This Book Is Gay	Juno Dawson
4	Tilt	Ellen Hopkins

4	WHAT GIRLS ARE MADE OF	Elena K. Arnold
4	A Court of Thorns and Roses	Sarah J. Maas
4	A Court of Frost and Starlight	Sarah J. Maas
4	A Court of Wings and Ruin	Sarah J. Maas
4	Empire of Storms	Sarah J. Maas
4	House of Earth and Blood	Sarah J. Maas
4	The Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini
4	Milk and Honey	Rupi Kaur
4	Jesus Land: A Memoir	Julia Scheeres
4	People Kill People	Ellen Hopkins
4	Beautiful	Amy Reed
4	Living Dead Girl	Elizabeth Scott
4	The Perks of Being a Wallflower	Stephen Chbosky
4	All Boys Aren't Blue	George M. Johnson
4	House of Sky and Breath	Sarah J. Maas
4	Slaughterhouse-Five	Kurt Vonnegut
4	Normal People	Sally Rooney
4	The V-Word	Amber Keyser

# BookLooks.org [BookLook.Info]

## LOLITA



*Lolita*

SIXTY ANNIVERSARY EDITION  
VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Adult

**By Vladimir Nabokov**

ISBN: 9780307744029

**CONTENT WARNING**

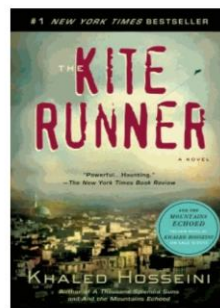
You are about to access material that may contain content of an ADULT nature. These files may include pictures and materials that some viewers may find offensive. If you are under the age of 18, or if such material offends you or if it is illegal for you to view these materials, please exit now.

**3** /5  
Minor Restricted  
BookLooks Review Rating

### Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities involving pedophilia; sexual nudity; and mild profanity

## THE KITE RUNNER



Adult

**By Khaled Hosseini**

ISBN: 9781101217238

**CONTENT WARNING**

You are about to access material that may contain content of an ADULT nature. These files may include pictures and materials that some viewers may find offensive. If you are under the age of 18, or if such material offends you or if it is illegal for you to view these materials, please exit now.

**4** /5  
Not For Minors  
BookLooks Review Rating


### Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual assault of a minor; prostitution involving minors and adults; and mild/infrequent profanity.




# No Left Turn in Education


- National group to instill “family values” and parental control in education
- Explosive growth in 2021 due to Tucker Carlson
- Major pushers of defunding public education; behind rise of “groomer” rhetoric

 **No Left Turn in Education** · Follow  
September 22, 2022 · 🌐

“In America, “banned” books are celebrated, commissioned, and distributed on the manufactured outrage that they are “banned.” It’s like having a party every day to protest how you’re never allowed to have parties. Banned Books Week is a marketing campaign pretending to be a protest, and this year they are marketing to groomers. When nine out of the Top Ten Most Challenged Books are “considered to be sexually explicit” or “considered to have sexually explicit images,” Banned Books Week looks a lot more like Porn For Kids Week. Even The Boston Globe rewrote an article after it falsely stated that I called to ban books.”

 **Nicoletta Nicole** ▶ **Ohio Group Against The Indoctrination of Critical Race Theory**  
Nicoletta Nicole · September 22, 2022 · 🌐

Banned Books Week is fake.  
Read my op-ed to see why.



FOXNEWS.COM  
**Banned Books Week looks more like Porn for Kids Week**  
Banned Books Week is a marketing campaign pretending to be a protest. Nine out of the M...



# No Left Turn in Education



Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.  
- Calvin Coolidge

## Reporting from the Battlefield

### Persistence Pays Off: A Lesson from the Badger State

Dear NLTE supporter,

My name is Alexandra Schweitzer, and I am a mom of three in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, just a few miles from the birthplace of the school choice movement. I am the president of the No Left Turn in Education (NLTE) chapter in Wisconsin.

In 2020, the COVID school closures opened my eyes to how my kids were being indoctrinated and how schools weren't serving families like mine. I knew something had to be done, and together with a small group of "Warrior Moms" - as I like to call us - we rolled up our sleeves and went to work.

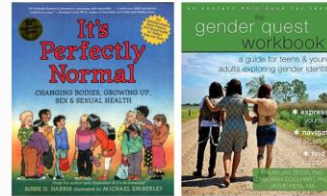
Together, we started attending school board meetings regularly, fighting for our rights and our children's rights every step of the way.



For the 2020-21 school year, I moved my daughter from her middle school to a private school because the school board denied the will of the parents they were elected to represent and refused to reopen for in-person learning.

