

ACLU-MO Model School Library Book Review Policy

Add Date Adopted

Mission

The school library and its school library professionals focus on student growth by providing equitable access to learning experiences, resources, and learning spaces that enable all members of the school community to become engaged critical thinkers, effective readers, and responsible users, evaluators, and creators of information in multiple formats.

Equitable access to the learning commons in school library environments, resources, and differentiated instructional opportunities for all learner needs and abilities must be ensured, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or identity, disability, nationality, language, professional, economic, or social status. Specific access must be provided for those who are unable to use mainstream library services and materials (Oberg, 2021).

Access to school library program services and resources should be based on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and should not be subject to any form of ideological, political, or religious censorship, or to commercial pressures (United Nations, 1948).

This book review policy provides a procedure for consistent excellence in the choice of resources for use in the teaching-learning process as provided by the district's library resource centers. It also serves as a document that is available to the entire school community for their understanding of the purpose and standards in the selection of books and media used in the district (Central Fulton School District, 2019).

Vision

The school library program improves and enhances teaching and learning for the entire school community through its school library professionals, and library resources for literacies, thinking, and global citizenship in inclusive and equitable education (Oberg, 2021).

Book Review Policy Guiding Principles

School libraries have diverse materials that support intellectual freedom and freedom of information, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, is a basic right in our democratic society. . The school libraries of this district are guided by the principles set forth in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Library Bill of Rights, and its interpretative statements, including "Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Program" and The Students' Right to Read statement of the National Council of Teachers of English. See Appendix (in this policy) for the Library Bill of Rights, "Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Program," and The Students' Right to Read statement (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2018).

Commented [1]: Recommend electronic system such as Board doc, simbli to house this policy.

Commented [2]: Recommended to edit this to connect to district value, and school mission

Commented [3]: Stakeholders agree upon the definition of "diversity." Documents that do not explicitly state "diversity" provide less protection for diverse materials and allow a more limited interpretation of what constitutes diversity.

Selection Policy Short-Term Objectives (Create annual goals)

- All Board of Education members, superintendent of schools or district administrator, and all library professionals should be aware of book review policy and its implementation.
- Create an additional implementation plan.
- Update the collection maintenance plan by [enter date].

Selection Policy Long-Term Objectives (Create 5-year goals)

- To provide the school community with equitable and timely access to resources.
- To select resources that enrich and support the curriculum and meet the needs of the community served.
- To provide students with a wide range of educational resources on all levels of difficulty and representing different points of view in a variety of formats, with a diversity of appeal.
- To select resources that present various sides of controversial issues, giving students an opportunity to the necessary critical thinking and analytical skills to be discriminate users of information and productive members of society.
- To select resources in all formats, including up-to-date, high-quality resources to develop an appreciation of literature and of reading to access information. (American Library Association, 2017).

Responsibility for Selection

The district's elected Board of Education, by state law is ultimately responsible for all library resources used in the district's school libraries. The board shall delegate to the superintendent of schools or district administrator (e.g., principal) the authority and responsibility for the selection of library resources in all formats. Responsibility for actual selection rests with school library professionals using the board's adopted book review policy. Superintendents, district administrators, and school faculty are not exempt from this book review policy.

Commented [4]: This can vary on authority depending on if it is a small or large school district

The school library professionals take leadership to work cooperatively with school community members to interpret and guide the application of the policy in making day-to-day selections, as appropriate. The district shall make the selection process of library materials readily available for the school community review, with a list of all library materials posted online on the district's website, and the content of all materials available for direct review during reasonable hours specified for such review.

Commented [5]: Ensure that all policies need to be publicly accessible. The person who maintains their district website needs to be included.

There should be an annual review and training on the Book Review Policy to discuss its status of implementation. School library professionals share the annual inventory list, and annual collection analysis report to the Board of Education and superintendent or district administrators' awareness. ⁽⁰⁶⁾ Establish date here.

Annual collection analysis report includes:

1. Number of items in the collection
2. Number of physical vs. digital resources

3. Number of literary vs. informational texts
4. Number of library resources de-selected.
5. Retention percentage for a recognized resource item
6. Add any other metric that is deemed appropriate.

