



LIBRARIES

Wasilla, Alaska

The Wasilla Public Library will move its entire young adult nonfiction collection in response to a complaint about one young adult gay sex education book. A Wasilla parent, Vanessa Campbell, complained about *This Book Is Gay* in September after her ten-year-old son pulled the sexuality guide for LGBT young people guide off a shelf in the library's children's section.

This Book Is Gay is written in a casual and humorous—and sexually explicit—style, with cartoon drawings and nicknames for body parts along with anatomically correct ones.

Campbell's complaint triggered the formation of a three-person reconsideration committee that submitted its findings and recommendations to the library director and patrons December 1. Based on those findings, the library director decided to move more than three hundred young adult nonfiction titles now housed in the library's downstairs children's section upstairs to be "interfiled" with adult nonfiction by December 11, according to a press release issued by Wasilla Mayor Bert Cottle.

The city will also review the library's existing "reconsideration" process, in which patrons can flag books for additional review of their status in the library, according to the release.

Campbell, shocked by what she saw as vulgar language and graphic descriptions of sex in the book, started the unusual process of getting the book reconsidered by the library director because of its location.

Library director Kathy Martin-Albright decided it should stay where it was, so Campbell filed an appeal in October, triggering the formation of the reconsideration committee. The committee came to three conclusions in its findings: *This Book Is Gay* should stay on the shelves; the book should

be reclassified to a Dewey call number for sexual education; and it should be "in a place that teens can access and feel comfortable accessing," such as the young adult or adult sections.

"As a committee, we were impressed with the process and due diligence of the patron and the library director," the finding states. "Both should be commended for their passion to support libraries, books and the Wasilla community."

Asked about the decision to move the entire juvenile nonfiction section instead of one book, Cottle said it was the least complicated option. Reclassifying just one book could lead to questions about others, he said.

The city's new library under construction will house all nonfiction books in one area, officials have said.

Campbell said her concerns had only to do with the age-appropriateness of the material—not that it is by a gay author or meant for LGBT people—and said she is "very pleased" with the committee's decision.

"I appreciate the time and effort they put into this process," she said.

The reconsideration committee was made up of David Cheezem, owner of Fireside Books in Palmer, Friends of Wasilla Public Library representative Julie Ede and Wasilla High School librarian Shelly Logsdon. The trio said they wanted to make sure *This Book Is Gay* was accessible to those that need it and not placed in a restricted area—like behind the counter—or not easily found without staff help.

"The Committee understands the parental concern on this book being placed in the Juvenile section of the library and the accidental discovery that may be made by younger children," the decision states. "We also understand the subjective nature of age-appropriate content; and the herculean effort it would take for a librarian to segregate every controversial

book to everyone's liking; and the chilling effect it would have on free speech." Reported in: *Alaska Dispatch News*, December 1.

Rosemount, Minnesota

A reconsideration review committee voted 7–4 December 3 against removing a book from Rosemount middle and high school libraries. Parents Ben and Kandi Lovin had requested the district remove Gayle Foreman's *Just One Day* from the libraries on the grounds it had material that was inappropriate for that audience. They raised the concerns after their eleven-year-old daughter brought the book home from her school library. They rejected an offer to have the book restricted from just their daughter.

"She can check out that book and have it in her hands all day before she talks to me, which is what happened," Kandi Lovin said. "You do have to watch what materials are out there. They're not all educational in the way we thought they were."

The book is about a recent high school graduate who travels Europe and has a brief affair with another traveler, as well as the path her life takes after that meeting. The Lovins pointed specifically to passages that contain sex, nudity, and drinking by the eighteen-year-old main character and foul language. They say those violate the district's policy for selecting instructional materials.

But secondary media specialist Dawn Lyons, who spoke in defense of the book, said it's not fair to consider those scenes in isolation from the rest of what she called a coming of age story. She pointed out that *Just One Day* was the 2014 winner of the Young Adult Library Services Association's award for best fiction for young adults and has been recommended for readers fourteen and up.



