



## SCHOOLS Coral Springs, Florida

In a May 6 letter, Paul Kempinski, district director for Florida State Fraternal Order of Police District 5, raised concerns with the Broward County School Board regarding the teaching of *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes in a fifth-grade classroom.

“Our members feel that this book is propagandized that pushes an inaccurate and absurd stereotype of police officers in America,” wrote Kempinski. “This book convinces its reader—the children of our community—that police officers regularly lie as they routinely murder children, while painting police officers as racists.”

*Ghost Boys* tells the tale of Jerome, a 12-year-old Black boy killed by a police officer who mistook his toy gun for a real one. As a ghost, Jerome observes the devastation felt by his family and community in the wake of his killing. He also meets other ghosts who suffered similarly unjust fates, including Emmett Till.

*Ghost Boys* was a *New York Times* bestseller, the 2018 New Atlantic Independent Booksellers’ Association (NAIBA) Book of the Year and won the 2019 Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children’s Literature award, among other distinctions.

Broward County Commissioner Dale Holness took a different view from Kempinski on the book and the issues it addresses. “You have to be from another planet not to see the differences between how Black people are treated compared to White people.”

Holness suggested that books like *Ghost Boys* could help build understanding on complex social issues contributing to racism and the disproportionately high rate at which Black people are fatally shot by police officers.

*Ghost Boys* had not gone through the district’s regular vetting process, so the school board put teaching of the book on “pause,” pending further review.

Broward County School Board Chair Rosalind Osgood said that they had not heard any complaints prior to receiving the letter from the police union. Since news of the letter broke, one parent wrote in expressing criticism and another wrote to them supporting the district’s teaching of the book.

Alaina Lavoie, a spokesperson for the nonprofit organization We Need Diverse Books, said that questioning a book’s “age appropriateness” is one of the most common ways books are challenged.

“The argument is always, ‘isn’t it too early to talk about race, or gender, or religious discrimination, or sexual orientation?’” said Lavoie. “Even though research indicates kids form biases at a young age.”

She opposed the idea of waiting to talk about such topics until kids are grown, as that can render the subjects taboo. “There are age-appropriate ways to talk about these topics,” said Lavoie.

Rhodes said kids are “far more sophisticated and knowledgeable about inequities in the world” than adults generally give them credit for. She added that, “Though I write about tough subjects, kids know that my stories are also infused with kindness, hope, and ultimately, it empowers them.”

**Reported in:** *Washington Post*, May 10, 2021; *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, May 9, 2021.

## Putnam County, Florida

In response to parent complaints of “indoctrination,” three books by foreign authors were removed from the

Putnam County School District’s summer reading list.

The titles removed were *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. The only thread connecting them is that their authors were born in countries other than the US.

*Born a Crime* is the autobiography of award-winning comedian and late-night talk show host Trevor Noah. It documents his life growing up mixed-race in apartheid-era South Africa. The book was named one of the best books of 2016 by *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Esquire*, *NPR*, and *Booklist*.

*The Kite Runner* is the first novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini. The critically-acclaimed bestselling book portrays life in Afghanistan before the Soviet-Afghan War and during the subsequent ascendancy of the Taliban.

*Atonement* is a British novel set primarily in England before and during WWII. In it, McEwan chronicles the tragic consequences stemming from one character’s false accusations, as well as her lifelong attempts to make amends through writing fiction.

*Atonement* won the 2002 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for fiction, the 2002 National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, the 2002 WH Smith Literary Award, the 2002 Boeke Prize, the 2004 Santiago Prize for the European Novel, and was included in numerous “100 best” novel lists.

Putnam County School District community relations director Ashley McCool said that in response to the concerns raised, these titles were removed from the list and “all parents were given alternate book options for the students.”

McCool indicated that the original summer reading list was created by “the English Department



teachers . . . with the support of school administrators.”

No insight was provided into what reconsideration process was followed in removing the books from the reading list, nor was any explanation provided as to why alternative assignments were not provided solely to those who requested them.

Florida governor Ron DeSantis has recently focused his efforts on banning materials from Florida classrooms in what critics have called an “attempt to whitewash history and keep conversations about race out of schools.”

The three books removed from the summer reading list remain available to students through the school district’s libraries.

**Reported in: News4Jax, June 28, 2021.**

## Louisiana

St. Tammany Parish School Board rejected two health textbooks after community members complained that they addressed gender identity and sexual orientation. The books were *Invitation to Health* published by Cengage and *Comprehensive Health Skills* published by Goodheart-Wilcox.

Michael Nation, board member for District 6, said “Our kids don’t have to be faced with that, and our teachers don’t have to teach that, and I certainly understand the public’s anger.”

The school board adopted a textbook published by Pearson Health, instead. The selected book was recommended by five members of the textbook committee composed of eight high school health teachers and two parents.

St. Tammany Parish includes schools in Abita Springs, Bush, Covington, Folsom, Lacombe, Mandeville, Madisonville, Pearl River, and Slidell, Louisiana.

**Reported in: NOLA.com, May 7, 2021.**

## Scarborough, Maine

A mother and daughter opposed the use of *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick in the Scarborough schools seventh-grade curriculum.

In response, school district administrators removed the book without following their policy for challenged materials. The teachers’ union pushed back, calling it a violation of academic integrity and intellectual freedom.

