



LIBRARIES

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

For ten years, the Metropolitan Library System, which serves the Oklahoma City metro area, has placed a group of children's books with sensitive subject matter into a smaller, elevated section. The section, known as "family talk," includes books on drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, incarceration, mental illness, death and divorce.

Another theme that finds itself in this category are books dealing with LGBT issues, like *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *King and King*. Now, a local LGBT rights advocacy group plans to ask the Metro Library Commission to revisit the policy and consider amending it to remove LGBT children's books from the family talk section and place them in general circulation.

Relegating these LGBT books to the special section creates an unnecessary and outdated stigma, they contend.

The policy began in 2006, after a group of parents, commission members, and lawmakers raised concerns about the availability of books for younger readers that dealt with homosexuality in the children's sections within the library system.

Janet Brooks, the system's material selection manager, said the family talk section was seen as a compromise. "We didn't want to have this material in a locked room," she said. Or removed altogether. Placing them in a separated section allowed parents to have more control over when to introduce their children to the subjects placed there.

"We preferred thinking of it as a place for responsibility for parents, not a place to hide it," she said. The discussions grew tense at times, those involved said, but in 2006 the commission approved the policy.

"I can tell you that it was that particular situation that caused me to get off the board. I'm one of the ones that wanted to pull the books altogether because of my Christian beliefs," said Cynthia Trent, who served nine years on the commission. Trent said she still believes books dealing with LGBT issues should be banned from the children's section.

"It's not because I have anything against those folks that have that kind of a lifestyle, it's that children that young don't have any business being faced with that type of book, unless they're in that type of family," she said.

Two years after the policy was adopted, commission member Ralph Bullard introduced an amendment that required the family talk section be placed at least five feet from the ground.

"When I came on the commission there was a lot of interest in the community that certain books were not really books that they thought children should be reading," Bullard said.

Bullard, a retired educator and former headmaster of a private Christian school, said while he believes books with LGBT themes have no place in the children's section, if the current commission reconsiders the policy it will reflect the people it serves.

"Just on a personal basis, I think that whole issues and homosexuality and all the different versions it's moved into, transgender and changing sexes and same sex marriage and all those things that come from homosexuality and it being morally correct or immoral, is much more widespread now," he said. "If I were at the library myself, I'd be more restrictive for sure, but it's a public library and it's reflecting the interests of the public that exists."

While Troy Stevenson, with Freedom Oklahoma, an Oklahoma City-based LGBT rights advocacy group, applauds library staff for finding a

compromise that kept the books in circulation, he disagrees with the placement of LGBT-themed books in a category that includes topics such as sexually deviant behavior and drug abuse.

"They singled out one class of people," he said. "Everything else on that list was a medical condition, a substance abuse issue, but you've got one class of people that are singled out. It identifies the entire LGBT community with sex, and I think that's the biggest problem. I think that any book, any material that has to do with sex should be in a place that a kid doesn't have easy access to it, but to say the entire LGBT community is only defined by sex is clear discrimination. It denies us our humanity."

Stevenson said he plans to appeal to the commission at their October 12 meeting to remove LGBT-themed children's books from the family talk section and allow them to be shelved as any other children's book would. Reported in: *The Oklahoman*, October 11.

Accomack County, Virginia

The classic novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, are no longer temporarily banned from Accomack County schools.

Use of the two classics was suspended in November after a parent raised concerns about their use of the N-word. Combined, the two books use the N-word more than 250 times. However, the books' final fate remained undecided.

"We agree that some of the language used is offensive and hurtful," said Ronnie E. Holden, chairman of the board. "Fortunately, Accomack County's excellent teachers and media center specialists have a wonderful talent for conveying the bigger meanings and messages of literature, including these two seminal works."



At a November 15 school board meeting, Marie Rothstein-Williams, the woman who made the complaint, said her son struggled to read the racist language, telling the Accomack County public schools board, “There’s so much racial slurs and defensive [*sic*] wording in there that you can’t get past that.” The challenge also appears to be motivated by the current political landscape in the United States, as the mother told the board, “Right now, we are a nation divided as it is.”

“I keep hearing ‘This is a classic, this is a classic,’” said Rothstein-Williams. “I understand this is a literature classic, but at some point I feel the children will not or do not truly get the classic part, the literature part—which I’m not disputing this is great literature—but there is so much racial slurs in there and offensive wording that you can’t get past that.”

As a committee had yet to discuss the future of the books, a permanent ban had not been placed on them. However, they were removed from classrooms in the district, a move the National Coalition Against Censorship described as “particularly egregious.”

A policy update disallowing challenged books from being suspended from libraries and classrooms during review had been approved by the Accomack County School Board in May, according to Chairman Dr. Ronnie E. Holden.

“What we found was that we had approved two policies in May. The policy was not updated in the policy manual. What we’re doing is going back and making sure all policy has been updated,” said Holden.

The updated policy states that challenged books “shall not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval,” but the board followed a previous policy and removed the books on November 29. The books

were reinstated during a December 6 work session.

Dozens of local residents gathered December 5 to protest the ban. Charles Knitter, a parent who attended Accomack County Public Schools, organized the gathering. He calls the ban “a terrible injustice” and says both novels condemn racism.

Reported in: wavy.com, November 30; DelMarVa Public Radio, December 5; DelMarVaNow.com, December 6, 9, 15; *The Guardian*, December 5.

Issaquah, Washington

An Issaquah mother said her son brought home a graphic novel from school that is pornographic. Shirley Lopez said her fourteen-year-old checked out the book from the Issaquah High School library. Lopez said *Mangaman*, by Barry Lyga, had sexual content she found inappropriate for her son who is a freshman.

“I don’t want to send my child to school and have him come home with this,” said Lopez looking through the book. “These are sexual images, they are naked images, they are naked and sexual. I don’t want my kid to be feeding his mind with that.”

Lopez glanced through the book her son brought home. On page 86 she found a drawing of the character, Ryoko, with his pants down about to have sex with Marissa, a woman who is wearing only underwear. The man’s penis is digitized. The page ends with the pair choosing not to have sex.

Shirley Lopez contacted administrators at Issaquah High School and expressed her concern about the book being available in the school library. She said she was told for her son to just stay away from the book. When she told school staff she didn’t think that was possible, she said their solution was for him to stay out of the school library.

“I have to opt my child out of library to ensure that he isn’t exposed to this,” said a frustrated Lopez.

She said later the librarian agreed to try to “shoo” her son away from the graphic novel. The book was put back on the shelf for other students to check out.