Selection Criteria and Acquisition Procedure

Library resources are considered in view of the needs and objectives of the curriculum and add to students' personal interests and learning. In selecting library resources, school library professionals will evaluate available resources and curriculum needs and will consult reputable review resources for the selection, and other appropriate sources. The actual resource will be examined whenever possible. Recommendations for purchase involve the school community, as appropriate. Selection is a continuous process that should include removing materials that are no longer used or needed, adding materials, and replacing lost and worn materials that still have educational value to support the district's curriculum and student's personal interests (Bentonville Schools, 2021).

Generally accepted selection lists and tools used by librarians are included in American Library Association (ALA) Review Resources' website:

<https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit/reviewresources>

The following selection criteria will be used as they apply. The combination of these criteria or any one criterion may be the basis for including an item in the collection, and the criteria may not be all-inclusive. (American Library Association, 2017): **(Customize the list to align with mission and community)**

- Support and enrich the curriculum.
- Support and enrich students' personal interests and learning.
- Meet high standards in literary, artistic, and aesthetic quality; technical aspects; and physical format.
- Be relevant for the subject area and for the age, emotional development, ability level, learning styles, and social, emotional, and intellectual development of the students for whom the materials are selected.
- For non-fiction resources, incorporate accurate and authentic factual content from authoritative sources.
- Earn favorable reviews in standard reviewing sources and/or favorable recommendations based on preview and examination of materials by school library professionals.
- Exhibit a high degree of potential user appeal and interest.
- Represent differing viewpoints on controversial issues.
- Provide a global perspective and promote diversity by including materials by authors and illustrators of all cultures.
- Include a variety of resources in physical and virtual formats including print and non-print such as electronic and multimedia (including subscription databases and other online products, e-books, educational games, and other forms of emerging technologies)

- The consideration process for including new material formats for inclusion (e.g., online databases, eBooks, streaming media, games, apps) should be ongoing. Factors to consider in this decision include current demand, trends or growth in demand and strengths and weaknesses of the format.
- Balance cost with need.
- Materials will adhere to all copyright law¹.

Gifts and Donations

Gifts and donations to the school library are accepted with the understanding that the decision for use and disposition of the materials and/or funds will be determined using the same selection criteria as purchased materials. All materials should support the curriculum and needs of library users. Gifts and donations, like purchased resources, will be weeded, or discarded in alignment with the school library’s collection maintenance plan ([Add link to plan](#)) (American Library Association, 2017).

Collection Maintenance and Weeding

To develop and maintain quality collections of books and other resources, school library professionals employ the following procedures:

- **Inventory:** Annually, the school library professionals will conduct an inventory of the school library collection and equipment. The inventory can be used to determine losses and remove damaged or worn materials which can then be considered for replacement. The inventory can also be used to deselect and remove materials that are no longer relevant to the curriculum or of interest to students.
- **De-selection:** School library professionals should develop a collection maintenance plan that includes systematic inspection of materials that would result in de-selecting outdated, damaged, or irrelevant materials from the collection. Resources that are worn, soiled, or out of date can be discovered during the annual inventory or during the day-to-day business of the library media center. Worn and obsolete materials discourage students in their search for reliable information, encourage users to handle materials carelessly, and detract from the appearance of the school library. The criteria for removing books and other resources from the collection include the following (Central Fulton School District, 2019):
 - Poor physical condition.
 - Outdated information.
 - Not circulated for an extended period.
 - Newer and revised editions are available.
 - No longer serves curricular needs.

Commented [6]: Add weeding guides that are used for the specific district or school

¹ [17 U.S.C. §§ 101-117](#)

- Discarding: Books that are removed from the library will have alternative possibilities for use explored, i.e., book sale, classroom book collections, and other schools but up to the discretion of the library professionals.

Reconsideration Policy

Any person included in the school community may express an informal concern or formal request for reconsideration of a library resource. School faculty and administrators must follow the same procedure and are not exempt from the book review policy. Items being formally reviewed will remain in circulation during the reconsideration process. The principles of the freedom to read, listen, and view are defended rather than specific materials. An item will be considered in its entirety, not judged solely on portions taken out of context. Parents or guardians have the right to guide the reading, viewing, and listening of their children and must give the same right to other parents/guardians. The reconsideration process should be completed in its entirety and not subverted or ended prematurely, leaving the library open to legal challenges (American Library Association, 2017).