Around this time, the Warrior Moms became curious about what exactly the children of all ages were learning in school and the books to which the students had unfettered access. We were horrified at what we uncovered! We discovered that one of the books, [the Gender Quest Workbook](#), coaches kids that gender is "a whole spectrum of possibilities" and encourages them to question their gender identity. I was mortified to find out that, a year earlier, my then-5th grade daughter was also exposed to another book called [It's Perfectly Normal](#), which targets kids as young as ten. It [describes sex acts](#), even providing graphic illustrations that clearly violate the will of the parents and blur the legal lines put in place to protect children. *The presence of such books in school is unacceptable.*

It's *not* "perfectly normal" to show pornographic content to children. It's evil and it is predatory. It was evident that the intent was to confuse children and undermine parents. It was clear to us that this would damage the young minds that are incapable of truly comprehending this explicit content. I knew that I had to do something to stop this.



I spoke with America's Sheriff David Clarke, an NLTE board member, who put me in touch with NLTE founder and president Dr. Elana Fishbein.

With the strong support of NLTE, [we began to testify in front of many school boards](#) about these books, even reading passages from them. The school board members were shocked, and many of them tried to shut us down, but we would not relent. Due to our persistent pressure (they don't call us the Badger State for nothing!), three Oconomowoc School Board members resigned in August 2021, followed by a fourth member a few months later. The remaining board members listened to us, but they have yet to act.

Whenever school boards were dismissive of the parents, we were emboldened to fight with more conviction and passion. With the vacant promise to remove the pornography from the shelves, we realized our demands were not being heard. We filed open records requests, using the board members' own words against them and proving that their representation of us was lax (if even present). We began working with state legislators to bring our state education system into compliance with

# RatedBooks.Org

- “Review” database to distribute biased information about books
- UBC ratings, counting curse words, “sexual” scenes, religious beliefs
- LaVerna/Mary in the Library Facebook groups actively tracking \*where\* books are.

Tandr Irish Admin · December 12 at 9:41 AM · 🌐

Me and My Dysphoria Monster by Laura Kate Dale  
Found in Michigan Elementary School Libraries and possibly the classrooms.  
Rated 1/5 (Child Guidance)  
Book Rating Review: <https://tinyurl.com/4pu6duxy>

**ME & MY DYSPHORIA MONSTER**

**Book Summary:**  
A young girl named Lily is struggling with her gender identity and is looking for a way to express herself. She meets a monster named Dysphoria who helps her to understand herself better.

**Summary of Concerns:**  
This book contains explicit content and may be inappropriate for young readers, including explicit language.

By Laura Kate Dale  
ISBN: 978-1-8399-1954-1

1 Child Guidance

1 Like 2 comments

Like Comment Send

Tandr Irish Author Admin  
Attwood Elementary, Lansing, MI  
Dwight Rich School of the Arts elementary School, Lansing MI  
Lewton Elementary, Lansing, MI... [See more](#)

2w Like Reply

Carrie Sparks  
You know what blows my mind? Our school is a hotspot right now because many parents are LIVID about impending transgender bathrooms. I am sitting going, "Seriously. Have you seen what's in your LIBRARY, for the love of God???" None of these people HAVE A CLUE!!!!

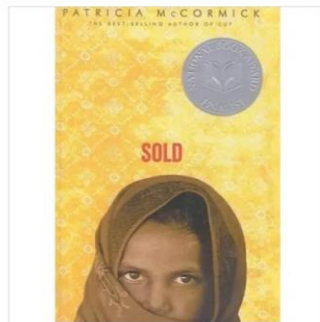
2w Like Reply



# RatedBooks.Org

teens. Additionally, the description of one girl's suicide and the Nepalese mothers drinking the juice from the ink tree so that they will cause themselves to miscarry babies that they do not want to be born only to die later, yields difficult classroom discussions. This is particularly true when the teacher may not be aware of the personal beliefs or opinions of the student's family on such topics. I would

RatedBooks gives **Sold** a rating of 5, "Aberrant Content, Adults Only."



Sold by Patricia McCormick

Book Summary

The story of a girl from Nepal named Lakshmi, who is sold into sexual slavery in India.

Summary of Concerns

This contains explicit aberrant sexual activities including rape of a minor, prostitution, and explicit violence.

- Publisher : Hyperion (April 1, 2008)
- **Book Rating**
- Review: <https://tinyurl.com/bdxdsp23>
- Slick Sheet: <https://tinyurl.com/z59xw59n>

#### Thoughts from Rated Books:

While the story provides an unflinching look at the crime of sex trafficking in Nepal and India - a practice that should be condemned and eradicated- the graphic nature of the narrative is inappropriate for children, pre-teens, and teens under the age of 18. The descriptions of the ongoing rape/violation and physical abuse suffered by the girls is emotionally disturbing and traumatic for many younger teens. Additionally, the description of one girl's suicide and the Nepalese mothers drinking the juice from the ink tree so that they will cause themselves to miscarry babies that they do not want to be born only to die later, yields difficult classroom discussions. This is particularly true when the teacher may not be aware of the personal beliefs or opinions of the student's family on such topics. I would strongly recommend that teachers who select this book for whole class guides reading activities first secure the consent of the parents to have their child participate. Encouraging parents to read the book with their child allow them the opportunity to facilitate discussions of the content in a way that they find developmentally appropriate.