The Issaquah School District is investigating the complaint and said there is a process for parents to ask for a “reevaluation of materials.”

“I certainly sympathize with this parent. She is trying to do the best for her child. If she feels there is inappropriate material I certainly understand her desire to protect her child from that,” said L. Michelle, Issaquah School District spokesperson. “She can fill out the form and I’m confident in that process.”

Lopez plans to challenge the book. “I don’t want to control anybody. I just want to send my kid to school and feel he is safe,” said Lopez. Reported in: kiro7.com, October 27

SCHOOLS Santa Rosa, California

Gutless, by Carl Deuker, was pulled from Jay High School’s Celebrate Literacy Week reading list after some parents questioned its content, according to Santa Rosa County Director of High Schools Jason Weeks.

Gutless tells the story of a Seattle high school student, Brock Ripley, balancing his football aspirations with a friend the team’s quarterback doesn’t like. The book features themes of bullying, overcoming failures, family illness, and growing up. Weeks said parents objected to pieces throughout the book they felt were inappropriate.

“The longest set together is about three pages of things that are not appropriate,” Weeks said. “It’s more about body parts and things like that that shouldn’t be being discussed. It’s inappropriate in that nature.”



The following is a passage from the book describing a girl, Suzanne Friend, who was in special education classes: “Then, in middle school, she got breasts. She got them before any of the other girls. Beautiful breasts. Movie star breasts.” The passage continues to describe the movement of her breasts and how boys reacted to them.

“Other girls didn’t like being stared at, but Suzanne did,” the passage said. “Probably it was the first time anyone paid attention to her, the first time she had anything on the other girls.”

“She shook them for lots of guys,” the narrator continued. “Every time she did it for me, I felt guilty. I never once asked her to do it, and she seemed to like it, but watching her didn’t feel right.”

Weeks said he, Jay High Principal Stephen Knowlton, and Superintendent Tim Wyrosdick agreed with the parents’ assessment of such content.

“Mr. Knowlton met with everyone that wanted to meet with him and listened to their concerns and took the appropriate action,” Weeks said.

District staffers are reviewing how educators missed material parents would find objectionable. “That process had a gap in it and we will make sure it doesn’t happen again,” Weeks said. “Neither Mr. Knowlton nor the district supports the inappropriate pieces of that book. There was no disagreement about that. . . ; We care about the community values and we want to make sure our folks understand it.”

“I’m naturally sorry that *Gutless* was pulled,” Deuker said. “In context, *Gutless* is moral to the core—maybe to the point of being too preachy. The characters that abuse power are, by the last page, revealed as moral cowards—despicable people. The main character learns through the course of the novel that developing the moral courage to

stand up to evil is essential, far more important than physical courage on an athletic field. The teachers would have used the book to take on the topics of bullying and abuse of power.

“A part of me does, I’ll admit, sympathize with parents. They want to keep their children young and innocent—fourth-graders for life. But Peter Pan and Wendy aren’t real. Their junior high ‘children’ are no longer children, but are now young adults. Reading *Gutless* would have been good for them.” Reported in: *Santa Rosa Press-Gazette*, February 2.

Enfield, Connecticut

Billie Joe Armstrong, lead singer of the band Green Day, penned a powerful response to a Connecticut high school’s decision to call off a production of the musical *American Idiot*, based on the Green Day album of the same name. Armstrong challenged the cancellation, arguing that the high school’s choice to not host the production is an issue of censorship.

“I realize that the content of the Broadway production of [*American Idiot*] is not quite suitable for a younger audience,” Armstrong wrote in an Instagram post addressed to the Enfield High School board. “However, there is a high school rendition of the production, and I believe that’s the one Enfield was planning to perform, which is suitable for most people. It would be a shame if these high schoolers were shut down over some of the content that may be challenging for some of the audience.”

Enfield High School cited sex, drugs, and foul language as the reason why the show was cancelled. “The bigger issue is censorship,” Armstrong continued in his note. “This production tackles issues in a post-9/11 world, and I believe the kids should be heard and most of all be creative in telling a story about our history.”

Enfield’s drama club director Nate Ferreira responded to Armstrong’s plea that “the show must go on” in an interview with *The Hartford Courant*.

“It wasn’t the school board as he thinks that forced us to not do the show,” Ferreira stated. “It was a decision that the principal and I arrived at together because there were some kids in the group whose parents didn’t want them involved.” The high school will perform *Little Shop of Horrors* instead. Reported in: *Rolling Stone*, January 26.

Mystic, Connecticut

A controversial move to take a beloved book off a reading list has parents at one Connecticut school confused and upset. George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, a popular book for students to read, was taken off the main reading list at Mystic Middle School.

“Nobody knows why it was taken off the list,” said Dan Kelley, whose son is a seventh grader at Mystic Middle School. He was astonished that the book was removed.

School Superintendent Van Riley said the decision was made two years ago to change the curriculum, which included moving *Animal Farm* off the list of “core books for eighth grade,” but it remains on a secondary reading list. Riley said teachers made that choice because different instructors at the middle school level were using different material, creating an advantage for some in high school.

A middle school English teacher, who had long used the book, was upset about the change and let parents know about it. It grew on social media and now many are questioning the reasoning.

Riley stressed the book is not banned by any means, but is no longer an “anchor” book. “We love the book, it’s a great book,” Riley said. Reported in: *kabc.com*, February 2.



Marion County, Florida

A group of parents say they're upset about a book their children have to read in English class that contains a racial slur. "It was something I was shocked to hear," parent Tanya Walker said. The book, *The Land*, has the N-word and the teacher reads it out loud in class at Forest High School, parents said.

The book follows an African American man during the late 1800s.

"That word is a horrible word in our vocabulary and it's something that we don't use on a regular basis," said Kevin Christian, with the Marion County School District. Christian said the teacher is able to teach and read the book out loud as long as it's inside the educational confines of a classroom.

"To say we're not going to use this book because it upsets you and it doesn't upset me or vice versa, I'm not sure that's a valid argument; to take a piece of highly respected and award-winning piece of American historical literature out of the classroom and never expose students to that," Christian said. Reported in: wftv.com, October 3.

Chicago, Illinois

After a prize-winning novel was yanked from the classroom at Lemont High School District 210, parents are saying other books on the reading list are too racy to read.

The school pulled Booker-prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997 by Arundhati Roy, from the reading list of the Academic English II class, because the book "contains subject matter in some sections that is not appropriate for our students," wrote Principal Eric Michaelsen in a November 2 email to parents. "The questionable passages were not assigned for students to read. The books have been collected and will not be used again," Michaelsen wrote.