“Media specialists must consider the students and staff population we are serving,” Lyons said. “Our collection must include material for the most mature students as well as the younger students.”

Lyons said teens can see themselves in a work like *Just One Day* and might recognize someone dealing with some of the same issues they face in their life.

Rosemount High School senior Kennedy Rieck, a member of the reconsideration committee, supported that thought. She said she didn’t focus on the sex and drugs when she read the book but focused on the experiences the main character had.

“I see it as a learning experience,” she said. “I look at it as finding yourself and seeing yourself in a different way.”

Committee member Michelle Howe, a media specialist in the district, said she would let her eighth-grade daughter read the book.

About twenty-three people sat in the audience at the hearing, but audience members were not allowed to take part in the discussion.

Following roughly an hour of discussion, committee members chose among three options: keeping the book, removing it from middle school libraries or removing it from both middle and high schools. There were no votes to remove the book from high schools. Reported in: *Rosemount Town Pages*, December 3.

Warrensburg, Missouri

A call to ban a book from the high school library shelf resulted in unanimous denial from the school board. A patron wanted to remove Juliet Marillier’s award-winning *Daughter of the Forest* from the library. The district investigated the complaint.

“For the first time in three years, we convened our Challenge

Committee,” district Superintendent Scott Patrick said.

“What was the concern?” board member Morris Collins asked.

A committee member who also serves on the school board, Rick Miller, said the story is about an industrious young lady who is working alone in a forest when approached by young men who rape her. The rape scene caused the complaint.

“Even though (the act of rape) was disgusting, it was not portrayed in a vulgar, nasty way,” Miller told board members. An online review of Marillier’s work showed the book has received accolades and is geared toward high schoolers, Miller said. The committee recommended and the board agreed the book will remain in the library. Reported in: *Daily Star Journal*, November 18.

Darby, Montana

The Darby Community Public Library Board decided the March 9 presentation titled “Perspectives on Islam” in the Life-Long Learning Series should continue as scheduled after holding an emergency meeting February 24.

“I called for the meeting after receiving phone call complaints the previous evening and receiving written complaints yesterday morning concerning the library offering the educational event,” library director Wendy Campbell said. “The nature of the complaints were a signal to me that they should not go unchecked.”

The Life-Long Learning Series schedule was set months earlier. On February 23 the library received written complaints from seven community members.

Board members Forrest Hayes, Lisa Poe, Barbara Ackerman, Judy Estler, and Ted Almgren listened to ten community members voice their opinions

for open-mindedness and education and for stopping the presentation because of radical Islam.

The series speakers present earlier in the day at Darby High School then in the library at night.

Community member Rocky Lanier said he was opposed to bringing in the speaker.

“Basically this all started with Islam in the world and how it is actually at war with the United States even though we haven’t declared war on them,” Lanier said. “I’m former military. I’ve been overseas and I’ve seen how these people are. I’ve seen how they promote what they do in other countries.”

Lanier said the American Constitution and the right to be peaceful, loving, and pursue our dreams will not work for Islam. “You can’t do that in Islamic countries,” Lanier said. “So, to have someone come here and tell us they are just here to be peaceful. No they won’t. Once they come over they’ll take over. Their goal is to kill everyone who is not Muslim.”

Darby school representatives Superintendent Loyd Rennaker, Principal J. P. McCrossin and teacher Steve Gideon said the students have to have parent signatures “opting in” to hear the presentations.

Darby Mayor J. C. McDowell said adults have the right to decide whether to attend. “If the topic is not of interest to the community members of Darby there will be an empty room at the presentation,” McDowell said. “I enjoy the right to choose.”

The funding for the series costs the library \$50 and the presenters are from Humanities Montana with guidance from Tamarack—an alliance of libraries in western Montana.

“Whether I agreed with what they said or not the question is, ‘What do



we do to serve the public?” board member Almgren said.