Superintendent Sanford Prince sent a letter to the community in which he stated, “At no time was the book banned for student access or permanently removed from the curriculum. In retrospect, it is clear that not continuing with the book was a mistake by the involved administrators.”

Philbrick’s novel centers on the friendship between the characters Maxwell Kane, who is developmentally disabled, and Kevin Avery, who is physically disabled from Morquio syndrome. Philbrick said his novel was written to be supportive of people who are different.

Erin Rowan and her daughter Carrigain, who has Down syndrome, opposed the use of the book because it contains the word “retard.” They also said that its themes perpetuate stereotypes about disabled people.

Philbrick said in one scene, Max is called a “retard” for struggling to read. “I don’t use swear words or anything like that, but to try and clean up the language that is used on the streets and in the playgrounds?” Philbrick said, “I can’t do that and have an edited world. It becomes fantasy rather than reality.”

Carrigain’s teacher reached out to Rowan to ask if they would be comfortable with it being taught. Rowan shared her concerns. School administrators held a meeting with the seventh-grade English teachers and assured her the book would not be taught in a way that would cause harm.

Rowan said she still did not want to see the book being taught to any students. “It’s not just about Carrigain’s personal feelings, but also about the fact that her peers will learn inaccurate lessons about disability that will impact their future interactions with her and other students and community members.”

“I’m sorry the parents feel this way,” Philbrick said. “If they want to have their daughter exempted so she doesn’t have to read it, that’s in their rights. But to deny the ability of other students to read it, that’s almost censorship.”

Carrigain emailed other students in her class about her experiences with ableism and protested by boycotting English class. In response, the district’s curriculum director, Monique Culbertson, held a meeting with Rowan and informed her the book would no longer be used.

Krystal Ash-Cuthbert, president of the Scarborough Education Association, said that the teachers’ union opposes the administration’s decision.

Ash-Cuthbert said that, “The district failed to follow its own policy” regarding challenges to materials from the curriculum. “That procedure creates a neutral evaluation process that requires deep consideration before such a severe decision is made. All educators have valid and solid reasons why the books they choose for a class are chosen.”

According to Ash-Cuthbert, the seventh-grade English teachers felt the book was about two children proving that they’re stronger through friendship and that disabled kids are capable and powerful. “Academic integrity and intellectual freedom are at stake here.”

Prince said the district is in the process of forming the committee called for by the policy. They will determine whether the book will be used going forward.



Rowan said the issue is not about her daughter, but about a culture that does not understand the history and struggles of the disabled community.

“I don’t expect to change all the systemic problems, but when something like this that is so obviously egregious comes up I do expect to be listened to without putting in 40 hours of work on my own time to convince them,” said Rowan.

**Reported in: *Portland Press Herald*, May 20, 2021.**

### Needham, Massachusetts

In a July 2, 2021, letter to students and parents, Needham High School Principal Aaron Sicotte announced that the school district was canceling their 2021-2022 One School, One Book summer reading assignment. Trevor Noah’s *Born a Crime* is the book that had been assigned.

*Born a Crime* is the autobiography of award-winning comedian and late-night talk show host Trevor Noah. It documents his life growing up mixed-race in apartheid-era South Africa. The book was named one of the best books of 2016 by *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Esquire*, *NPR*, and *Booklist*.

According to Sicotte, Noah’s book had been selected “to provide us with an opportunity to learn about Noah’s life in Africa and to see some of the parallels with aspects of life in America.”

Sicotte said his decision to revoke the reading assignment came in response to a monologue on *The Daily Show* in which Noah suggested Israel should take the lead in de-escalating violence with Palestine as the power imbalance profoundly favored them.

Sicotte also said that Noah had also tweeted some jokes in 2010 which he did not view as “positive models for the students in our community.”

As a stand-in for the canceled One School, One Book community read,

school staff and librarians created a list of 79 recommended books for district students. The list includes Noah’s *Born a Crime*.

**Reported in: *Wicked Local*, July 7, 2021.**

### Huntington and Smithtown, New York

*Persepolis* is an award-winning autobiographical graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi set during and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. On June 8, Commack High School removed it from the 11th grade required reading list.

Satrapi’s book criticizing authoritarianism has received numerous accolades, including a 2004 Alex Award from the American Library Association (ALA) and an Angoulême Coup de Coeur Award. *Persepolis* was ranked number 47 on *The Guardian*’s list of the 100 best books of the 21st century.

In her essay “Graphics and Global Dissent,” Marie Ostby called *Persepolis* “a watershed moment in the global history of the graphic novel” and observed that Satrapi “draws on a global history of graphics as dissent by challenging preconceived notions about . . . Iranian women as silenced victims of an oppressive fundamentalist state.”

Despite, or perhaps because of its global accessibility, *Persepolis* also ranked as number 2 on the ALA’s “Top 10 Most Challenged Books List” for 2014, as documented by the Office for Intellectual Freedom.

Reasons ALA has noted for challenges to the book include its portrayal of a man being tortured by the SAVAK secret police before Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown, its “political viewpoint,” and for being “politically, racially, and socially offensive.”

The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund documented a thread of Islamophobia running through the challenges to the book.