Now some parents want eight additional "X-rated" books banned from advanced English classes. At a November 21 meeting, mothers Laura Reigle and Mary Kay Fessler, along with other "parents and community members," urged the Lemont School Board to pull Maya Angelou's 1969 autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, off of school reading lists.

In addition to her problems with Angelou's classic, Reigle—who is the mother of a Lemont High School junior—also published a complaint against seven other "pornographic" books on the high school's English curriculum, which she claims "contain sex, murder, suicide and homoeroticism." They are, in addition to *The God of Small Things*, *The Lovely Bones*, by Alice Sebold; *Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher; *A Separate Peace*, by John Knowles; *After the First Death*, by Robert Cormier; *All the Bright Places*, by Jennifer Niven; and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, by James Baldwin.

"I think it was a big, huge wake-up call for parents who are questioning the school's activities and looking at their actions and not trusting them," said Reigle. She said she thinks the selection of curriculum materials should be more transparent.

Resident Rick Lighthart came with a prepared statement of changes he wanted in the district's policy. "Regardless of the books, I'm recommending to the board that no literature whatsoever be inclusive of literal, metaphorical, figurative or allegorical words for male or female genitals," he said. Identifying himself as a former tenured school teacher he said, other than exceptions for state-mandated sex ed, "English classes should not be involved in sexuality in literature for our kids. It shouldn't be in any books. No books."

"We can't have eighteen-year-olds reading about masturbation or sexual

issues, regardless of the literature. I don't care if it's from Dickens or who else," he said, in summary.

The God of Small Things is a debut novel described as a coming-of-age story of two separated fraternal twins in India who meet again as adults. Each of their childhoods is affected by current events in India such as state communism, the caste system, and arranged marriages. Shortly after the book was released, Roy was sued in her home state of Kerala, India, on obscenity charges.

"Any writer can be harassed in this way," Roy told the *New York Times* in July 1997. "It comes to the point where one citizen can hold literature to ransom."

According to the superintendent and a district spokesman, the Roy novel slipped through the curriculum approval process in error. New curriculum items are supposed to be publicly displayed by the board for a period of time and then approved by a vote of the board.

"Unfortunately, with *The God of Small Things*, this process was not followed. The book was introduced into our curriculum without approval of the board of education," wrote Tony Hamilton, D210's director of school and community relations, in an email.

The district will use this experience as a "springboard to review all materials that are used in our English classes—regardless of how long they've been a part of our curriculum—to ensure they are appropriate for our students," he added.

The school has also implemented a permission-slip policy that would allow parents to opt their children out of reading *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. But Reigle and Fessler don't believe the opt-out policy is fair.

Fessler said her "kid would . . . be ostracized and read different material somewhere else" if she did not



approve of a book, and Reigle said the permission slips would coerce parents into signing in order to avoid the “exclusion” of their children from the classroom. Reported in: *Cook County Chronicle*, November 29; *bustle.com*, December 6.

Carmel, Indiana

It should have been simple. It should have been a moment for teaching. Instead, when a Carmel High student apparently complained about a poster promoting adoption over abortion, a work created by a group of pro-life students and displayed with permission on a cafeteria wall, school administrators went in the opposite direction. They had the poster removed and destroyed.

In November, which is National Adoption Month, student members of a school-approved club called Carmel Teens for Life created a poster that featured 300 paper hearts and the word abortion edited to read as adoption. A Carmel High administrator then approved the sign, and the students displayed it in the cafeteria November 17. But the next day, the poster was taken down and trashed, reportedly after a student complained that others were offended by the message.

On December 5, a Christian legal defense organization, Liberty Counsel, notified Superintendent Nicholas Wahl that it would sue if the district didn’t reverse its decision to stifle the students’ free speech rights. Then, four days after Liberty Counsel’s letter was sent to the superintendent, the student leaders of Teens for Life were told to sign an agreement barring them from communicating with outside agencies without approval from the club’s staff sponsors. The sponsors also would have to sign off on parental involvement with the club as well as any student communication about the group’s activities.

In a letter to school administrators the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) wrote: “While a school may follow a viewpoint-neutral policy of approving student posters for display, school administrators may not remove or refuse permission to display a poster only because of its real or perceived potential to offend. Indeed, if offense were used as a justification to suppress political expression, discussions on polarizing societal issues such as immigration, terrorism, religion, contraception, marriage, and race would be purged from our high schools.”

Suppressing such discussions would undermine one of the core goals of public education: to encourage civic engagement and develop students’ critical-thinking skills. Reported in: *Indianapolis Star*, December 15; *ncac.org*, December 20.

Henderson, Nevada

A book assigned in a Henderson elementary school has some parents furious. *Bad Kitty for President* is a chapter book more than one hundred pages long meant to teach children about America’s electoral system. On page 76, talking about money in a campaign, it says “A billion dollars! Holy %#@\$.”

Fenix Ohman, a third grader at James Gibson Elementary School, reads the symbols, and his mind jumped to a word that needs a *bleep*. Pages later, the symbols show up again. Ohman says he read those as the F-word.

“My reaction was of complete shock,” said Sonya DeRossi, Ohman’s aunt. “I’ve had four children in that elementary school. My job as a parent is to keep my child innocent as long as I can but if I’m fighting the schools what chance do we have?”

The author of the book, Nick Bruel, believes the symbols are vague and unharful. “She can take offense but

honestly I’m not entirely sure what she’s taking offense with,” Bruel said. Other parents at the school like Amanda Knapp don’t think the symbols are a big deal.

“I think that parents nowadays are way too sensitive and that exposure teaches children and if your child knows not to use those words, it shouldn’t be an issue,” she said.

Ohman’s mother said the teacher told her the book would be pulled from the assignment.

Clark County School District says it reviews all formal complaints about educational materials, but no such complaint has been filed for this book. Reported in: *ktnv.com*, November 17.

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Cherry Hill High School East students of all races made a passionate plea to school officials January 24 to allow the musical *Ragtime* to hit the stage without removing several racial slurs.

More than one hundred people packed a Cherry Hill School Board meeting to press their case on whether the N-word should be used in the upcoming production, the school’s spring musical. There were cheers, tears, and angst on both sides of the issue, which brought national attention from Broadway stars, people affiliated with the arts, and civic groups weighing in.

Ezra Nugiel, a white student who plays a character in the play who utters the N-word several times, was among several cast members who asked the South Jersey district to rescind a decision announced a week earlier banning the use of the N-word.

“I don’t say it [the N-word] happily, but I know I have to,” Nugiel told the board, which has two minority members. “We want to hear these words to not let history repeat itself.”