# Other Wisconsin Book Banners

- MassResistance: an anti-LGBTQ+ hate group
- Parents Rights in Education Wisconsin: interested in “the role of education in teaching core skills and reject the dangerous obsession to force extreme sexualization and racist doctrine on our children”
- Awake Americans: A coalition comprised of Moms For Liberty and AwakeLL, attempting to step in for a rebrand of Moms For Liberty on the national level.



# Other Wisconsin Book Banners

- [Parents on Patrol](#)
- [Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty](#)

The screenshot shows the top of a news article on the Wisconsin Examiner website. The header includes the site name 'WISCONSIN EXAMINER' with a logo of a stylized 'W' and a book. Below the header is a navigation bar with categories: POLITICS & GOVERNMENT, WORK & THE ECONOMY, EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT, and CIVIL RIGHTS & IMMIGRATION. The article is categorized under 'EDUCATION' and 'POLITICS & GOVERNMENT'. The main headline is 'Democrats propose state law to help limit book bans'. Below the headline, it says 'BY ISIAH HOLMES - NOVEMBER 10, 2023 5:25 AM'. There are social media sharing icons for Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Email, Print, and a share icon. At the bottom of the article preview is a photograph of a young girl with dark hair, seen from behind, reaching up to a high shelf in a library filled with books.

wpr.org/wisconsin-libraries-would-have-notify-parents-about-books-their-kids-check-out-under...



Franklin Heijnen (CC BY-SA 2.0)

## Wisconsin libraries would have to notify parents about the books their kids check out under GOP proposal

A separate bill would also repeal a protection for librarians related to distributing obscene materials

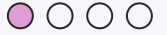
By Anya van Wagtenonk  
Published: Friday, November 24, 2023, 5:00am

# 02

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## Preparing For & Responding to Challenges





# Update Your Collection Policies

- Collection policies protect you as a professional and your patrons
- Collection management policies—including challenge policies—protect the First Amendment Rights of all.
- Collection policies provide a formal, uniform manner for addressing complaints.

Not only are book banners taking advantage of bad policy, most book bans in schools are happening because those in charge of reviews are ignoring their own policies.



# What Belongs in a Collection Policy?

- One-or several-policies which define what is in your collection, how it is selected, *why* it is selected, and how patrons can participate in the process.
- Includes selection tools, best practices, and the library's goals and philosophies. Articulate the purpose of a library collection and tie it into topics of liberty, justice, and freedom (i.e., the First Amendment)
- Incorporate how staff respond to patron concerns and how staff concerns are addressed. Be transparent about the process.
- Begin with ALA's templates but customize and make unique to your institution.

## Sample Public Library Request for Reconsideration of Material Form

The trustees of Mainstream Public Library have established a materials selection policy and a procedure for gathering input about particular items. Completion of this form is the first step in that procedure. If you wish to request reconsideration of a resource, please return the completed form to the library director.

Mainstream Library, 1 Mainstream Plaza, Anytown, State Zip

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you represent self?  Or an organization?  Name of Organization \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Resource on which you are commenting:

Book (e-book)     Magazine     Digital Resource     Newspaper  
 Movie     Audio Recording     Game     Other

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author/Producer \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What brought this resource to your attention?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Have you examined the entire resource? If not, what sections did you review?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 4. What concerns you about the resource?

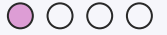
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Are there resource(s) you suggest to provide additional information and/or other viewpoints on this topic?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

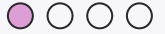
### 6. What action are you requesting the committee consider?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Make Book Banners Work

- Articulate in your challenge forms the purpose of the library's collection being created to meet the needs of a whole community and commitment to protecting First Amendment Rights of all.
- Be explicit and detailed in what you require from book challenges: materials were read in full, were understood, and ***points of contention are not copied or pasted from anywhere outside the filer's own work***. Limit how many challenges a patron can have active at once and that once a decision is made, it remains in place for a predetermined period of time.
- Include the costs of a book challenge in your form. Estimates are fine and should include costs for acquiring materials for each committee member, time spent reading the material, costs for accessing reviews of the material, and time spent in committee meetings.



# What Bad Policy Looks Like

## 2. RECONSIDERATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Occasional objections to the selection of certain materials may be made from time to time. The following procedure shall be followed in dealing with challenged materials:

- A. An objection in writing, specifically detailing materials involved, objections thereto, reasons therefore, and recommendations, may be filed by any adult citizen and/or parent/guardian of an open enrolled student of the District with the principal of the appropriate school.
- B. Upon receipt of a completed, written objection, the principal shall temporarily withdraw from circulation the materials being challenged. The principal shall review the objection and review the material. Upon completing their study, the principal shall stipulate continued use, discontinued use, or restricted use of the materials involved, which use shall be effective immediately.
- C. The principal's decision may be appealed to the district administrator in writing, specifying the reasons for the objection of the principal's decision.