Commack Superintendent Donald James said in an email that district officials decided to remove the book from the curriculum during an annual review for “age-appropriate suitability.” Satrapi was the age of a junior high school student during the events depicted in *Persepolis*.

James’s email stated that the book “will not be required reading for future classes but will still be available on our reading lists and available for electives.”

Charles Schulz, secondary school English director for the district, said in an interview that he argued *Persepolis* should remain in the curriculum.

“We know how much the students respond to it, we know how much meaning they take from it, especially when it comes to learning about the world outside Commack and Long Island,” Schulz said.

The decision to remove Satrapi’s book from the curriculum came as the district faced pressure from parents regarding the teaching of “critical race theory” (CRT) at the school.

While the district denied any connection between the two strands, they were interwoven during the June 10 Board of Education meeting, where students and alumni spoke out in defense of the book and local residents spoke out against CRT.

At the meeting, board member Susan Hermer said those opposing teaching *Persepolis* seemed to be conflating critical thinking with what they were calling CRT. “We’re not going to discriminate against White people to achieve equity. We’re not dividing people . . . We’re not teaching socialism or Marxism—this is all stuff I’m reading on Facebook.”



Over frequent interruptions, sixteen-year-old Lakshanna Raveendran argued that every English class should read at least one book related to issues faced by people of color, as this would address “blind spots in our curriculum.”

Raveendran said she had been “starved of representation” for most of her school life and that she and her friends were greatly looking forward to reading *Persepolis* as “it was something we could actually connect to.”

An angry White woman shouted, “Children don’t see that they’re different unless they’re taught that they’re different. Stop pushing diversity on innocent babies.”

Some parents in attendance called *Persepolis* “pornographic.” No complaints were made about other books in the curriculum.

Another student of color was heckled for observing that “if this book is removed from the curriculum, every book that we read will be coming from the same perspective of old White men.”

After 16 years of teaching high school English and working as a secondary school administrator, Schulz was reassigned to the elementary level on June 16. The district did not comment on whether the reassignment was related to his defense of *Persepolis*.

**Reported in: *Newsday*, June 17, 2021; *CNN*, June 11, 2021.**

### Upper Saint Clair, Pennsylvania

The Upper Saint Clair school district board was scheduled to vote on whether or not to add *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson to the 9th grade honors English curriculum at their June 28, 2021, meeting.

Stevenson is a lawyer and a New York University School of Law professor. His memoir focuses on his battles fighting injustices in the legal

system, including his efforts to overturn the wrongful conviction of Walter McMillian, his work to ban life sentences for juveniles, and his numerous efforts supporting marginalized clients.

That vote never happened because residents Barbara Austin and Lucinda Cafaro derailed the meeting by submitting statements opposing masking, vaccination, Critical Race Theory, and *Just Mercy*. Austin also went on record in opposition to “spending and taxes.”

*Just Mercy* received numerous awards and honors, including the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for Non-fiction, the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in Non-fiction, and the Stowe Prize for Writing to Advance Social Justice.

“This book is very racially motivated and teaches our children to judge people based on the color of a person’s skin instead of their character,” said Cafaro.

Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative. Throughout his career, he challenged bias against the poor and minorities in the criminal justice system, especially children.

Neither Cafaro nor Austin is the parent of an Upper Saint Clair school district student. Despite this, Superintendent of Schools John Rozzo recommended that the board table voting on the 9th grade English honors curriculum until January, 2022, based solely upon their objections. The board obliged.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu said *Just Mercy* “should be read by people of conscience in every civilized country” and called Stevenson “America’s Nelson Mandela.”

The school board provided no indication of what book would be taught in place of *Just Mercy*.

**Reported in: *WTAE*, July 27, 2021.**

### Brookfield, Wisconsin

In response to a request from the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty (WILL), a conservative law firm, the Elmbrook School District suspended middle school students’ access through both the Sora e-book app and their school libraries to *Queer: A Graphic History* by Meg-John Barker and *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson.

In a statement signed by Scott Wheeler, School Board President, and Jean Lambert, School Board Vice President, the district indicated they would review their library material selection and controversial issues policies at a future Teaching and Learning Committee meeting.

The challenge from WILL asserted that the books contain graphic instructions on sex acts and the use of online sex apps. WILL claimed the books were available in elementary school libraries, an allegation the school district refuted.

WILL complained that materials available through the school district’s e-book app, Sora, were not subject to the school’s Internet filtering software. WILL also requested that the Elmbrook School District publicly identify all sexually explicit materials currently available through the Sora app and the district’s libraries.

Wheeler and Lambert indicated the district’s library department relies on professional review sources for guidance on book selection to ensure accuracy and age appropriateness. They encouraged concerned parents to contact district Director of Library Services Kay Koepsel-Benning if they wanted access to their children’s circulation records.

**Reported in: *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 15, 2021.**



## Northampton, Pennsylvania

The board of the Northampton Area School District (NASD) unanimously voted to table a donation of dozens of books from The Conscious Kid after parents complained during their July 19 meeting.

Kim Bretzik was the first of roughly ten parents and grandparents to object to the donation. “The Conscious Kid uses Marxist critical race theory,” Bretzik said, “Just like the ‘No Place for Hate’ program, Conscious Kid is not an ally for all.” (No Place for Hate, an initiative of the Anti-Defamation League, provides anti-bias and anti-bullying resources to more than 1,600 schools).