Cedric Middleton, a black student in the play, also supported using the



script unaltered. “I fully understand the feelings of discomfort,” he said. “*Ragtime* is how we get through such ugliness.”

Carey Savage, vice president of the Camden County East Branch of the NAACP, also made an emotional appeal, saying civil rights leaders don’t “need to be refreshed on what racism is by the unfettered use of this word.”

“You can’t call me the N-word and then tell me it’s art. I don’t care what your rationale is,” said Savage, of Voorhees, a retired school administrator. “I’ve been through too much for that.”

The school board took no action on the controversy during a meeting that lasted several hours.

Superintendent Joseph Meloche said the district has contacted Music Theatre International, the leading theatrical license agency, which must approve any changes to the script. Without authorization, the district would be “at a crossroads to determine whether to move forward with the show in its original form or to pursue other options,” he said. Reported in: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 25.

Blountville, Tennessee

A Tennessee mother has launched a campaign against textbooks used in the local school district for teaching about Islam as part of the curriculum. Michelle Edmisten wants the Sullivan County board of education in Blountville to remove a seventh-grade textbook from the course because it teaches basic lessons about Islam.

“It is time as parents, teachers, and administrators, we stand up and take back our families, our schools, and our country,” she told the school board. She added her daughter felt some assignments about Islamic beliefs violated her Christian beliefs, so the student refused to do some of the school work and failed those assignments.

“Those are zeroes that we proudly took and we will not compromise,” Edmisten said.

Some of the assignment questions were “Islam’s holy book is called the _____,” “List the five pillars of Islam,” and, “After the death of Muhammed, did the Muslim empire spread or get smaller?”

Edmisten is adamant that her daughter’s “personal religious beliefs were violated.” She is, therefore, adamant in her demand to get *My World History*, published by Pearson, removed. “I would like to see the Pearson book yanked from the school immediately. I would like to see parents, Christians, veterans, anyone that’s anyone, stand up for this fight.”

“How can I, as a Christian, say that I have these values? And I want to instill these values in my daughter, but then say it’s OK, go ahead and do it,” she wonders.

Director of Schools Evelyn Rafalowski and Board of Education Chairman Michael Hughes said the system is exploring a religious accommodation option since there is no “opt out” allowed in Tennessee.

At the close of the board meeting, board member Mark Ireson made a motion to remove the textbook immediately “because it does not represent the values of the county.” However, after Ireson’s motion, school system officials said there is a textbook removal policy in place that is to be followed, including the parent filling out a form and the formation of a committee on the matter, and that the matter could be addressed at a future called board meeting.

“We support our faculty and our staff,” said Hughes, who also said he has issues with the Pearson textbook. “This debate over the textbook has nothing to do with the faculty.”

However, Edmisten disagreed. “I’m very happy (with Ireson’s motion).

I’m very unhappy about the board for apologizing to the staff because it is a teacher’s discretion,” Edmisten said. “That’s why I’m going to continue the fight.”

In November, Edmisten formally asked the school system to remove *My World History*. Making her second appearance before the board in as many months, Edmisten, is now represented by Freedom X, a California-based, self-described conservative Christian group with a website that says it fights Islamic indoctrination in U.S. schools. “This will not go away. I will not go away,” Edmisten told the board.

“I want the book removed immediately,” Edmisten said. She lamented that Bible verses were removed from a wall at Indian Springs Elementary School and said that Tennessee law prohibits discrimination against a religious viewpoint and voluntary expressions of faith-based views.

The Tennessee state board of education is currently reviewing draft seventh-grade standards, which would remove a section on Islamic history from 400 to 1500 but retain mentions of Islam in other sections. Until and unless the standards change in 2019–20, Hughes said Sullivan County must follow the law and standards “whether we like it or whether we don’t.” Reported in: *Kingsport Times-News*, October 4, November 7; carbonated.tv, October 6.

Cumberland County Schools, Tennessee

John Green’s young-adult novel *Paper Towns* was returned to library shelves in Cumberland County Schools after a reconsideration committee rejected a parent’s request that it be removed from all schools in Cumberland County. The parent filed a request for reconsideration after her daughter, a seventh-grade student at Brown Elementary School, checked it out and



brought it home from the Brown Elementary School library.

The parent told school officials she did not want the book to be available to any students of any age and believed it only appropriate for adult audiences. She said there was nothing good about the item and believed the theme was “teenage party life.”

“She said she would like it removed from all the schools,” said Stephanie Speich, principal at Brown Elementary.

The report issued by the reconsideration committee reviewing *Paper Towns* noted that the book was not used in classroom instruction, has a UG (Upper Grade) label to notify students about its reading and maturity level, and that it was purchased following student requests that it be made available through the school library. It has won a literary award and has been made into a popular film. In deciding to retain the book, members of the committee expressed appreciation for the quality of the writing, the novel’s use of literary references, and its modeling of positive behaviors like calling for a designated driver. It also provided a number of perspectives on suicide, which is a component of the story. The committee said that while the book’s language is a concern, it was not language students would be unfamiliar with.

Speich noted the parent was acquainted with the material her child was reading, something all on the committee praised. But several on the committee said such decisions were best made by parents for their children.

Rebecca Atkinson, librarian at CCHS, said, “I tell students there is a book in my library for every student, but not every book is for every student.”

Their decision to return books to library shelves will be sent to Director of Schools Donald Andrews.

The parent, who was not present for the committee meeting, has the option to appeal the decision of the committee. Reported in *Crossville Chronicle*, March 10, 2016.

Argyle, Texas

Several parents spoke out against two required readings during an Argyle school board meeting in September, citing disturbing and inappropriate content. The two books in question, *Trash*, by Andy Mulligan, and *Iqbal*, by Francesco D’Adamo, are in this year’s sixth-grade lesson plans to promote cross-curriculum reading, district officials said.

“The readings go along with world cultures and social studies,” Argyle Superintendent Telena Wright said.

But for the six parents who spoke during an open forum, the content and language were too graphic for their eleven- and twelve-year-old children.

“I thought it [*Trash*] was a really good book,” said parent Amy Fanning. “But it’s not appropriate for that age level.”

Most of the parents said they should be the ones to teach children about tough concepts, not the school system.

Trash, which students read over the summer, follows the story of Raphael, a fourteen-year-old boy who lives in a third-world country and stumbles on widespread governmental corruption. Parent Traci Johnson said she hosted a book club for sixth-grade girls as they were reading the book. After they finished, they cooked a meal for local police and firefighters.

“I didn’t want the girls to think police were corrupt,” she said.