CENSORSHIP

## One Parent Got 444 Books Removed from a Wisconsin School District

Kelly Jensen | Dec 14, 2023

In what might be the single largest book challenge to date, one parent submitted complaints about 444 books in Elkhorn Area School District (EASD) in southern Wisconsin. [Due to a policy approved in November 2021](#) with no comment from the board, all of the books were removed from shelves. The policy states that any complaint automatically gets a book removed from shelves while it undergoes the review process.

The district has been working to put some titles back on shelves since they were pulled earlier this month, and the policy is being revisited in the next school board meeting.



# What Bad Policy Allows



## CLAY COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOLS

900 WALNUT STREET, GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FL 32043  
P (904) 336-6500 F (904) 336-6536 W www.clay.net

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

David G. Brinkley

### BOARD MEMBERS:

Jamice Kerestes, District 1  
Mary Bolla, District 2  
Beth Clark, District 3  
Tina Bullock, District 4  
Ashley Gilchrist, District 5

Additional Inf Level: 11/18/22

### Request for Reconsideration or Review of Instructional Materials

Individual Requesting Review: BRUCE FRIEDMAN

Phone: 917 734 8706 Email: BRUCE.FRIEDMAN@NOLETFL.NYU

Physical Address: 3433 TRAIL RIDGE RD

City: MIDDLEBURGH State: FL Zip: 32069

School: RIDGEVIEW etc Grade Level: HS etc Subject: VARIES

#### Check as applicable:

- I represent a special interest group named NOLETFLTURN IN EDUCATIONAL FLORIDA
- I already have a copy of the material
- I will review the material on-site
- I wish to check out the material for a two-week period

#### Type of Instructional Material:

- Novel
- Textbook
- Workbook
- Symbol
- Video (includes DVD, etc)
- Other: VARIES

Title: Someday

Author: David Levithan ISBN: 9780399553059

1. What is your interest or reason for this request? PROTECT CHILDREN

2. What is objectionable about the material: specific pages, chapters, language, scenes? Attach additional information, if necessary. INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT PAGES

- COMMON CORE
- CSE
- SEL
- DEI/CRT/ANTI-POLICE
- SEXUAL CONTENT

BAD AUTHOR

3. What do you believe might be the result of a student using this material?  
DAMAGED SOULS
4. For what age group would you recommend this material? ADULT
5. Is there anything good in this material? NA
6. Would you care to recommend another instructional material in the same format, covering the same subject or content standards? If so, please list the title, author, publisher, and ISBN: NA

Printed name of Complainant: BRUCE FRIEDMAN

Signature of Complainant: [Signature]

Date: 7/28/2022

Please submit the completed form and any additional documentation to:

Clay County District Schools  
Attn: Supervisor of Instructional Resources  
900 Walnut Street  
Green Cove Springs, Florida 32043

#### To be completed by Instructional Resources Office Staff:

- Received in Instructional Resources: Date 8/12/22 by RF
- Attachments were included with this form. Total number of pages \_\_\_\_\_
- The form was fully completed and accepted: Yes No If not, why? NO OBJ
- Date Committee convened: \_\_\_\_\_
- Committee Members: \_\_\_\_\_
- Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_
- Notification of Complainant: Date \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_
- Additional Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of Someday by David Levithan

[Sex; theft; CRT; CSE; anti religion; promiscuity]

Format p # and content/keyword - my comments follow

P 30 "where the fuck have you been?" - charming

P 31 "What the fuck is that?" ... "Who the fuck is Leigh?" ... "Don't you fucking tell me to calm down" - Noticing a trend yet? Is this a trend you want our children to follow?

P 32 "I could smash her face in...I could knock out her teeth or crack her skull" - Lovely

P 67 "Even when I was punished with a female body, I knew to act and think like a man..."an advantage...being white"...pocket some Advil"- Foreshadowing of unpleasant CSE and CRT content ahead.

P 100 "I don't want to go home. I want sex" - Notice he did not say "love and respect."

P 100 "goes onto an app...really a hookup..." - So we glamorize the lesson for our children to use the internet to connect with frivolous promiscuity. Why?

P 203 "queer lit...gender nonbinary" - fabulous discussion.

P 221 "You're saying 'they' and 'them' " - An individual is NOT a "them!"

P 285 "uberassholes" - Imagine if the books in school libraries demonstrated useful vocabulary instead.

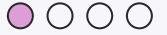
P 289 "dad throwing around Pope jokes" - Nice dad.

P 290-291 "We're in a no-fuckery zone. And you are bringing fuckery into it." - If you speak without all this profanity, your life will improve.

P 291 "everything but equality, Sir" - Playing the victim card, again.

P 338 "I am intersex and equal" - No, you need therapy and better parents.