“It is to inform them of things they don’t know about,” board member Ackerman said. “That is the mission of the library. As an American I believe in freedom of speech and to let people decide. If they don’t want to come that is up to them.”

“A public library is a place of education not to promote or condemn,” Campbell said. Reported in: *Ravalli Republic*, February 25.

SCHOOLS Roxbury Township, New Jersey

The Roxbury public school district will not remove what it has called a “supplemental” history text book which two or three parents say glorifies Islamic Jihad. The book, *History Alive: Medieval World and Beyond*, is used at the Eisenhower Middle School by seventh and eighth graders as a supplemental text.

At a December board meeting, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Loretta Radulic read a prepared statement detailing the district’s decision on the matter, after a few parents questioned the book’s place in the classroom of seventh and eighth graders.

Resident Laurel Whitney maintained, for example, that the book glorifies “suicide and violence” in its discussion of Islam. Whitney was present at the meeting, and had previously brought her concerns to the board’s attention. She also maintained that the statement read by Radulic didn’t adequately address her concerns about what she perceives as glorification of suicide and violence.

“The Roxbury Board of Education and administration is committed to providing the students with a quality education. At the same time, your Board of Education is committed

to providing the community with an opportunity to be heard on issues,” Radulic said.

“Recently, a few parents expressed concerns regarding the use of a supplemental textbook entitled *History Alive*. Many misconceptions regarding the text have generated questions that we would like to address directly,” Radulic said.

“We believe that it is important to clarify these misconceptions so that our community has accurate information. First, the text was chosen by our educational professionals as a supplemental resource to be utilized on a limited basis with our students.

“None of the students are provided with a copy of this textbook because it is not the primary text used in class. Therefore, some of the objections raised by members of the community contain parts of the text that students do not have access to,” she said.

“It is merely a supplement from which our teachers choose various activities that are educationally appropriate for our students as they explore world cultures. Second, the history curriculum for seventh and eighth graders follows a historical timeline. During seventh grade, the students focus on early civilization, including Judaism and Christianity. The eighth grade curriculum covers the Middle Ages during which Islam is reviewed,” Radulic said.

“Therefore, looking at the *History Alive* supplemental text in isolation, without considering the history taught previously, may give the mistaken impression that the entire curriculum is focused on Islam. It is not. Third, our staff regularly reviews texts for yearly approval by the Board of Education. Any concerns raised by parents and/or community members are taken into consideration when the curriculum is reviewed.

“We will continue to follow our established practices and procedures when reviewing our curriculum and will certainly consider community members concerns regarding this supplemental text as we move through the curriculum review process for the upcoming year,” she said.

“We hope our clarification regarding this text allays any concerns community members may have, as we move forward together to ensure that Roxbury students are provided with a quality education.”

Muslims and scholars do not even agree on what the word “jihad” means, according to online published reports.

The K-12 district currently enrolls about 3,900 students in grades PreK through 12. The district contains seven school buildings, including five elementary schools, the Eisenhower Middle School and Roxbury High School. Reported in: *Roxbury Register*, December 8.

Rumson, New Jersey

Two books that a group of parents say contain sexual passages and explicit language that are inappropriate for their Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School students will remain on the district’s reading lists.

Rumson-Fair Haven school board members, however, agreed to formalize and better publicize the procedure for students to request alternative reading options.

The school board heard a report from an ad hoc committee of teachers, school board members and a parent, which determined the novel *Cal* and the play *Death and the Maiden* were age appropriate for the district’s juniors and seniors. The committee was formed after a group of more than three hundred parents expressed concerns about the books last month.



That decision centered in part on a review of the school district's health curriculum, which provides sexual education sections during freshman year, a more comprehensive sections in junior year and refresher discussions in senior year, said Sarah Maris, a member of both the school board and the ad hoc committee.

Maris said the passages were not designed to be gratuitous, but rather were used in either historical context or as tool to show a literary theme in the book.