Iqbal, scheduled for reading later in the semester, is historical fiction that deals with child slavery. The book is based on the real life of Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani boy who helped free child slaves but was fatally shot in 1995 when he was only twelve years old.

“That can also send the message that bad things can happen when you stand up for something,” Fanning said.

Both books appear on national reading lists and have won multiple literary awards in children and young adult categories.

“One of our sixth-grade teachers taught one of the books for four years at another district,” Wright said. The alternative book to the assigned readings is *I Am Malala*, an autobiography about a girl who stood up to the Taliban, was shot in the head at point-blank range and lived to tell about it. If parents still aren’t satisfied, Wright said, they can discuss an alternative assignment with their child’s teacher and principal. Reported in: *Denton Record-Chronicle*, September 20.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES Long Beach, California

Michele Roberge resigned in September as theater director at California State University at Long Beach after fourteen years in the post. Her resignation followed a disagreement with administrators over whether the university’s performing-arts center should host the racially charged play *Nigger Wetb*ck Ch*nk*.

After the university’s president, Jane Close Conoley, told Roberge that the play must be canceled, the theater director said she felt she could no longer remain in her position. “I couldn’t imagine myself doing this job anymore,” she said.

Conoley, however, said she had not banned the play. She said that because of the racially sensitive nature of the material and because faculty members did not feel the play created many teaching opportunities, they would not be asked to plug the play in their classrooms or plan educational events around it. But Conoley conceded that



this decision had made the play financially unviable.

“To be pretty frank, I hate to be critical, but it was described as kind of a *Saturday Night Live* skit. They didn’t think it was deep. They didn’t think it was thought-provoking,” the president said. “In my view, it was not about censorship.”

Rafael Agustin, co-founder of the troupe that created the play, disagrees. The play features black, Latino, and Asian actors mocking racial stereotypes, he said, and is intended to open a dialogue about race.

“The same act of censorship that today may seem to protect a community may be used next time as justification to silence a community in desperate need of a voice,” Agustin said in a written statement. “It has long been the position of our company that there is a vast difference between using these words to express hatred and having a mature conversation about their use.”

Roberge said that rather than simply placing limits on the play’s advertisement, the president had made it very clear to her that it would not run. “She said, ‘Cancel it,’” Roberge said. Reported in: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 9.

Kellogg, Kansas

Newman University canceled a planned talk by Kansas Supreme Court Justice Carol Beier after people who oppose abortion launched an “unsettling” social media campaign opposing her visit, the university’s provost said.

Beier had been invited by the campus student history club on August 22 to answer questions as part of the school’s Constitution Day program. She was scheduled to discuss topics such as how to get into law school, what it is like to be a judge and what role judges play in the judicial

system, said Clark Schafer, a Newman spokesman.

But opposition to her visit from people outside the campus grew so ominous in tone that Newman vice president and provost Kimberly Long said she worried about the safety of Beier and of students attending her talk.

Newman, near Kellogg and Edwards, is a Catholic university.

“There were no specific threats of violence, but . . . I found some of the things being said were quite unsettling,” Long said. “I decided it was in the best interests of good operations of the university to cancel the event.”

“We worried about safety of students, and about perhaps having a guest on campus not be treated right,” Long said. “I hope that our civic discourse here would be respectful to all persons in the future. I felt the behaviors in some of the messages to me were not respectful.”

Diana Stanley, a Newman student and president of the student history club, said that members of the club invited Beier to talk about the history of the Kansas Constitution and the general duties of judges.

“We were very excited when Justice Beier agreed because she has over thirty years of experience in the legal field and is a Wichita native,” Stanley wrote. Opponents to Beier’s visit “made very public statements that implied our club had invited Carol Beier, a member of the highest court in Kansas, to speak about abortion . . . at a Constitution Day event.”

“As a student of history, I think that civil discourse is one of the bulwarks of a free society. I find disappointing that in our current political climate, even a lecture on the Kansas Constitution is considered controversial.”

Long said the messages that seemed unsettling came from people not affiliated with Newman students or faculty.

But at least one former Newman student, in a posting on his Facebook page, opposed Beier’s visit and called on people to contact Long’s office.

“Absolutely disgusted that my alma mater, Newman University, is hosting pro-abortion Kansas Supreme Court Justice Carol Beier to speak this Friday on campus for Constitution Day,” he wrote. Reported in: *Wichita Eagle*, September 8.

Lynchburg, Virginia

An attempt by the Liberty University administration to censor one of its newspaper’s student columnists backfired with the widespread republication of a column criticizing Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump across numerous national news outlets.

The column, written by *Liberty Champion* Sports Editor Joel Schmiege, came in response to University President Jerry Falwell Jr.’s continued support of Trump’s campaign following the release of a now-infamous 2005 *Access Hollywood* video in which the Republican nominee boasted about being able to kiss and grab women by their genitals without their consent because of his celebrity status.

Falwell pulled Schmiege’s column, justifying his decision by calling the piece “redundant.”

“The paper already had a letter that was very similar in content supporting Hillary Clinton and condemning Donald Trump for the 2005 video,” Falwell wrote in an October 19 statement. “The two letters were redundant so an editorial decision was made to go with the other letter, which written [*sic*] by a medical student, because it did not come from a staff member but an independent reader.”

A statement released by a university spokesperson cited space limitations as another reason for Falwell’s excision of the article.



“Space allocation always requires editorial judgment and that judgment simply does not allow for repetition,” the statement reads. “This was discussed with Mr. Schmieg and the University is at a loss for why he seems to have not recalled or understood these facts and circumstances.”

After Falwell pulled the column, Schmieg took to Facebook to post the piece, writing, “I find these words from Jerry amusing and extremely hypocritical as yesterday I was told he was not allowing me to express my personal opinion in an article I wrote for my weekly column in the *Liberty Champion* about Trump and his ‘locker room talk.’ Here is the story I was not allowed to publish because Jerry didn’t like it.”

In his column, Schmieg wrote about his own experiences as a male athlete and the content of the “locker room talk” to which Trump compared his own words in the *Access Hollywood* tape.

“As a former male athlete, I know exactly what high school guys talk about when they think they are alone,” Schmieg wrote. “It absolutely can be vulgar and objectifying to women. But here’s the thing—I have never in my life heard guys casually talk about preying on women in a sexual manner.”

Schmieg’s column condemned Trump and those who continue to support him despite the comments he made in the video.

“This is not locker room talk,” he wrote. “Anyone who says otherwise is just trying to excuse the terrible things they or others have said.”