Timeline: Each book has its own challenge. A timeline for each book will be established. All efforts will be made to follow the established district reconsideration timeline. However, extenuating circumstances may require an adjustment of the timeline. Adjustments will be communicated with complainants and committee members in a timely manner should an extension be required.

Procedure for Handling Informal Complaints

People with a complaint about school library resources should state their concerns to the school librarian and principal. All complaints to staff shall be reported to the building principal, whether received by telephone, letter, or personal conversation. No library resources should be removed or restricted from use because of the informal complaint.

The school library professionals and other necessary staff members (e.g., principal) deemed appropriate by district-level library personnel will have a phone call, or meeting to listen attentively to the concerns and attempt to resolve the issue informally. As part of the discussion, the school employee will explain the library's selection policy, selection criteria, diversity of the collection with resources from many points of view, and the selection process. A copy of the book review policy will be given to the complainant.

Each parent/guardian has the right to determine the appropriateness of library resources for their children and should accord the same right to other families. Parent(s)/guardian(s) requests that such library material not be given to their children shall be honored. The principal, after consulting with the appropriate staff and the parent(s)/guardian(s), will make every effort to provide alternative supplementary materials that meet the curriculum or assigned requirements while still meeting the fiscal responsibility of the district.

Procedures for Handling Formal Complaints

If the complaint is not resolved informally, the librarian or principal will explain the formal reconsideration process and provide the individual with a copy of the school district's library

selection policy with reconsideration procedures and a copy of the “Request for Reconsideration of Library Resources” form.

- If there is concern about multiple items, a separate form must be completed for each item.
- The work in question will remain on library shelves and in circulation until a formal decision is made from pending committee study and final action by the Board.

If the complainant wishes to file a formal request for reconsideration, the following procedures should be followed:

1. The complainant is required to complete and submit the reconsideration form to the principal within **fourteen school days**.
2. If a completed and signed Formal Request for Reconsideration Form has not been received by the principal within **fourteen school days**, the matter is considered closed.
3. Upon receipt of the form, the principal should notify and provide a copy of the reconsideration form to the following individuals:
 1. Superintendent
 2. School Library Advisory Committee/Reconsideration Committee
 3. School librarians and school library professionals
4. The Reconsideration Committee will be appointed by the principal and consist of two teachers who are assigned the grade level or subject area for which the challenged material was selected, two students (middle or high school only), a building-level administrator, two school librarians (one from the school of challenged material and one from another school in the district), a Board of Education member, a reading specialist or language arts teacher, and a member of the community.
5. The school librarian will secure copies of the material in question for review by the Reconsideration Committee.
6. The school librarian will provide the reviewing committee with a short formal Intellectual Freedom training that explains a packet of materials, which includes the library’s book review policy, the completed reconsideration form, reviews of the resource being reconsidered, and a list of awards or honors, if any. This packet should be created with assistance from the state department of public instruction and the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom.
7. The Reconsideration Committee should schedule a formal reconsideration meeting within **sixty school days** after the principal receives the written request form for reconsideration. The principal should notify the superintendent and the school librarian of this schedule.
8. The school-level Reconsideration Committee should follow the procedures listed below:
 1. At the initial meeting, the principal and committee will review reconsideration committee guidelines and procedures.
 2. A member of the committee should keep notes and minutes.
 3. All committee members should fully review the material in question (read or view the entire work) before voting.
 4. The committee reserves the right to use outside expertise if necessary to help in its decision-making process.

Commented [7]: The makeup of the committee varies depending on the school district.