Bretzik urged the school board to refuse the donations and organize a team of parents to inspect the curriculum for the school year.

The Conscious Kid is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. According to their website, they are “an education, research, and policy organization dedicated to equity and promoting healthy racial identity development.”

The donation to NASD is part of a project to donate 120,000 books to 3,000 elementary and middle schools nationwide in order to “foster anti-racist conversations.”

Their past projects include a partnership with Nickelodeon to support conversations around race and racism with kids and a team-up with Google to curate reading materials and lesson plans supporting inclusive K-12 classrooms.

The Conscious Kid was also the victim of a smear campaign by Project Veritas, a far-right activist group that uses entrapment, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and deceptively edited videos to generate bad publicity for the organizations it targets.

Grandparent Shirley Arnold said she opposed the book donation even

though she had not read any of the books. She said, “Those books will not help our children. There’s no reason to be segregating the world anymore.”

Superintendent of Schools Joseph S. Kovalchik explained that the books were not being added to the curriculum, but rather to school libraries and guidance offices where they could be used as a resource to support staff.

Kovalchik noted they have seen a significant uptick in teachers fielding questions from students about the environment, race, immigration, bullying, and historical figures with diverse backgrounds.

“The staff really is struggling with having those conversations and providing the resources for those students of a diverse background, to assist them with their concerns,” said Kovalchik.

Kovalchik also stressed the impact these books would make on the lives of students. “It’s important to expose students on the diverse background of our country and our community, and I think having those resources for those of different race and different backgrounds is important.”

Board member Robert Mentzell bluntly agreed. “We’re running a public school. We have a legal obligation and a moral obligation to teach all students.”

Nonetheless, Vice President Chuck Frantz voted to table the donation in response to the concerns raised, so that he would have time to research the matter.

After speaking with the district teachers who vetted the books, Frantz recognized that these books belonged in the school district.

Frantz said the parents at the meeting had characterized the donated materials as “something that was divisive.” However, “when I got more information about it, I thought, ‘You know what? This is wrong. We can’t

be like that.’ Let’s say there’s another book in the library they don’t like. Are they going to complain and make us pull those books? This is ridiculous.”

Kelly Woodward, whose children are mixed race and attend Northampton Borough Elementary, said, “I was disappointed to hear that parents in our district are taking buzzwords that are really spread in order to promote fear-mongering.”

Woodward continued, “It really disappointed me [that] the school district tabled this instead of saying ‘We’re not teaching critical race theory, we’re not teaching racism, they’re storybooks and stories we’re shelving in our classroom.’”

Jessica Quinones, the kindergarten teacher who applied for the book donation from The Conscious Kid, said she already had several of the books in her classroom, but wanted to apply so the books could be added to the school library. She stressed how important it was, especially after a summer of racial unrest, for teachers to incorporate diverse books into their classrooms.

Quinones said that representation matters in children’s books, and relayed a story about a Black student she had who felt anxiety around being different from the other kids in the classroom (the district is 84% White). She found a book addressing this issue and shared it with him and his parents. “He was seen,” she said, and he felt much better for it.

“I just feel like being able to see yourself really matters to kids,” she said.

When the issue was taken up again at their August 9 meeting, school board president David Gogel stated that the book donations complied with their Instructional Materials policy, which states: “Resource materials shall be chosen based upon the interest





and learning value for students, . . . shall not be discriminatory in nature [and] shall be provided which present all points of views.”

Gogel also highlighted a section of their Gifts, Grants, Donations, and Scholarships policy indicating that any gift or donation accepted by the school board is not an endorsement of a product, business, institution, or ideology.

Nicholas Woodward spoke out in support of the donations, observing that “just as silence condones bullying, ignoring differences in our community makes people feel overlooked and pushed away.”

Woodward said, “Books expose students to a wider range of cultures and people, and are one simple way to build an understanding of others. These books presented for donation help diversify the district’s collection and open a window into other people’s lives.”

Many other parents continued to object to the donated books, calling them “divisive,” “racist,” and “socialist.”

Doug Vaughn spoke against the donation because of what he called The Conscious Kid’s “Marxist agenda.” He said, “I wouldn’t accept a gift from Stalin, Hitler, I don’t care what it was, because of who they are and the motivation for why they might be giving us a gift.”

Board member Mentzell said he researched The Conscious Kid and found nothing along the lines of what Vaughn, Bretzik, Arnold, and others alleged. “I took it upon myself to read everything about The Conscious Kid organization,” he said. “I didn’t find any reference to Marxism.”

Mentzell characterized the language being used by those objecting to the donation as “an empty vessel with which to rile up the troops,” adding, “I don’t put any credibility in that.”

Mentzell also noted that copies of 30 of the titles that The Conscious Kid donated were already on the shelves of district school libraries. He said access to diverse books like these is vital, because “I want our kids to have the necessary resources in their education.”

Mentzell made a motion for “the administration to pursue those resources, which include the books mentioned on the July 19 agenda, plus other similar resources.”

The board unanimously approved the motion. Superintendent Kovalchik then parsed the board’s action this way: “We’re not accepting the books, but are to go out and address diversity.”

After the meeting, Board President Gogel, who earlier read a statement delineating the books’ compliance with the district’s Instructional Materials policy, indicated he no longer wanted to accept the donation. “We don’t need more problems,” he said.