Despite labeling Trump’s words as “reprehensible,” Falwell continued to defend the candidate in his pursuit of the presidency, something with which Schmieg and other Liberty students and faculty have found fault.

This was not the first time Falwell has been criticized for his support of the candidate. A week before Schmieg’s column was cut, a Liberty student group called Liberty United Against Trump released a statement denouncing Falwell for defending the GOP nominee.

“A recently uncovered tape revealed his comments bragging about sexually assaulting women,” the statement reads. “Any faculty or staff member at Liberty would be terminated for such comments, and yet when Donald Trump makes them, President Falwell rushes eagerly to his defense—taking the name ‘Liberty University’ with him.”

Falwell, who campaigned as an evangelical supporter on the candidate’s behalf, issued his own statement criticizing the students’ views but called the letter “a testament to the fact that Liberty University promotes the free expression of ideas unlike many major universities where political correctness prevents conservative students from speaking out.”

While Falwell claims pride for the campus’ free expression, Schmieg’s column still wound up on the cutting room floor a week after Falwell issued his statement.

Liberty University, a private institution not subject to First Amendment standards, regards itself as the owner and publisher of the *Champion*. Consequently, Liberty administration—namely Falwell—is charged with making editorial decisions about any potentially “controversial” content each week the paper is published. Even though excising the column was legally within the college’s authority, the message sent by the president’s decision has been a chilling one for other would-be dissenters on the Lynchburg campus.

Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center (SPLC), expressed his own concerns

surrounding the chilling effect on Liberty’s campus.

“It’s concerning that any university, public or private, has created a hostile climate where people don’t feel safe in expressing political views that diverge from their administration’s,” he said. “That’s a good way for an educational institution to produce robots, not informed and engaged citizens.”

But LoMonte has hope that Liberty’s blowback against its student journalist will allow the university to re-evaluate the role it plays in facilitating free speech on campus.

“I imagine that the ironically named Liberty University will be seeing a drop in applications from people who want to learn in a climate that values and rewards independent thinking,” he said. “Liberty should join the 21st century and recognize that administrative censorship of journalism is irreconcilable with fundamental American values.” Reported in: *The Elm*, November 10.

U.S. GOVERNMENT Washington, DC

The U.S. Department of Agriculture on February 3 abruptly removed inspection reports and other information from its website about the treatment of animals at thousands of research laboratories, zoos, dog breeding operations, and other facilities.

In a statement, the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service cited court rulings and privacy laws for the decision, which it said was the result of a “comprehensive review” that took place over the past year. It said the removed documents, which also included records of enforcement actions against violators of the Animal Welfare Act and the Horse Protection Act, would now be accessible only via Freedom of Information Act requests. Those can take years to be approved.



“We remain equally committed to being transparent and responsive to our stakeholders’ informational needs, and maintaining the privacy rights of individuals with whom we come in contact,” the statement said.

The records that had been available were frequently used by animal welfare advocates to monitor government regulation of animal treatment at circuses, scientific labs and zoos. Members of the public could also use the department’s online database to search for information about dog breeders, as could pet stores. Seven states currently require pet stores to source puppies from breeders with clean USDA inspection reports, according to the Humane Society of the United States—a requirement that could now be impossible to meet.

Animal welfare organizations quickly condemned the removal of the information, which they called unexpected and said would allow animal abuse to go unchecked.

“The USDA action cloaks even the worst puppy mills in secrecy and allows abusers of Tennessee walking horses, zoo animals, and lab animals to hide even the worst track records in animal welfare,” said John Goodwin, senior director of the Humane Society’s Stop Puppy Mills Campaign.

In a statement, Kathy Guillermo, the senior vice president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, called it “a shameful attempt to keep the public from knowing when and which laws and regulations have been violated. Many federally registered and licensed facilities have long histories of violations that have caused terrible suffering.”

It is unclear whether the decision to remove the animal-related records was driven by newly hired President Donald Trump administration officials. When asked questions about the change, a USDA-APHIS representative

referred back to the department’s statement. The Associated Press reported that a department spokeswoman declined to say whether the removal was temporary or permanent.

The change came two days after Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Calif., introduced a bill calling for more information about and a reduction in testing on animals at government research labs. The bill is backed by an advocacy group, the White Coat Waste Project, which says such testing is a waste of taxpayer dollars.

Justin Goodman, the group’s vice president for advocacy and policy, said much of the information he has gathered on animal testing at hundreds of federal facilities—including inspection reports and annual reports that can include information on the species and numbers of animals used—came from the USDA-APHIS database. He said the department’s reference to privacy requirements were puzzling because many of the documents were already heavily redacted. The page where the information was located now brings up the announcement about its removal.

“There was already a troubling lack of transparency about what happens in government-funded labs,” Goodman said. “This was a very important resource for us, and for every animal organization, in terms of tracking patterns of animal use and compliance, whether it’s in labs or other settings.” Reported in: *Chicago Tribune*, February 3.

PRISONS Austin, Texas

Dan Slater’s new book *Wolf Boys* recounts the story of two Mexican American teens in Texas seduced by the violent cartels across the border and the Mexican-born Texas detective who hunts them. It is grim and violent, yet it is a detailed and thoughtful look at American society and the war

on drugs. It has also been condemned by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Directors Review Committee, which declared *Wolf Boys* off limits to all Texas prisoners before it was even published.

Paul Wright, executive director of the Human Rights Defense Center and editor of *Prison Legal News*, says Texas has 15,000 banned books but the list “is growing exponentially. Once a book goes on it never comes off.”

The Texas list is not just long but diverse. It includes former Senator Bob Dole’s *World War II: An Illustrated History of Crisis and Courage*; Jenna Bush’s *Ana’s Story: A Journey of Hope*; Jon Stewart’s *America: A Citizen’s Guide to Democracy Inaction*; and *101 Best Family Card Games*. Then there are books banned for what TDCJ calls “racial content,” such as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, the Texas football classic *Friday Night Lights*, Flannery O’Connor’s *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, and Lisa Belkin’s *Show Me a Hero*, which depicts the struggle to desegregate housing in Yonkers, New York, in the face of institutional racism.

But Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, David Duke’s *Jewish Supremacism*, and the *Nazi Aryan Youth Primer* are all acceptable. Texas inmates are also free to read Che Guevara’s *Guerrilla Warfare*, which teaches everything needed to know about Molotov cocktail construction, as well as “U.S. Army manuals [that] contain combat strategy and tactics for fighting small, loosely organized groups.”