# What a Challenge Policy Should Include

All of the information in the ALA sample, plus:

- Explain the purpose of the material
- What positive qualities does the material present
- What are your concerns about the material, including page citations and quotes
- How has the material been assessed in professional review sources (include citations)
- Provide citations in support of your objections
- How does the material fail to comply with district educational objectives
- In what ways does the material fail to meet state educational objectives
- Explain how the material fails to meet Intellectual Freedom standards
- Who would be negatively impacted by this material and how (citations and evidence required)
- What would you replace the material with (include titles and professional reviews of replacement)
- Why do you believe you should be able to restrict the reading choices of community members, including children?

Adapted from [Martha Hickson's template suggestions](#)



# Irving Public Library (Sample Strong Policy)



## IRVING PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

### **MISSION AND PURPOSE:**

This policy functions as a general guide for the development of a robust collection of reading, listening, viewing and information/research material that allows the Irving Public Library (IPL) to fulfill its mission to support and nurture an informed and literate citizenry. The Irving Public Library functions as a major information source for the community and provides a broad and relevant collection of materials for informational, educational, and recreational purposes to a diverse community.

### **GOALS:**

The goals of this policy are to provide general principles and more detailed information to Library staff and our community regarding the following:

- Professional standards used to guide the development of the collection
- Criteria and methods used by library staff to select new material
- Collection maintenance, including how materials are deselected from the collection
- How community input is used to maintain the collection

### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS:**

#### **Responsibility and Authority**

The responsibility and authority for materials selection and the development of the library collection rests under the purview the Library Director and the Department, who carry out the selection of materials on the basis of standards set forth herein.

#### **Freedom to Read/Intellectual Freedom**

The freedom to read, along with the freedom to hear and to view, is protected by the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution and shall not be restricted or abridged based on the content or viewpoint expressed in the materials in the IPL collection.

#### **Accessibility**

Irving Public Library has an obligation to select, maintain, and support access to content on subjects by diverse authors and creators that meets—as closely as possible—the needs, interests, and abilities of all the people the IPL serves. This means acquiring materials to address popular demand and direct community input, as well as addressing collection gaps and unexpressed information needs.

#### **Quality**

Quality is pursued and maintained by applying professional discretion and standards established by the library profession and through the use of appropriate selection aids, including book reviews, best seller lists, professionally recognized periodicals, standard bibliographies and booklists. Professional review sources provide more objective information about the materials than appears in publishers' catalogs or advertisements. Reviews are usually written by subject experts in the field, by professional reviewers, or by librarians. Library review sources often assess how well a publication serves a particular audience (for example, "essential for public libraries," or "not recommended").

### **Collection Classification and Arrangement**

Books and other materials are initially placed in areas of the collection based on the publisher and author's intended audience and review source recommendations. Occasionally, materials are subsequently referred to their respective age-appropriate selectors for reevaluation. Materials will be organized and maintained according to subject, format, type, user level or other category to achieve their most effective utilization by the public and by library staff. An item's placement in a collection allows for the organization of resources and provides viewpoint-neutral guidance to users. It is not intended to imply that every item in that collection will be of interest to or relevant to the collection's intended user.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

The Irving Public Library strives to meet the informational needs of all ages, backgrounds, and educational levels of our community by providing alternative perspectives and/or opposing views on topics including those that may be perceived as less popular and/or unorthodox. The collection broadly reflects the diversity that exists in our culture and society. The existence of a particular viewpoint in the collection is an expression of IPL's policy of intellectual freedom, not an endorsement of that point of view.

### **SELECTION CRITERIA/GUIDELINES:**

The Irving Public Library acquires materials in many subjects and formats, based upon the merits of a work in relation to the needs and interests of the community. Each item is evaluated objectively and in its entirety, taking into consideration selection criteria set forth herein, including but not limited to content, educational, creative, literary, and technical quality and merit.

Library materials are selected for the general reader rather than the specialist. Although IPL attempts to provide materials on many subjects and grade levels, no attempt is made to match the collection to a particular curriculum. The IPL may serve as a limited, supplementary source to meet the educational needs of students.

#### **Selection Criteria**

- Relevance to interests and needs of the community
- Significance of subject matter
- Accuracy of information
- Extent of publicity, critical reviews and current or anticipated demand
- Current or historical significance of the author or subject
- Reputation or authority of the author or publisher, with preference generally given to titles vetted in the editing and publishing industry
- Timeliness and/or popularity of a subject, title, or author
- Professional reviews from reputable journals and sources
- Award-winning or award-nominated material
- Patron requests (see RESPONSIVENESS)
- Value of resource in relation to cost
- Price, availability, and materials budget
- Technical characteristics, e.g., binding, size, quality of paper and typography



# Irving Public Library (Sample Strong Policy)

## **Children/Young Adult Collections**

The Irving Public Library's Children's Collection is intended to serve children through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The IPL's Young Adult Collection is intended to serve teens from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The Irving Public Library contains a wide variety of materials and opinions reflecting various points of view. IPL does not serve as "in loco parents". Responsibility for overseeing a minor's use of the Library collection rests with the parents and/or legal guardians, not the Library. It is the right and responsibility of the parent or legal guardian to restrict their children, and only their children, from access to library material and resources to which the parent or legal guardian may object. The Library does not knowingly make available to minors either pornographic or obscene materials as defined by state and federal law. Parents or legal guardians may find certain materials objectionable or inappropriate for their children, and they may want to carefully review the content of library materials being accessed by their minor children. Selection of library materials, in this and other collections, will not be restricted by the possibility that materials may inadvertently come into a child's possession. The [Library's Parents Guides](#) provides helpful instructions on how parents can monitor and, if necessary, restrict materials that their minor children check out.