5. The complainant may make an initial verbal presentation about the resource under reconsideration or may choose to share the written form. The complainant is asked to provide sources for quotes used during this presentation.
6. The complainant may not participate in or observe the committee's deliberations unless invited to do so by the committee. The committee chair may choose to give committee members time to ask questions.
7. During the initial or subsequent meetings, the committee will make its decision determined by the simple majority to retain without restriction, retain with restriction (e.g., move the resources to a different level), or remove the resource. Prepare a written report that states the decision, the rationale for the decision, and the official vote. This will be a ballot vote.
 1. The written report should be published on a publicly accessible webpage.
8. The committee's written decision (including a minority report if needed) shall be presented to the complainant, the superintendent of schools, and the school library department within **fourteen school days** after the decision is made.
9. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision at the school level, a written appeal can be made within **fourteen school days** to a district-level Reconsideration Committee. This request should be delivered to the superintendent of schools.
9. The district-level Reconsideration Committee will consider any appeals from the school level. The committee will be appointed by the Superintendent or his/her designee as follows:
 1. Director of school library services, as appropriate
 2. Director of elementary, middle, or secondary education, as appropriate
 3. Curriculum coordinator specializing in reading from the appropriate level.
 4. District-level library services staff
 5. School librarian from the appropriate level
 6. Other district-level instructional directors
 7. A student from the level in which the challenged material resides (middle or high school level only)
10. The organization of the district-level Reconsideration Committee will be as follows:
 1. Policy, committee guidelines, and procedures should be reviewed at each meeting.
 2. The chairperson will be the school library coordinator (or another appropriate central office supervisor of school libraries). The secretary of the committee will be elected at each meeting.
 3. The chairperson will be the spokesperson for the committee at all meetings and before the Board of Education when decisions are made.
 4. The secretary will record the minutes and decisions of the meetings.
 5. These should be filed with the chairperson, who will communicate decisions in writing to the superintendent. Meetings will be called at the discretion of the chairperson or when an appeal is requested by a complainant.
11. The procedures for the district-level Reconsideration Committee will be as follows:
 1. The chairperson will call the meeting within **thirty school days** after the written appeal is filed with the superintendent.

2. The committee shall read and/or examine the challenged resource, read the written reconsideration form, and read copies of the professionally prepared reviews and list of awards provided by the school librarian on the committee. The chairperson should forward these materials to the committee members at least three days prior to the meeting. The procedure for these meetings is the same as those for the school-level meeting.
12. The procedures for an appeal to the Board of Education will be as follows:
1. An appeal of the decision made by the district-Level Reconsideration Committee must be made in writing to the superintendent within **fourteen school days** of the district-level committee decision.
 2. A decision on the complaint will be made at the next regular meeting or special meetings within **thirty school days** of the written request to the superintendent.
 3. The board reserves the right to use outside expertise if necessary to help in its decision-making.
 4. The chairperson for the district-level Reconsideration Committee will present the committee's decision to the board.
 5. The complainant or designee will present the petitioner's position.
 6. The board of education's decision will be final, and the superintendent will implement the decision. A written report will be kept for the record and given to the appellate/complainant.
 7. Decisions on reconsidered materials will stand for **five years** before new requests for reconsideration of those items will be entertained.

Policy Revision

The book review policy should be reviewed for necessary revisions on a regular schedule (American Library Association, 2017).

- Remove outdated statements and reflect professional association most up-to-date policy statement.
- No revision should be undertaken while a formal challenge to a library resource is occurring.
- When a challenge has been resolved, those involved should reflect on the reconsideration experience and use new knowledge to revamp the current policy.

Commented [8]: To ensure that a school district's selection policy properly meets the continually changing needs of each of its communities, the policy should be revised frequently (at least once every five years). Similarly, to ensure that the document's audience is aware of the age of the information contained within the policy, both the adoption date and subsequent revision dates should be clearly listed at the beginning of each document.

Appendix

Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people in the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting the abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries that make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.

Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; January 29, 2019.

The inclusion of "age" was reaffirmed on January 23, 1996.

Although the Articles of the *Library Bill of Rights* are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries, questions do arise concerning application of these principles to specific library practices. See the documents designated by the Intellectual Freedom Committee as [Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights](#).

Access to Resources and Services in the School Library: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

The school library plays a unique role in promoting, protecting, and educating about intellectual freedom. It serves as a point of voluntary access to information and ideas and as a learning laboratory for students as they acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed in a pluralistic society. Although the educational level and program of the school necessarily shape the resources and services of a school library, the principles of the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* apply equally to all libraries, including school libraries. Under these principles, all students have equitable access to library facilities, resources, and instructional programs.