The titles the school district received from The Conscious Kid are:

- *All Because You Matter* by Tami Charles and Bryan Collier
- *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
- *The Boy Who Thought Outside the Box* by Marcie Wessels and Beatriz Castro
- *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel and Melissa Sweet
- *Coretta Scott* by Ntozake Shange and Kadir Nelson
- *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* by Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson and Rafael López
- *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi and Thi Bui
- *Drawn Together* by Minh Lê and Dan Santiat

- *Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon* by Kelly Starling Lyons and Laura Freeman
- *Dreamers* by Yuri Morales
- *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners* by Joanna Ho and Dung Ho
- *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard and Juana Martinez-Neal
- *Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America* by Carole Boston Weatherford and Jamey Christoph
- *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry and Vashti Harrison
- *Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race* by Margot Lee Shetterly and Laura Freeman
- *Hold On to Your Music* by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen
- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers
- *I Am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James
- *I Can Write the World* by Joshunda Sanders and Charly Palmer
- *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark* by Debbie Levy and Elizabeth Baddeley
- *It Began with a Page: How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way* by Kyo Maclear and Julie Morstad
- *Kamala and Maya’s Big Idea* by Meena Harris and Ana Ramirez González
- *Lailah’s Lunchbox: A Ramadan Story* by Reem Faruqi and Lea Lyon
- *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* by Vashti Harrison
- *Little Legends: Exceptional Men in Black History* by Vashti Harrison
- *Mae Among the Stars* by Roda Ahmed and Stasia Burrington
- *Malcolm Little: The Boy Who Grew Up To Become Malcolm X* by Ilyasah Shabazz and AG Ford
- *Mama’s Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation* by Edwidge Danticat and Leslie Staub
- *Missing Daddy* by Mariame Kaba



- *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero and Zeke Peña
- *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi
- *Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré* by Anika Aldamuy Denise and Paolo Escobar
- *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family* by Ibtihaj Muhammad
- *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni and Bryan Collier
- *Ruth and the Green Book* by Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Floyd Cooper
- *Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library* by Carole Boston Weatherford and Eric Velasquez
- *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Sing a Song* by Kelly Starling Lyons and Keith Mallett
- *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o and Vashti Harrison
- *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson
- *We Are Grateful* by Traci Sorell and Frané Lessac
- *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* by Traci Sorell and Frané Lessac
- *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade
- *When Aiden Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff and Kaylani Juanita
- *When Lola Visits* by Michelle Sterling and Aaron Asis
- *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson and Julie Flett
- *Where Are You From?* by Yamile Saied Méndez and Jaime Kim
- *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elvgren and Fabio Santomauro
- *Your Name is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and Luisa Uribe

**Reported in:** *Times News Online*, July 21, 2021 and *August 11, 2021*; *Morning Call*, July 28,

**2021 and August 10, 2021; Home News**, August 10, 2021.

## LIBRARIES Jonesboro, Arkansas

Stephanie Nichols spoke out after her 11-year-old daughter told her about a Pride Month display in the children's section of the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library.

Nichols found one book particularly objectionable: *The GayBCs* by M.L. Webb, an abecedarium in which each letter refers to some facet of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community.

*The GayBCs* won a Red Tricycle Best Kids Book award. Its publisher, Quirk Books, says it is appropriate for grades pre-K through 3.

Nichols expressed concerns that by displaying books, the library was taking control away from parents. "I know we have to be careful how much we censor adults, but children are different."

David Eckert, director of the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library, said the library always puts out materials for Pride Month and that he does not recall ever receiving complaints about it before. He noted he has received 35 emails in favor of the Pride displays and three people who wrote to complain. He said he has also received two complaints over the phone.

Jolene Mullett, a teen services librarian, said there were no objections until Senator Dan Sullivan shared a post on June 21 or 22 declaring the displays inappropriate. The original post was made by Cathy Davis Tarver in the Northeast Arkansas Tea Party Facebook Group.

Teen services librarian Malorie McDermott said books in the displays reflect what home is like for a

lot of kids, including books about "single-parent homes, or books about being raised by grandparents, or books about being raised by gay or lesbian couples."

Assistant Director Tonya Ryals said that the library has a material reconsideration policy, but no one had filled out a reconsideration request form for any of the displayed materials.

Eckert said people have asked him what his agenda is. He answered succinctly: "We just want people to check out books."

**Reported in:** *Jonesboro Sun*, June 25, 2021.

## MUSEUMS Lincoln, Nebraska

A private Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) event scheduled after hours at the Lincoln Children's Museum by OutNebraska was canceled when the organizations received "an overwhelming number of threats of violence," including death threats. The threats were posted online, on Facebook, made over the phone, and left on voicemail.

The event was not museum-sponsored and the decision to cancel it was made by event organizer Waylon Werner-Bassen. After extensive conversation with the police, Werner-Bassen said "it was better to be safe and to not have it," due to the credibility of some of the threats.

Abbi Swatsworth, OutNebraska's executive director, said that the "decision to cancel our event was not made lightly. It involved a frank conversation about the safety of our families" and that of event attendees.

The story hour was intended to celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) families. Swatsworth said they rented the facility for "LGBTQ+ families to enjoy



the museum together and to hear stories of inclusion, empathy, and kindness.”