## **Digital Resources**

Digital resources fall into two classes: Owned materials and accessed materials. Owned or purchased material is selected by librarians and will fall under "General Criteria for Selection". Accessed material will undergo additional considerations including:

- Price
- Ease of Use / Accessibility of platform
- Accessibility to patrons (in-house use and /or remote access; 24/7 access)
- Availability from contracted vendors
- Need or interest from the community
- Terms of licensing agreements
- Cost per use analysis

Many accessed digital resources are curated by third-party sources, and as such the IPL does not control the content. Digital resources are evaluated annually to determine ongoing need for the collection.

## **RESPONSIVENESS:**

The Irving Public Library responds to community interests by careful consideration of the following: patron requests for purchases, use patterns for existing materials, purchase trends of similar materials from retailers and any other source of information indicating community interests. The IPL collection serves, to the degree possible, the interests of a diverse community without exclusion. The IPL believes that individuals have the freedom to accept or reject an item from the IPL's collection for their personal use. Responsiveness to the interest of one individual or group is not restricted based on the dislike or objection of another individual or group.

## **Patron Requests**

Patrons are encouraged to submit suggestions for possible addition to the library collection. The IPL will consider all requests from patrons using the same selection criteria used for all materials. If the IPL cannot fill a request, the use of the Interlibrary Loan (ILL) service will be recommended. ILL allows patrons to borrow items from other participating library systems.

## **Selection Based on Demand**

Selectors track current trends, bestselling authors, and publisher publicity to anticipate demand for specific library materials. The library patron is an important part of the selection process. An individual request from a patron is generally honored if the request conforms to selection guidelines and falls within budgetary constraints.

## **Selection Based on Need**

Some materials are chosen for the purpose of developing and/or updating specific subject areas to ensure that vital resources are available, up-to-date, and reliable. The IPL staff is constantly gathering information concerning the needs of library users by means of circulation statistics, interlibrary loan requests, and patron input.

## **Gifts**

Gifts in the form of library collection materials will be accepted if they meet the IPL's principles for selection of new materials. The IPL reserves the right to determine such issues as classification, arrangement, and shelving of gift materials. The IPL will not accept special collections of materials with any donor's stipulations. Please see the entire Gifts, Memorials and Donations policy on the IPL Policy page.

## **COLLECTION MAINTENANCE:**

In addition to acquiring new materials, it is important to remove from the existing collection those items no longer deemed useful or relevant. This policy provides authority for the systematic and regular evaluation of the existing collection and subsequent withdrawal of worn, obsolete or infrequently used materials and supports the public's right of access to an appealing and relevant collection.

Irving Public Library staff systematically review the collection with the goal of maintaining the quality and vitality of library resources. Collection analysis incorporates the use of library data, circulation reports, and other statistical information for continuous collection evaluation, as well as the use of the patron Request for Reconsideration Process.

## **Weeding Evaluation Criteria**

Weeding in this context is defined as the process of evaluating books and other physical materials to determine whether they will be retained, relocated, or replaced. Selection of materials for discarding is based on the "CREW" method, which stands for Continuous Review, Evaluation, and Weeding, and is a professional guide for reviewing and withdrawing materials from each library collection.

## **Replacement Criteria**

While the Irving Public Library attempts to have copies of standard and important works, it does not automatically replace all materials withdrawn. The same criteria that apply to original selection also apply to replacements.

## **Removal of Withdrawn Material**

Excess or obsolete library materials weeded from the collection are donated to the Friends of the Irving Public Library or an organization otherwise designated by the City Council. Items suffering from water/mold damage or other conditions that make their retention hazardous are disposed of promptly and appropriately.