School librarians assume a leadership role in promoting the principles of intellectual freedom within the school by providing resources and services that create and sustain an atmosphere of free inquiry. School librarians work closely with teachers to integrate instructional activities in classroom units designed to equip students to locate, evaluate, and use a broad range of ideas effectively. Intellectual freedom is fostered by educating students in the use of critical thinking skills to empower them to pursue free inquiry responsibly and independently. Through resources,

programming, and educational processes, students and teachers experience the free and robust debate characteristic of a democratic society.

School librarians cooperate with other individuals in building collections of resources that meet the needs as well as the developmental and maturity levels of students. These collections provide resources that support the mission of the school district and are consistent with its philosophy, goals, and objectives. Resources in school library collections are an integral component of the curriculum and represent diverse points of view on both current and historical issues. These resources include materials that support the intellectual growth, personal development, individual interests, and recreational needs of students.

While English is, by history and tradition, the customary language of the United States, the languages in use in any given community may vary. Schools serving communities in which other languages are used make efforts to accommodate the needs of students for whom English is a second language. To support these efforts, and to ensure equitable access to resources and services, the school library provides resources that reflect the linguistic pluralism of the community.

Members of the school community involved in the collection development process employ educational criteria to select resources unfettered by their personal, political, social, or religious views. Students and educators served by the school library have access to resources and services free of constraints resulting from personal, partisan, or doctrinal disapproval. School librarians resist efforts by individuals or groups to define what is appropriate for all students or teachers to read, view, hear, or access regardless of technology, formats or method of delivery.

Major barriers between students and resources include but are not limited: to imposing age, grade-level, or reading-level restrictions on the use of resources; limiting the use of interlibrary loan and access to electronic information; charging fees for information in specific formats; requiring permission from parents or teachers; establishing restricted shelves or closed collections; and labeling. Policies, procedures, and rules related to the use of resources and services support free and open access to information.

It is the responsibility of the governing board to adopt policies that guarantee students access to a broad range of ideas. These include policies on collection development and procedures for the review of resources about which concerns have been raised. Such policies, developed by persons in the school community, provide for a timely and fair hearing and assure that procedures are applied equitably to all expressions of concern. It is the responsibility of school librarians to implement district policies and procedures in the school to ensure equitable access to resources and services for all students.

Adopted July 2, 1986, by the ALA Council; amended January 10, 1990; July 12, 2000; January 19, 2005; July 2, 2008; and July 1, 2014.

The Students' Right to Read <https://ncte.org/statement/righttoreadguideline/print/>

This statement was originally developed in 1981, revised in April 2009 to adhere to NCTE's Policy on Involvement of People of Color and revised again in September 2018.

Overview: The Students' Right to Read provides resources that can be used to help discuss and ensure students' free access to all texts. The genesis of the Students' Right to Read was an original Council statement, "Request for Reconsideration of a Work," prepared by the

Committee on the Right to Read of the National Council of Teachers of English and revised by Ken Donelson. The current Students' Right to Read statement represents an updated second edition that builds on the work of Council members dedicated to ensuring students the freedom to choose to read any text and opposing "efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others." Supported through references from text challenges and links to resources, this statement discusses the history and dangers of text censorship which highlight the breadth and significance of the Students' Right to Read. The statement then culminates in processes that can be followed with different stakeholders when students' reading rights are infringed.

The Right to Read and the Teacher of English

For many years, American schools have been pressured to restrict or deny students access to texts deemed objectionable by some individual or group. These pressures have mounted in recent years, and English teachers have no reason to believe they will diminish. The fight against censorship is a continuing series of skirmishes, not a pitched battle leading to a final victory over censorship.

We can safely make two statements about censorship: first, any text is potentially open to attack by someone, somewhere, sometime, for some reason; second, censorship is often arbitrary and irrational. For example, classics traditionally used in English classrooms have been accused of containing obscene, heretical, or subversive elements such as the following:

- Plato's *Republic*: "the book is un-Christian"
- Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*: "very unfavorable to Mormons"
- Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*: "a filthy book"
- Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "too violent for children today"
- Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: "a poor model for young people"
- Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*: "contains homosexuality"

Modern works, even more than the classics, are criticized with terms such as "filthy," "un-American," "overly realistic," and "anti-war." Some books have been attacked merely for being "controversial," suggesting that for some people the purpose of education is not the investigation of ideas but rather the indoctrination of a certain set of beliefs and standards. Referencing multiple years of research completed by the American Library Association (ALA), the following statements represent complaints typical of those made against modern works of literature:

- D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*: "profanity, lurid passages about sex, and statements defamatory to minorities, God, women, and the disabled"
- John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*: "uses the name of God and Jesus in a vain and profane manner"
- Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson's *And Tango Makes Three*: "anti-ethnic, anti-family, homosexuality, religious viewpoint, unsuited to age group"
- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*: "promotes racial hatred, racial division, racial separation, and promotes white supremacy"
- Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*: "occult/Satanism, offensive language, violence"
- Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: "offensive language, sexually explicit, unsuited to age group"

- Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings’s *I Am Jazz*: “inaccurate, homosexuality, sex education, religious viewpoint, and unsuited for age group”

Some groups and individuals have also raised objections to literature written specifically for young people. As long as novels intended for young people stayed at the intellectual and emotional level of *A Date for Marcy* or *A Touchdown for Thunderbird High*, censors could forego criticism. But many contemporary novels for adolescents focus on the real world of young people—drugs, premarital sex, alcoholism, divorce, gangs, school dropouts, racism, violence, and sensuality. English teachers willing to defend classics and modern literature must be prepared to give equally spirited defense to serious and worthwhile children’s and young adult novels.

Literature about minoritized ethnic or racial groups remains “controversial” or “objectionable” to many adults. As long as groups such as African Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Latinxs “kept their proper place”—awarded them by a White society—censors rarely raised their voices. But attacks have increased in frequency as minoritized groups have refused to observe their assigned “place.” Though nominally, the criticisms of literature about minoritized racial or ethnic groups have usually been directed at “bad language,” “suggestive situations,” “questionable literary merit,” or “ungrammatical English” (usually oblique complaints about the different dialect or culture of a group), the underlying motive for some attacks has unquestionably been discriminatory. Typical of censors’ criticisms of ethnic works are the following comments:

- Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: “homosexuality, offensive language, racism, sexually explicit, unsuited to age group”
- Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*: “occult/Satanism, offensive language, religious viewpoint, sexually explicit, violence”
- Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*: “sexual violence, religious themes, ‘may lead to terrorism’”
- Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*: “anti-family, cultural insensitivity, drugs/alcohol/smoking, gambling, offensive language, sex education, sexually explicit, unsuited for age group, violence, depictions of bullying”

Books are not alone in being subject to censorship. Magazines or newspapers used, recommended, or referred to in English classes have increasingly drawn the censor’s fire. Few libraries would regard their periodical collection as worthwhile or representative without some or all of the following publications, but all of them have been the target of censors on occasion:

- *National Geographic*: “Nudity and sensationalism, especially in stories on barbaric foreign people.”
- *Scholastic Magazine*: “Doctrines opposing the beliefs of the majority, socialistic programs; promotes racial unrest and contains very detailed geography of foreign countries, especially those inhabited by dark people.”
- *National Observer*: “Right-wing trash with badly reported news.”
- *New York Times*: “That thing should be outlawed after printing the Pentagon Papers and helping our country’s enemies.”

The immediate results of demands to censor books or periodicals vary. At times, school boards and administrators have supported and defended their teachers, their use of materials under fire, and the student’s right of access to the materials. At other times, however, special committees have been formed to cull out “objectionable works” or “modern trash” or “controversial

literature.” Some teachers have been summarily reprimanded for assigning certain works, even to mature students. Others have been able to retain their positions only after initiating court action.

Not as sensational, but perhaps more important, are the long-range effects of censoring the rights of educators and students to self-select what they read and engage with. Schools have removed texts from libraries and classrooms and curricula have been changed when English teachers have avoided using or recommending works which might make some members of the community uncomfortable or angry. Over the course of their schooling, many students are consequently “educated” in a system that is hostile to critical inquiry and dialogue. And many teachers and other school staff learn to emphasize their own sense of comfort and safety rather than their students’ needs.

The problem of censorship does not derive solely from the small anti-intellectual, ultra-moral, or ultra-patriotic groups which will typically function in a society that guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The present concern is rather with the frequency and force of attacks by others, often people of goodwill and the best intentions, some from within the teaching profession. The National Council of Teachers of English, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Library Association, as well as the publishing industry and writers themselves agree: pressures for censorship are great throughout our society.