In their announcement regarding the cancellation, OutNebraska observed that it is “so sad when hate threatens families with children.”

In an Instagram post, the Lincoln Children’s Museum said “cancelling this event and not having the children in our building to create, discover, and learn through the power of play breaks our heart.” They shared a link to OutNebraska’s resources page and recommended four LGBTQIA+ inclusive children’s books.

Mayor Gaylor Baird issued a statement proclaiming that “playing politics with people’s lives is never acceptable. Misinformation spread about a private event at the Lincoln Children’s Museum inspired threats and fueled hatred and fear. All threats are being investigated by the Lincoln Police Department, and, to our LGBTQ friends and neighbors, know you are loved and welcome in our city.”

OutNebraska indicated the event would be rescheduled without any public invitation. They have been holding DQSH events for four years and while there has been pushback in the past, they never previously received credible death threats.

**Reported in: *Lincoln Journal Star*, July 27, 2021; *The Hill*, July 28, 2021; *Newsweek*, July 27, 2021.**

### Derry, New Hampshire

The Taylor Library canceled a scheduled drag queen story hour called “Drag Story Time with Clara” after people protested and contacted library trustees.

Library director Jen Thielker said on Facebook that she had scheduled the program without consulting library staff or the trustees. She was also the sole decision-maker regarding the event’s cancellation.

Michael McMahon, who was to host the story hour as Clara Divine, told WMUR-TV that, “It was a really sad moment for me to look at all these messages and see all the hate, but there was also a lot of support which made me really happy.”

The event was held at a private venue instead.

**Reported in: *Associated Press*, June 9, 2021.**

### Austin, Texas

On July 1, the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum pulled out of their role co-hosting a virtual discussion of the book *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth* hours before it was scheduled to take place.

The Writers’ League of Texas offered to move forward with the event on another platform, but the authors decided it was too short of notice to set this up, update the 198 pre-registered participants, and advertise the change.

The book by Bryan Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford places The Battle of the Alamo within its historic context as a fight to preserve slavery. Since the 180 Texan rebels who died for this cause are celebrated as state heroes, publicly acknowledging this fact made politicians invested in their legacy uncomfortable.

Concerns raised by the museum’s board of directors were the official reason given for canceling the event. Conservative lawmakers Governor Greg Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, and House Speaker Dade Phelan all serve on the board and were all cited as contributing to the decision.

Patrick tweeted that, “As a member of the Preservation Board, I told staff to cancel this event as soon as I found out about it.”

An individual using the Twitter handle @MimCoyote responded that “Bob Bullock would be ashamed [that] the board of his namesake museum is too chickenshit to come to terms with the truth.”

Tomlinson stated that Patrick “thinks he has the right to force his myths on others and can’t handle the truth. Historians have been teaching these facts for a decade.”

In an interview, Stanford said, “If the state history museum isn’t the right place to talk about state history, then I don’t know what to do.”

Tomlinson said, “I think we’re being censored, which is a shame, because the mission of the Texas [State] History Museum is to promote examining our past. We’ve done more than a dozen events and this is the first time we’ve been shut down like this.”

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) agreed with Tomlinson’s assessment. Their letter to the museum board states, “It is clear from the public statements of Texas government officials that the event was canceled because those officials disagreed with the views expressed by the authors of the book. Such viewpoint discrimination is unconstitutional.”

“I think it is politics,” explained Tomlinson, when asked what may have motivated the event’s cancellation. “I think they’re distorting what critical race theory (CRT) means the same way they distorted political correctness and multiculturalism in the past. It’s just another piece of propaganda.”

Tomlinson was referring to the recent passage of House Bill 3979 by the Texas legislature banning schools from teaching CRT and barring teachers from discussing “polarizing current events or social issues” in class.

Abbott said, “House Bill 3979 is a strong move to abolish critical race





theory in Texas, but more must be done. The issue will be added to a special session agenda.”

Stanford called the State Museum’s withdrawal from the event an illustration of what the state means by “patriotic education.” He said, “They’re insisting so vehemently on a version of the past that never existed.”

NCAC observed that, “With increasing frequency, elected officials are using their power to pressure cultural institutions to censor ideas with which they disagree. This trend is directly connected to efforts to control how history is taught in schools.”

“There’s no reason conservatives can’t accept the past with open arms and say, that’s where we started, here’s where we’re going,” said Stanford. “There’s no reason they can’t tell the story of Texas as a redemption story and that we’re still an imperfect union ever becoming more perfect.”

It wasn’t until 2019 that Texas textbooks acknowledged slavery played a “central role” in the Civil War.

Admitting that Davy Crockett and William Travis were slave-owners and Mexico’s abolition of slavery in Texas precipitated the Battle of the Alamo remains challenging for some Texans.

“If they want to bring up that it was about slavery,” said Brandon Burkhart, president of the This is Freedom Texas Force, “They need to take their rear ends over the state border and get the hell out of Texas.”

Burkhart’s group led an armed protest last year in Alamo Plaza and opposes any acknowledgment that the desire to maintain the institution of slavery was a major cause of the Texas Revolution.

Burrough tweeted that “I’ve worked all over the world for 35-plus years and I had to return to Texas to get my first government censorship and actual death threats.”