# Irving Public Library (Sample Strong Policy)



## Reconsideration of Materials

### Policy

The Irving Public Library believes that censorship is a purely individual matter and declares that, while any person is free to reject for himself or herself materials of which he or she does not approve, he or she cannot exercise this right of censorship to restrict the freedom of others to read, view, listen, or inquire. The Irving Public Library has set these regulations in place to assist in fulfilling the Library's goal to serve all the residents of Irving:

- Any customer who is a resident of the City of Irving and holds a resident borrower's card in good standing from the Irving Public Library is encouraged to speak with Library staff if they have questions on the Library's collection development policies. A copy of those policies shall be provided to customers upon request. The customer may request that the Library's Collection Development Supervisor respond directly to the customer regarding any library materials they may have questions or concerns about.
- If a resident's concern is not satisfied through discussion with Library staff, the resident may complete and submit a formal, written Request for Reconsideration of Materials. Copies of this request form may be obtained from any library service desk or by fax, mail, or e-mail from the Library.
- For a Request for Reconsideration of Materials to be considered by the Library Administration, it must meet the following criteria:
  - The most recent version of the request form must be completed in full.
  - The customer must be a resident of the City of Irving and hold a resident borrower's card in good standing from the Irving Public Library.
  - The recommendation form must be submitted to the Library Director or his or her designee. Submission may be completed in person, by mail, or by e-mail.
- Upon receipt of a completed Request for Reconsideration, the Director shall refer the Request for to the Senior Library Services Manager overseeing collection development.
- An Ad Hoc staff review committee will be appointed by the Senior Library Services Manager to review the Request, undertake a firsthand review of the material subject to the Request, and prepare a report. The Ad Hoc Staff Review Committee shall include collection development librarians familiar with the area of the collection of which the item(s) referred to in the Request are a part. The committee shall consider the following criteria when drafting report:
  - Consistency with the Library's Collection Development Policy
  - Cultural and/or literacy significance and quality
  - Audience for the material
  - Circulation history and customer requests for the material
  - Professional review and awards
- The Ad Hoc Staff Review Committee may recommend a number of actions including removal of the material, re-labeling/classification of the material, providing other restrictions on the material, or no action at all. The review process by the Ad Hoc Staff Review Committee will be completed and submitted to the Senior Library Services Manager within thirty (30) days from the date the complete Request for Reconsideration of Materials form is submitted to Library Administration.

- The Senior Library Services Manager shall have final discretion as to whether to follow or modify the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Staff Review Committee.
- The Senior Library Services Manager shall inform the customer in writing of his or her decision regarding the Request for Reconsideration of Materials no later than ten (10) days after receiving the report from the Ad Hoc Staff Review Committee.
- If the customer is unsatisfied with the Senior Library Services Manager's decision, the customer may appeal the Request for Reconsideration of Materials by asking in writing that it be referred to the Library Director within thirty (30) days from the date of the response to the customer.
- The customer will be notified of the Director's decision within ten (10) days of the appeal. The Director may request additional information from Library staff as well as from the customer submitting the appeal request.
- If the Director is required to render a decision under this policy, the Director shall notify the Library Board of the outcome in its next monthly report to the Board following his or her decision.
- Any previous outstanding Requests for Reconsideration of Materials shall be final upon the enactment of the new policy.

## Irving Public Library's Reconsideration Form



# While a Challenge Is In Process

- Read or reread the challenged material to be as familiar as possible. Carve out work time to do this—it's part of our job and not something you should be taking home—the challenge is a taxpayer cost.
- Draft a response, addressing each point with evidence-based research, reviews, and examples from the book in question.
  - Don't reinvent the wheel—ask around and borrow responses from colleagues
  - Create a book resume
  - Be conscious of what you cite—banners are dismissive of anything related to ALA.
- Decide if you approach the media—it can bring attention, but this might put pressure on current and future censors.
- Consider updating your library website on the challenge status—this is transparency and helps you find your allies.

# 03

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## Engaging Citizens & Protecting Library Staff



# The Long Term Mental Health Reality

- Overlooking mental health and trauma in libraries means creating a toxic work environment, translating to a toxic space for community users
- A lack of support leads to burnout and the loss of vital voices in the community
- A field seeking to be more representative of the diversity of our world loses those staff members and perspectives.



[More: a toolkit to understanding and mitigating trauma in the library](#)



# Trauma & Mental Health

Trauma



Burnout



Overt Cruelty + Casual Cruelty



Compassion Fatigue



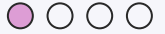
Vicarious trauma



Inclusive, safe spaces for all, including staff







# For Managers

Create a policy for when staff need an escape because of potential triggering interactions or events and include in your employee documents

## **Employee Support - Self-Care Parachute**

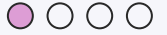
RNMG supports employees in being able to step away from work during moments of crisis, collective trauma, or attack on marginalized communities. We recognize the importance of removing responsibility for that process from affected employees and have created the flowchart below to guide proactive conversations between managers and employees.

When an incident occurs, managers will reach out to employees in the affected community. If the employees elect to pull the self-care parachute, managers will be responsible for collecting a list of the tasks to be delegated for an agreed upon time period and will work with other staff to coordinate their completion. If the manager is also affected by the incident, they will notify the next available manager or member of the executive team, who will then be responsible for collecting and delegating tasks.

When an employee opts not pull the parachute, the manager will check back in the following day. Employees may change their minds and opt in at any time.