Death and the Maiden is about Paulina, a former political prisoner who was raped by her captors, and years later believes she found her attacker and puts him on informal trial. *Cal* is about a young Irish Catholic man involved in the Irish Republican Army who falls in love with the wife of a man murdered in an incident in which Cal was a getaway driver.

"When students read these very brief sex scenes, they should not be surprised, because this is material that they have read about and talk about a year ahead of time," she said.

The ad hoc committee also recommended that *Death and the Maiden* be moved off the summer reading list and instead be taught during the school year so teachers can guide the students as they read the play, Maris said.

The committee also tried, but could not accommodate a request from parents to give all students options on books to read that meet certain literary topics, Maris said. Doing so would not work because part of the in-class work is analyzing the texts, she said. To accomplish that with students reading multiple books, teachers would have to prepare multiple lessons, which ultimately would cut down on discussion time for each lesson.

"We, as a committee, pushed really hard on this. The reality is it is really

difficult to do that," she said. "We cannot have classrooms where kids get half of the English instruction."

The committee's review did little to assuage parents who said they felt it was stacked with people who were already proponents of the books and didn't take up their concerns fairly. Parents said the procedure to request an alternative book is too restrictive and ultimately singles out students. Several parents also returned to the same question: Aren't there better books for students to read?

At least one board member agreed that the district should consider more regularly changing required reading lists. *Cal* and *Death and the Maiden* have been on and off the district's reading lists for about fifteen years.

"Maybe we need a more frequent rotation," said Teresa Liccardi, who also noted that she was comfortable with the committee's recommendations about the two books and the thoroughness of their review.

Those books, school board members warned, would also likely cause concerns for some people. "The nature of good literature is conflict. Conflict is quite often controversial to one side or another," said Maris.

Several parents who attended the board meeting said they supported the board's efforts to review the books. Parent Katy Badt-Frissora of Fair Haven said she was initially outraged when she learned of the sexual references in *Death and the Maiden* and marched up to her son's room to talk about them.

Badt-Frissora said her perspective changed when her son, who normally does not talk about his school work, spent ten minutes explaining to her how the references represented the experiences during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, how the book paralleled the ongoing conflict

in Syria and it fit into a broader discussion about revenge.

"Literally, this kid educated me in such a profound way," she said. "It's risqué, it was uncomfortable, but it worked." Reported in: *Asbury Park Press*, November 18.

Marshfield, Wisconsin

A Muppets book about how children experience poverty around the world is on track to remain in Marshfield elementary schools, despite objections from a School Board member who has garnered national attention.

On December 9, an eight-member panel voted unanimously to recommend that the Marshfield School District continue using the book *For Every Child a Better World*, by Jim Henson, in kindergarten social studies curriculum.

District officials convened the panel after board member Mary Carney raised concerns that the book is too graphic—namely, that its illustrations of some children living in poverty and violence are not appropriate for kindergartners. Citing online reviews, Carney claimed some people said they were traumatized after reading the book.

But panel members disagreed.

"I think that a lot of times we want to protect these young kids from the reality of what's going on in the world around them," teacher Donna Smith said. "But the reality is, in our classrooms every year, we have more and more kids who are homeless, and more and more kids who are hungry, and more and more kids who are victims of abuse in their households."

Smith and other panelists—who included teachers, district staff and community members—said it is important to expose children to the world in a way they can understand, in part



to give them insight on how different people and societies live.

Teacher Judy Nicksic acknowledged some images in the book might be jarring, but she said teachers can use that reaction to cultivate learning in a sensitive way.

“Many children would be disturbed, as they should be,” Nicksic said. “But it’s the dialogue that follows it.”

One parent who sat on the panel, Marshfield resident Preston Tippen, said he read the book to his kindergarten-age son, and the

experience provoked discussion about child labor and education. Reported in: *Marshfield News-Herald*, December 9.