The controversy translated into book sales, as *Forget the Alamo* was catapulted from a triple-digit ranking to the 28th best-selling book on Amazon.

**Reported in: *San Antonio Express-News*, July 1, 2021, and July 2, 2021; *KXAN*, May 22, 2021, and July 2, 2021; *The Texas Tribune*, May 10, 2021, and July 2, 2021; **National Coalition Against Censorship**, July 14, 2021; *The Eagle*, July 20, 2021; *San Antonio Report*, July 28, 2021.**

### Irving, Texas

Vicki Norman, a school nurse with Irving Public Schools, sent a lengthy email to the mayor and city council on June 30, 2021, informing them that “there is a systemic pornographic problem in the library.”

Norman has been speaking out against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) materials in the Irving Public Library’s collection since their 2019 observation of Pride Month.

Her initial protest was against Drag Queen Story Hour, an event the library had neither held nor even planned at the time of Norman’s complaints.

In September of 2019, Norman wrote to the library board and Irving City Council members requesting the removal of all LGBTQIA+ materials from the library’s teen collection.

In her email, Norman cautions that “the library and city are promoting gender dysphoria and transgenderism. This is extremely irresponsible.”

The crux of Norman’s current “pornographic problem,” as presented in her June 30, 2021, email is L. C. Rosen’s young adult (YA) romance novel *Jack of Hearts (and Other Parts)*. The plot revolves around a gay

seventeen-year old who writes a sex advice column and has a stalker.

*School Library Journal*’s starred review for Rosen’s novel proclaimed that “The dearth of sex-positive YA literature—particularly sex-positive queer literature—makes this book an essential addition to library collections that serve teens.”

Norman asks whether the library and city are prepared to “spend more money on the resultant diseases due to promoting sexual promiscuity to its youth” by circulating this book. Her email also notes that the library “has zero items in its collection under homosexual disease.”

According to Norman, the American Library Association (ALA) is complicit and “using tax payer money and abusing its trusted position in the community to enable promotion of dangerous sexual behavior, normalizing gender fluidity and anal sex.”

While Norman also complained about *Teen Vogue* (all of it) and Michele Tea’s books *Check Please, My Brother’s Husband*, and *Midnighter* volumes 1 and 2, she focused on *Jack of Hearts* including photocopies of 35 pages from it with the juicy bits dutifully underlined.

Norman states that she “emailed the information about this book to our library director in January, 2020, and it is still in the collection and was not reviewed by she or her staff.”

Norman’s Request for Reconsideration form regarding *Jack of Hearts* was submitted on June 28, 2021, and not in January of 2020.

The form notes that the book demonstrates “hatred of monogamy, women, self, heterosexuality” and should be replaced with “materials on STDs, HIV, sexual abstinence, waiting to date, saying ‘NO,’ dangers of Transgender Identity, faithful life long marriage, healthy relationships,



that children are a result of sexual relationships.”

Irving Public Library Director Cary Siegfried responded to Norman’s June 30 email the following day.

“I understand from your many emails that materials regarding LGBTQ sexual behavior and gender roles departing from strict male and female roles or from heterosexual behavior are not ones that you would like to see in our collection,” wrote Siegfried. “However, there are members of the Irving community who DO want to have these materials in the collection and have specifically requested them.”

Siegfried continued, “We certainly respect and support a parent’s right to set limits for their child. We always encourage parents to be interested and engaged with what their children are reading; however, those limits should not impede other families from accessing the information and reading material that they wish to use.”

According to the library’s reconsideration process, materials requested for reconsideration will be reviewed by library staff who participate in collection development to determine if the material falls within their collection policy. If the customer is unsatisfied with the decision made, they can appeal it by asking in writing that it be referred to the Library Director within 30 days from the date of the response.

**Reported in: *Book Riot*, July 20, 2021.**

## Campbell County, Wyoming

When the Campbell County Public Library System (CCPL) made a Facebook post highlighting items in their collection for Pride Month, community members pushed back during the July 7 Campbell County Commissioners meeting. Among those

objecting was County Commissioner Del Shelstad.

Some residents suggested minors should not have access to any lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) books. Some proposed removing all LGBTQIA+ materials from the library collections, including those for adults. Demands for removal of the library’s board members were also made.

The Facebook post which generated this controversy read simply: “June is Pride Month and Rainbow Book Month. For this month’s Teen Room blog, Sarah writes about a few titles you can check out from your library that will connect you with the [LGBTQIA+ collection at CCPL](#).”

At the meeting, Commissioner Shelstad said, “This is exactly the type of thing that I think is harmful in our community. I’m not asking you to have a straight Pride Month, I’m just asking you not to have a gay Pride month.”

CCPL Executive Director Terri Lesley said the spotlight during Pride Month in June was to highlight diverse perspectives, the same way they would highlight books for seniors, books in Spanish, or books for Christmas.

Resident Susan Sisti said of the library board, “They’ve betrayed the children in our community. My solution is that they all need to be removed, we can no longer trust them. I will never trust them again. There are already parents boycotting the library.”

County Commissioner Rusty Bell provided guarded support for the library, “I hope it doesn’t keep us from promoting things. Also, I hope it doesn’t keep us from keeping books in the library in the fiction section. I think we can promote things, but I think we got to be really careful when we start censoring things.”