Employees affected by an incident may also contact their managers at any time to initiate this process. If your direct manager is not immediately available, please contact the next available manager or any member of the executive team. We want you to be able to step away as soon as possible.

The self-care parachute is intended for temporary delegation of time-sensitive responsibilities and in most instances will not require the use of PTO.



# Diffuse Fight-Flight-Freeze

- Create a safety plan
- Develop a self-care plan
- Walk away from a triggering space as soon as possible
- Spend 5-10 minutes focusing on your breathing to activate the parasympathetic (rest and digest) nervous system
- Move your body—a walk, a quick dance, light yoga

## Then...

- Do you need professional help?
- Record everything that transpired—even details that do not seem important. Document, document, document.
- Remember your professional values. Keep a list somewhere accessible so you can access and remind yourself of the good work you're doing.

# Protect Your Staff (& Yourself!)

- Do not communicate any information you would not want broadcast publicly through your workplace. Even if you delete it--it's not gone.
- Stay calm and know *nothing* requires an immediate response. Do not let a false sense of urgency guide decision making.
- Safeguard all of your personal information with a privacy check.





# Who Speaks On Your Behalf?

- Know your boards—both where you live and where you work.
  - Work with these governing bodies on policies related to public comment--no individual should be allowed to complain about materials without following the outlined reconsideration procedure.
- Vote in elections and consider running if you have the capacity
- Explore hosting candidate forums and information sessions on the importance of local elections
  - If Moms For Liberty is doing it, the library can be, too. You're *nonpartisan*, not neutral.
- Do you know your representatives? Get on their mailing lists and put their information in your hands.
- Keep tabs on what your lawmakers are working on: periodically search relevant keywords in House and Senate and know what legislators are involved.



# Find Your Supports & Engage Them

- Encourage patrons to write to the library board or school board praising what is happening in your library or resources they find especially valuable. Create an easy-to-find form on your website and/or handouts.
  - Develop a “worried about censorship” resource on your library webpage and social media alongside challenge forms
- Tap your power users to write to the local paper and city council about specific needs and interests being met.
- Power users make excellent board members—encourage them to consider it!

The screenshot shows the Wood Library website with a dark purple header. The header contains the Wood Library logo, navigation links for 'About Us', 'Calendar', 'Events & Classes', and 'Support', social media icons for Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, and a search bar labeled 'SEARCH CATALOG'. The main content area features the heading 'Speak Up For Wood Library!' followed by a paragraph of text encouraging patrons to write letters to the editor. Below the text, it lists two contact options: 'The Daily Messenger Editor' with the email 'letters@messengerpostmedia.com' and 'The Finger Lakes Times Editor' with the email 'opinion@fltimes.com'.

**WoodLibrary** About Us Calendar Events & Classes Support f y i Q SEARCH CATALOG

## Speak Up For Wood Library!

Did you recently attend a thought-provoking lecture at the library? Did your children squeal with delight during Storytime? Did a library staff person help you find information? If you feel like Wood Library is doing a good job or was helpful to you, let your neighbors know by writing a short letter to the editor. It doesn't have to be long, just heartfelt. Through your words, others will come to find out that Wood Library is a great place to go to learn something new, to connect with others, to get accurate information, and relax and unwind.

Send your letter to—

The Daily Messenger Editor  
letters@messengerpostmedia.com

The Finger Lakes Times Editor  
opinion@fltimes.com



# Don't Forget

- Every challenge is different, but a unified response plan helps ensure the best protection for all.
- Document everything and share that with relevant supervisors and colleagues. Even if it feels like “nothing,” it is something. This could be weird phone calls, books that go “missing” or are purposefully misshelved, or photos/videos are being taken in the library.
- The temptation to not purchase a book, to hide a book, to not promote a book, to not put up the display, or to weed a book outside of parameters is quiet/silent censorship. Don't be complicit. Walk away—most of the time, you'll feel differently with time and space to reset the fight-flight-freeze response.

Regularly update policies and procedures with lessons learned. These are living documents.



# Take Heart: You're Supported

95% of parents

Believe every school should have a school librarian

93% of parents

Believe their child is safe using a school library

90% of parents

Feel comfortable allowing their child to select their own material from the library

85% of parents

Are satisfied with the work librarians do

80-92% of parents

Trust librarians to select appropriate materials for the school or public library

82% of parents

Trust librarians to recommend age and content appropriate books and materials



# Take Heart: You're Supported

77% of parents

Believe librarians make the library a place for fun and creativity.

77% of parents

Believe librarians are friendly and approachable.

74% of parents

Agree or somewhat agree that book bans infringe on their rights as parents

School and public librarians are ranked in the top 5 most trustworthy professions, alongside doctors, nurses, and teachers.

Data from research by Book Riot & The EveryLibrary Institute, 2023.





Book bans offer something librarianship has not put enough time or consideration into: how to adequately care for, support, and accommodate the mental health and safety needs of its most valuable asset: its people.



# Thank You!

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