A 2011 report from legal advocacy nonprofit Texas Civil Rights Project found that in 2008, 11,851 titles were on the state’s banned book list. Of those, 8,000 books had no chance of being challenged or removed from the list. The report highlighted books critical of the prisons system and about civil rights, as well as classics.



Here are some of the classic works of literature that have been banned, according to that report: *Shakespeare and Love Sonnets*, edited by O.B. Duane; *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri; *Vintage Hughes*, Langston Hughes; *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker; *American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis; *Tropic of Cancer*, Henry Miller; *Big Sur*, Jack Kerouac; *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie; *Deadeye Dick*, Kurt Vonnegut; *The Great American Novel*, Philip Roth; *The Deer Park*, Norman Mailer; *First Love: A Gothic Tale*, Joyce Carol Oates; *Eight Men*, Richard Wright; *Villages*, John Updike; *Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon*, Chuck Palahniuk; *12 Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright; *Breakdowns: Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!*, Art Spiegelman; *Salammbô*, Gustave Flaubert; *Delta of Venus*, Anaïs Nin; *Utopia*, Thomas More; *Middlesex*, Jeffrey Eugenides; *The Way to Paradise*, Mario Vargas Llosa; *White Oleander*, Janet Fitch; *Hooking Up*, Tom Wolfe; *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, Flannery O'Connor; *It Can't Happen Here*, Sinclair Lewis; *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis; and *The Essential Gore Vidal*, Gore Vidal.

“Texas is less rational than other states,” says Michelle Dillon, program coordinator of the Seattle-based nonprofit Books to Prisoners. She adds that it is a national problem, particularly in more conservative states in the South. Wright says federal prisons have even banned President Obama’s books.

In Texas, as in most states, the judge and jury on a book’s fate is typically an anonymous mailroom clerk, “who often don’t have high school diplomas,” says Wright. “The bureaucratic system rubber stamps it from there.”

Texas is one of the few states with a comprehensive database. While most states allow each prison to operate haphazardly, Wright says the states with databases—Arizona, Florida,

Michigan, and North Carolina—“are the most systematic and organized in their censorship.”

The lists are generally not accessible, Wright says, and the lack of transparency means publishers or groups or people sending books don’t know what’s banned.

Arizona prisons have banned books on physics, mythology, dragons, home medical care, and local wildlife. In 2010, a detention facility in Moncks Corner, South Carolina banned all books except the Christian Bible. Prisoners in Pennsylvania can’t read books related to *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Pathfinder*, *Magic: The Gathering*, *Warhammer 40k*, or *World of Warcraft*, because those games allegedly “advocate violence, insurrection or guerrilla warfare against the government or any of its facilities.”

“There is no accountability,” Dillon says, adding that some inmates have complained that one clerk might ban a book that another would let through, either because the one clerk is grouchy, doesn’t like the prisoner for whom it is intended, or has more conservative values. Wright says any minority viewpoint—racial, ethnic, political, or religious, is especially likely to be shot down.

But it goes beyond that. A collection of Shakespeare’s sonnets and a collection of Leonardo DaVinci’s sketches have both been banished in Texas for sexual content (the Shakespeare edition had a painting with nudity on the cover) while a book like *The Pleasure’s All Mine*, filled with descriptions of kinky sex, made it through. Reported in: *The Guardian*, September 25; Quartz, September 26; *bustle.com*, September 27.

ART St. Louis, Missouri

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis is at the center of controversy over artwork that appears designed

to address racial tensions but, instead, is provoking them. Museum directors came up with a supposedly Solomon-like solution, putting the artwork behind screens to appease those who might be offended.

Part of the exhibit of work by Kelley Walker, a New York-based multimedia artist, shows altered images of black civil rights protesters in the 1960s being attacked by police, and covers from the men’s lifestyle magazine, *King*. The images appear to be smeared with whitening toothpaste and chocolate. They have been criticized as racially insensitive and particularly caustic in St. Louis, a community that is trying to heal in the aftermath of civic unrest and deep racial fissures. Reported in: *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 29.

FOREIGN Toronto, Canada

The Toronto Public Library released its annual list of customer complaints at a June 2016 board meeting. Library patrons asked for the removal of Ian McEwan’s award-winning novel *Atonement* and David Egger’s best-selling memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. The library also received complaints about two graphic novels that were deemed a little too graphic by the complaining patrons, and a call to remove a documentary based on a Palestinian woman’s life. All three removal requests were rejected.

McEwan’s *Atonement* was targeted for its poor grammar and sentence structure. The request to ban Egger’s *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* was based on the accusation that it contained profanity, poor grammar, and poor sentence structure. The library’s materials review committee retained both books, citing high demand and positive reviews for both books.



The complaint seeking the removal of the documentary, *Soraida, A Woman of Palestine*, directed by Egyptian-Canadian filmmaker Tahani Rached, claimed it lacked any artistic or educational merit and had no basis in factual events. The committee retained the film in the library's collection, noting that the film is "subjective in nature," and that it is recommended for high school students by a Canadian educational magazine.

The library did agree to move the comic strip collection *Cyanide and Happiness: Punching Zoo* to the adult graphic novel section from the teen collection. The patron challenged the work on the ground that it contained vulgar language, pornographic humor, racism, and sex. The library committee noted that the comic strips, which were originally published online, contained dark humour that may not be appropriate for everyone.

The committee refused a request to institute a labelling system for its graphic books after a patron complained about *The Troublemakers*, a graphic novel by award-winning writer and artist Gilbert Hernandez. The individual complained about sexual language and depictions of prostitution and violence in the book, and said a new labelling system is necessary so children will not borrow books with material that is not suitable for them.

The library committee responded by citing the author's award-winning track record, and added that the book is already categorized in the adult graphic book collection. The committee acknowledged that graphic books are inherently appealing to children, because they contain images that easier to interpret than words. However, they also pointed out that the graphic books meant for older audiences are stored separately from

the children-oriented books. "Parents and legal guardians are responsible for monitoring and limiting the use of library materials by their children," the committee said. Reported in: *Toronto Life*, June 28; CTVNews.ca, June 29.

Westmount, Quebec, Canada

The Westmount Public Library temporarily removed a displayed copy of *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Photographs* from a public display after a patron complained. The book features a number of Mapplethorpe's images that are included in the permanent collection of the Getty Museum. The library's display was created to coincide with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts's exhibit of Mapplethorpe's work, called *Focus: Perfection*.

In accordance with the library's policies, a reconsideration committee was formed to review the book in light of the patron's complaint. The committee voted to retain the book and return it to the public display. The complaining patron was not identified. Reported in: *Montreal Gazette*, November 4

Beijing, China

Apple has withdrawn the *New York Times* from its China App Store following a request from Chinese authorities. The paper said the move was aimed at preventing readers in China "from accessing independent news coverage." Apple said they had been informed the app violated Chinese regulations but did not say what rules had been broken.