The books linked to from the Facebook post are:

- *A Quick & Easy Guide to Queer & Trans Identities* by Mady G.
- *Let’s Talk About Love* by Claire Kann
- *None of the Above* by I.W. Gregorio
- *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell
- *All Out: The No-Longer-Secret Stories of Queer Teens Throughout the Ages* by Sandra Mitchell
- *I’m a Wild Seed* by Sharon Lee De La Cruz
- *Music from Another World* by Robin Talley

On August 12th, a special meeting between the library board and the Campbell County commissioners was held. During this meeting, the commissioners announced that it was not their job to censor materials, but rather to appoint library board members.

“If the county begins to censor books that have anything to do with LGBTQ+, where does that censorship end?” asked Commissioner DG Reardon.

Reardon then said “We need to take responsibility for our actions, for our kids’ actions, and our grandkids’ actions, and stop talking about censoring, taking books out, burning books, and going back to the days of the Nazis.”

Kevin Bennett, who earlier led a protest in front of the library against “books that indoctrinate kids into the LGBTQ community . . . using taxpayer dollars,” responded heatedly.

“Nobody’s saying that! No one said censorship,” Bennett yelled. “You’re a liar!” He was then escorted from the meeting by a Campbell County Sheriff’s deputy.

Library director Lesley provided a step-by-step walkthrough of the library’s material reconsideration



process and noted that no one had followed the process for challenging any of the books that were being objected to at the County Commission meetings.

Commissioner Shelstad then asked each library board member to answer whether they thought *This Book is Gay* was appropriate for Campbell County youth. All but one declined to answer, indicating they had not reviewed the book. Mandy Steward said she did not feel it was appropriate.

Shelstad then said, “It seems to me, the formal process has been started because of the public comments from the community. I would say that we need to take a look at this book, whether this [request for reconsideration] form has been filled out or not.”

CCPL Board Chair Hollie Stewart disagreed. “If you want to get divorced in the State of Wyoming, you don’t get to just go stand on the courthouse steps and say ‘divorce me now,’ you have to file the paperwork. You have to make the claim. You have to allow the other side to also collect their thoughts and make their claims as well.”

Before August 2021, only one request for reconsideration of library materials form was ever filled out, and submitted to CCPL and that was done several years ago.

The conversation continued during the regularly scheduled August 17 Campbell County Commission meeting.

Bennett returned to this meeting to suggest that the county could save hundreds of thousands of dollars on social services for at-risk youth if the commission would take “sexually perverted materials . . . from the children and teen sections and put [them] in the adult section.”

Citizen Edie Reno also had interesting ideas to share. “It’s already been proven and documented that when

a child looks at porn—and don’t be telling me there is not porn in that library, you’ll find it—it changes their DNA.” Reno did not cite any studies supporting this outlandish claim.

Scott Clem declared that “It is reasonable and responsible and good judgment not to put smut magazines in the children and teen section.” Prior to Clem’s comment, no official consideration had been given to this idea.

Chelsie Clem [relation to Scott unknown] said that years ago she was the one who had previously challenged a book at the library because it mentioned “souls being harvested.” She said that after she turned in her form, the library let her know that the book had been vetted and was being retained. This did not impress Clem.

“You’re going to see me and folks like me come up and we’re going to be up here because this problem isn’t going to go away until we see someone exercise good judgment,” she said.

Sisti also returned, this time suggesting the county create a parental review board “so parents can review what’s in our library and censor books.”

Numerous citizens defending the library and their decision to make age-appropriate LGBTQIA+ materials available to all audiences also spoke out at this meeting.

Jordan Engdahl said it is difficult for children who are struggling with their sexual identity to be who they are when they see adults in the community acting this way.

“I find it astonishing that a special meeting was called for a book which had not even had a formal complaint filed against it,” said Doug McGee.

“It seems a very small but very vocal part of the community wishes to bypass the established procedures and claim authority over disposition

of individual items in the collection, which I think would set a very dangerous precedent.”

“We can’t just censor books and throw them out of the library because you don’t like them,” said Mike Clymer. “We can’t just pull up and say, ‘I don’t like that book because it mentions the ‘V’ word,’” Clymer continued. “We’ve got to use some common sense.”

Between the August 12 special meeting and the August 17 meeting of the Campbell County Commission, four forms requesting reconsideration of library materials were filed. By September 3, 22 formal book challenges had been filed regarding twelve titles.

No decisions regarding the challenged materials has been made at the time of this writing.

The formally challenged titles are:

- *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson
- *Trans Mission: My Quest to a Beard* by Alex Bertie
- *The Babysitters’ Coven* by Kate Williams
- *Music from Another World* by Robin Talley
- *The V-Word: True Stories About First-Time Sex* by Amber Keyser
- *Quick & Easy Guide to Queer & Trans Identities* by Mady G.
- *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Keith Negley
- *Meena* by Ine Van Mol
- *My Body My Choice* by Robin Stevenson
- *The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta
- *Heartstopper* by Alice Oserman
- *Jane Against the World* by Karen Blumenthal

**Reported in: Wyoming Public Radio, July 13, 2021; County 17, July 18, 2021; August 16, 2021; and September 3, 2021; Wyoming News Exchange, August 23, 2021.**