The material that follows is divided into two sections. The first on “The Right to Read” is addressed to parents and the community at large. The other section, “A Program of Action,” lists Council recommendations for establishing professional committees in every school to set up procedures for book selection, to work for community support, and to review complaints against texts.

Where suspicion fills the air and holds scholars in line for fear of their jobs, there can be no exercise of the free intellect. . . . A problem can no longer be pursued with impunity to its edges. Fear stalks the classroom. The teacher is no longer a stimulant to adventurous thinking; she [sic] becomes instead a pipe line for safe and sound information. A deadening dogma takes the place of free inquiry. Instruction tends to become sterile; pursuit of knowledge is discouraged; discussion often leaves off where it should begin.

—Justice William O. Douglas, United States Supreme Court: *Adler v. Board of Education*, 1951

The Right to Read

An open letter to our country from the National Council of Teachers of English:

The right to read, like all rights guaranteed or implied within our constitutional tradition, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways, education is an effort to improve the quality of choices open to all students. But to deny the freedom of choice in fear that it may be unwisely used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we respect the right of individuals to be selective in their own reading. But for the same reason, we oppose efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

One of the foundations of a democratic society is the individual's right to read, and also the individual's right to freely choose what they would like to read. This right is based on an assumption that the educated possess judgment and understanding and can be trusted with the determination of their own actions. In effect, the reader is freed from the bonds of chance. The reader is not limited by birth, geographic location, or time, since reading allows meeting people, debating philosophies, and experiencing events far beyond the narrow confines of an individual's own existence.

In selecting texts to read by young people, English teachers consider the contribution each work may make to the education of the reader, its aesthetic value, its honesty, its readability for a particular group of students, and its appeal to young children and adolescents. English teachers, however, may use different texts for different purposes. The criteria for choosing a text to be read by an entire class are somewhat different from the criteria for choosing texts to be read by small groups.

For example, a teacher might select John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* for reading by an entire class, partly because the book has received wide critical recognition, partly because it is relatively short and will keep the attention of many slower readers, and partly because it has proved popular with many students of widely differing skill sets. The same teacher, faced with the responsibility of choosing or recommending books for several small groups of students, might select or recommend books as different as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*, [Mariane Satrapi](#)'s *Persepolis*, Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, or Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, depending upon the skills and interests of the students in each group.

And the criteria for suggesting books to individuals or for recommending something worth reading for a student who casually stops by after class are different from selecting material for a class or group. As opposed to censoring, the teacher selects texts, and also helps guide students to self-select them. Selection implies that one is free to choose a text, depending upon the purpose to be achieved and the students or class in question, but a book selected this year may be ignored next year, and the reverse. Censorship implies that certain works are not open to selection, this year or any year.

Wallace Stevens once wrote, "Literature is the better part of life. To this it seems inevitably necessary to add / provided life is the better part of literature" (1957). Students and parents have the right to demand that education today keep students in touch with the reality of the world outside the classroom. Many of our best literary works ask questions as valid and significant today as when the literature first appeared, questions like "What is the nature of humanity?" "Why do people praise individuality and practice conformity?" "What do people need for a good life?" and "What is the nature of a good person?" English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not hide, or lie to the young, about the perilous but wondrous times we live in, books which talk of the fears, hopes, joys, and frustrations people experience, books about people not only as they are but as they can be. English teachers forced through the pressures of censorship to use only safe or antiseptic works are placed in the morally and intellectually untenable position of lying to their students about the nature and condition of humanity.

The teacher must exercise care to select or recommend works for class reading and group discussion. One of the most important responsibilities of the English teacher is developing rapport and respect among students. Respect for the uniqueness and potential of the individual, an important facet of the study of literature, should be emphasized in the English class. One way rapport and respect can be developed is through encouraging the students themselves to explore and engage with texts of their own selection. Also, English classes should reflect the cultural contributions of minoritized groups in the United States, just as they should acquaint students with diverse contributions by the many peoples of the world. Finally, the teacher should be prepared to support and defend their classroom and students' process in selecting and engaging with diverse texts against potential censorship and controversy.

Glossary

Access - The ability and freedom to obtain and use resources and services.