Western media have long been facing difficulties making their content available in China, with many outlets frequently or permanently blocked. According to the *New York Times*, Apple removed both the English-language and Chinese-language apps from the App Store in China December 23.

The paper cited an Apple spokesperson as saying the firm had been "informed that the app is in violation of local regulations," which meant it had to be taken down.

"When this situation changes, the app store will once again offer the *New York Times* app for download in China," the spokesman said.

The New York Times said they had asked Apple to reconsider the decision.

The paper's website has been blocked in China since 2012 after it published a number of reports on the private wealth of members of the political elite and their families. The *Times* attributes the request to pull the app to new regulations officially designed to curb activities "such as endangering national security, disrupting social order and violating the legitimate rights and interests of others."

"The request by the Chinese authorities to remove our apps is part of their wider attempt to prevent readers in China from accessing independent news coverage by the *New York Times* of that country, coverage which is no different from the journalism we do about every other country in the world," the paper's spokeswoman Eileen Murphy said.

Users who have their accounts registered on an App Store other than the Chinese one can still download the apps.

Apps from some other international media outlets can still be accessed, including the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, BBC News, the *Financial Times*, ABC News, CNN, and Reuters.

In the case of the BBC, the Chinese-language website is blocked while the English version occasionally has some human rights or political stories blocked on both the website and the app. A number of other western websites like Google, YouTube, and Facebook are also blocked



in China. Reported in: BBC News, January 5.

Shanghai, China

Customers of the Shanghai Foreign Language Bookstore used social media to complain that two pages had been torn out of their newly-purchased copies of the *Merriam-Webster English Dictionary*.

“I bought a dictionary two days ago in Shanghai Foreign Language Bookstore. I’ve noticed that the plastic wrapping on all the copies had been removed and the shop assistant told me, ‘There are some problem, and we removed the wrapping to deal with them.’ I bought the books and carefully examined it, only to find that two pages have been torn out. I wonder what could be the words that irritate the authorities,” said Twitter user Tyler Wang.

The missing pages contain the definition of Taiwan.

An employee with the Beijing Foreign Languages Bookstore told the *Washington Post* that all imported copies of the Merriam-Webster dictionary had been “treated” before they went on the shelf.

“There is content violating the One China principle, and we have dealt with it in accordance with relevant regulations,” he said, only giving his surname as Zhu.

According to reports on social media, prior editions of the Merriam-Webster dictionary have been censored by covering the definition of Taiwan with black marker or paper stickers. Reported in: *Washington Post*, October 13.

London, England

Recently, the Student Union at Queen Mary University—a public research university in London—approved a motion to prohibit the sales of tabloid newspapers on campus. The

Sun, *Daily Mail*, and *Express* contain viewpoints that are “hateful” toward refugees, immigrants, and other marginalized groups, and therefore, no one should be able to read them.

“The Union should continue to stand by its mission, vision and values such as ‘diversity and inclusivity,’” the motion states, according to *The Tab*.

The motion does not carry actual weight: university officials would have to agree to enforce it. Nor does it stop students from bringing copies of the papers onto campus. The motion is merely “a commercial boycott that will ensure the Union does not profit from the sale of these newspapers.”

Queen Mary’s Student Union is not the first to take this step. City University’s Student Union recently approved a similar ban on tabloids. Reported in: *reason.com*, January 9.

India

A high court in Chennai, Madras, India dismissed an attempt to bring criminal charges against novelist Perumal Murugan for the content of one of his books, *Madhorubagan*.

Madhorubagan (One Part Woman) is set about a century ago near the author’s home town of Tiruchengode in southern India. It is about a childless Tamil woman who participates in a sex ritual during a temple festival in an attempt to conceive, a scenario Murugan says was based on historical fact.

Although Murugan is Tamil himself and a respected scholar of the region’s history and culture, right-wing nationalists offended by the historical novel claimed that he “defamed Tiruchengode town and the womenfolk and the community.” In their decision, the court offered an easy nonjudicial solution for those who were troubled by the novel: “If you do not like a book, simply close it. The answer is not its ban.” Reported in: BBC News, July 5; *The Hindu*

Centre for Politics and Public Policy, July 6, 2016

Ireland

The Irish Censorship of Publications Board has put a prohibition order on all editions of *The Raped Little Runaway*, written by Jean Martin. It is the first book banned in Ireland on the grounds of obscenity in eighteen years. The order applies to all editions of the book by any publisher.

Board chairman Shane McCarthy said the decision was unanimous among the five board members.

“It was the only resort,” said Mr McCarthy. “We either ban it or allow it. It isn’t like a film where you can put in an age restriction. It is black or white.” The book contains numerous explicit descriptions of the rape of a child.

McCarthy said only a small number of books are banned in Ireland and that prohibitions were an extreme and rare occurrence. Reported in: *The Irish Independent*, March 10, 2016.

Qatar

The International School of Choueifat (ISC) in Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan has been forced to withdraw textbooks which describe the Palestinian resistance as terrorists. Parents complained to the school after spotting excerpts from the books that said Palestinians are practicing terrorism in the Middle East.

The Qatari ministry of education and higher education visited the school and issued a statement on Twitter, stating: “The books’ contents were found to contradict Qatar’s foreign policy.” The ministry responded after photographs of a page from the unnamed English-language book were posted on Twitter.

The school confirmed that the book was a grade 9 history text titled *Technology, War and Independence*, published



by Oxford University Press. All copies of the book were removed and students were reimbursed for its costs, the ministry said, adding that the school was warned to seek approval before using any book. Reported in: *Middle East Monitor*, October 6.

Uganda

Ugandan officials seized copies of British children's author Jacqueline Wilson's *Love Lessons* from a private school on the orders of a minister who

has led several crackdowns on obscene conduct.

Minister for Ethics and Integrity Simon Lokodo said the book exposed children attending the exclusive Greenhill Academy to sex at too young an age. The school in the capital Kampala is popular with Uganda's elite and western expatriates, and admits pupils between five and twelve years old.

Love Lessons tells the story of fourteen-year-old Prudence, who escapes the misery of life at home with

a controlling father by falling in love with her handsome art teacher.

Greenhill Academy management refused to comment on the raid. Lokodo says an investigation has been opened into the school's motives. He said he would not hesitate to shut down the establishment if it did not make changes. Reported in: News24.com, August 11; Agence France Presse, August 11.