Administration – Referencing leadership at the school such as the principal, principal's support staff, board of education, and district superintendent.

Aesthetic Quality- The feeling, mood, or atmosphere of the artwork, generated using art elements and principles.

Appropriate- Each parent/guardian has the right to determine the appropriateness of library resources for their children and should accord the same right to other families.

Authoritative Sources- A repository or system that contains identity information about an individual and is the primary or most reliable source for this information.

Curriculum - (synonyms: teaching-learning process, educational materials, curriculum, educational curriculum, district's curriculum, instructional program) The subjects comprising a course of study in a school.

Controversial Issues- Topics typically become controversial when students have competing values and interests; when they strongly disagree about statements, assertions, or actions; when the subject touches on some sensitivity (e.g., political, or religious); or when they arouse an emotional reaction.

Classroom Library – Specifically, tailored for that class's reading level and interest level, while still providing the opportunity for self-selection.
district level/school district

District Level – (synonym: School district) The geographical unit for the local administration of schools.

District Library Resource Center - Referencing the district level supervising department that oversees individual school libraries.

Diversity - The practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Equitable Access- All persons are afforded accommodation regardless of age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or identity, disability, nationality, language, professional, economic, or social status.

Faulty – Teachers

Global Citizenship- The umbrella term for social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale. The term can refer to the belief that individuals are members of multiple, diverse, local and non-local networks rather than single actors affecting isolated societies.

Inclusive - Aiming to provide equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or intellectual disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.

Intellectual Freedom - The right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored.

Implementation Plan - A plan developed by the local school system outlining the goals and objectives for the school library program and the strategies, activities, timeline, budget, responsibilities, and evaluation used to achieve them. The implementation plan is used to provide direction in and improvement of the county and individual school library programs.

Learning Commons- This is a shared space with physical and virtual components. Learning commons emphasize creativity, collaboration, innovation, and opportunity to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

Librarian - A person, typically with a degree in library science, who administers or assists in a library. They teach students how to use library resources, including technology. They also help teachers develop lesson plans and find materials for classroom instruction.

Library Resource - (synonym: library books and instructional media, print, digital material, materials, learning resources, library media collection, educational materials, school library collection, library program, and services, inventory) A wide variety of communications and information formats and their accompanying technologies appropriate to learning and instruction. All print, non-print, and electronic materials and resources, generally found in school libraries, are used by students and teachers in the district's educational program. Library materials do not include textbooks or any other resources identified for use in the delivery of the curriculum for various courses.

Library Support Staff- Library support staff, or library paraprofessionals, are involved in all library operations at all levels. They may manage libraries, or they may contribute very specialized expertise in some specific field. They may engage in routine activities or supervise and direct other staff. Generalizations about them are difficult to make, and to find an all-encompassing job description, nearly impossible. The range and complexity of their duties varies with each position, the size and type of the library in which they work, and each library's specific needs, goals, or mission. The one distinction usually drawn between "support staff" and "librarians" is that those in the latter group typically have a Master of Library Science degree (MLS). In practice, however, that distinction is not always clear. Staff lacking the MLS may be found in the uppermost levels of library management, and MLS holders may be found in positions that normally do not require the degree. Potential titles: Page, Library Aide, Library Clerk, Library Assistant, Library Associate, Library Technician, Library Technical Assistant, Library Services Assistant, Library Specialist, Service Specialist, Special Assistant, Library Information Specialist, Audio Visual Technician.

Offensive - Causing someone to feel deeply hurt, upset, or angry.

Parents/guardian - Parental responsibility is exercised by the child's parents. Guardianship is exercised by someone who is not one of the child's parents. It is up to the person or persons with parental responsibility, or the guardian, to make decisions about the child's care and upbringing and to administer the child's property.

School - Individual institution within a district

School Library – (synonym: library media center, library resource center, school library collection, library) An area in a school where a full range of materials, technology, and services from library media staff are accessible to students and school personnel.

School Library Professionals – Includes librarian, and library support staff.

Staff - Refers to employees of any organization. Staff are all the people who support the Administration, such as secretaries, registrars, counselors, etc.

Student – A person who is studying in school.

User - The continued use or enjoyment of a right.

Weeding - A systematic method for re-evaluating a basic collection to repair, replace, or remove materials.

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