

## Challenged Materials Committee Report

### Material Being Challenged:

Library Book: *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe

Date of Challenge Committee Meeting: 12/6/21

### Regulation 6241 outlines that the Challenged Materials Committee shall:

- Examine and/or read the challenged resource
- Determine professional acceptance by reading critical review of the resource
- Weigh positives and negatives and form opinions based on the material as a whole rather than on passages or sections taken out of context
- Discuss the challenged resource in the context of the educational program
- Prepare a written report which states the decision, rationale for the decision, and the official vote (without identifying votes of individual members of the committee)
- Recommend that the questioned materials be retained without restriction, retained with restriction or not retained

### Agenda:

1. Norms and meeting operation
2. Parent concerns over the material
3. Library policy and procedures
4. Committee Discussion of the Value of the material
5. Committee consensus

### Library Media Information Shared with the Committee

#### Library Mission Statement from the Rockwood Library Handbook

- The Rockwood School District believes inclusive library media services and access for all students and staff will raise levels of student performance. Therefore, the Rockwood Library Media Program strives to provide welcoming library spaces, robust collections of materials, and dynamic library media instruction that will empower students to become critical thinkers, ethical users of information, responsible and engaged citizens, and lifelong learners and readers.

- page 3 of The RSD Library Media Handbook

#### Intellectual Freedom

- Intellectual freedom, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, is a core value of the library media profession and a basic right in our democratic society. The school library media program in the Rockwood School District will play a role in the promotion of intellectual freedom and serve as a point of voluntary access and offer opportunities for all students to learn in an atmosphere of free inquiry. Every student regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation shall be given equal access to library media resources.

-page 4 of The RSD Library Media Handbook

#### Collection Development

- In managing the library collection, the library media specialist shall be mindful of the objectives listed in Regulation 6310. In addition, the library media specialist shall also:
  - Consider the importance of diverse literary representation. The collection should provide literature that serves as both mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors so students are exposed to books and characters that reflect their own experiences as well as experiences of others.
  - Consider the degree of user appeal as measured by reviews in professional library journals and

inclusion on award lists, including but not limited to the Missouri Association of School Librarians Readers' Awards lists, the Young Adult Library Services Association Awards lists, and the Association for Library Services to Children Awards lists.

- page 6 of The RSD Library Media Handbook

### Professional Reviews & Awards Regarding This Material

#### Awards:

- 2020 ALA Alex Award Winners
- 2020 Stonewall Award Honor Book
- 2020 ALA Great Graphic Novels for Teens
- 2020 ALA Rainbow Project Book List
- Iowa - Iowa High School Battle of the Books List 2021
- New Jersey - New Jersey Garden State Teen Book Award Nominees 2022: Nonfiction Grades 6-12
- Texas - Maverick Graphic Novels Reading List 2020: Adult for Young Adult
- School Library Journal Starred, 07/01/2019
- Publishers Weekly, 02/25/2019

#### Professional Reviews:

- **School Library Journal, 07/01/2019**  
Gr 9 Up—Kobabe, who uses the pronouns e, em, and eir, was assigned female at birth but never felt that this designation fit. As e grew up, e learned about the spectrum of gender designations and settled on nonbinary as the best descriptor. E came out to eir family as nonbinary and asexual and found that eir family supported em however e identified. In this memoir, Kobabe chronicles eir life from the time e was very young through eir coming of age and adulthood. E describes common situations from the perspective of someone who is asexual and nonbinary: starting a new school, getting eir period, dating, attending college. The muted earth tones and calm blues match the hopeful tone and measured pacing. Matter-of-fact descriptions of gynecological exams and the use of sex toys will be enlightening for those who may not have access to this information elsewhere. VERDICT A book to be savored rather than devoured, this memoir will resonate with teens, especially fans of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Mason Deaver's *I Wish You All the Best*. It's also a great resource for those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand.—Jenni Frencham, Indiana University, Bloomington
- **Publishers Weekly, 04/29/2019**  
This heartfelt graphic memoir relates, with sometimes painful honesty, the experience of growing up non-gender-conforming. From a very young age, Kobabe is unsure whether to claim a lesbian/gay, bisexual, or even transgender identity: "I don't want to be a girl. I don't want to be a boy either. I just want to be myself." Kobabe comes of age having to navigate expressions of identity such as clothing and haircuts, with fraught attempts at romantic and sexual entanglements. Eventually, Kobabe's supportive sister concludes: "I think you're a genderless person." (Kobabe: "She knew before I did.") Kobabe continues to explore the challenges of a nonbinary identity, including the use of alternate pronouns (in Kobabe's case, e/em/eir), the trauma of cervical exams, refuting misplaced concerns from a loving relative who believes "female to male" transgenderism could be rooted in a form of misogyny, and learning that the term autoandrophilia actually applies "for me." Intermixed are lighthearted episodes relating Kobabe's devotion to LGBTQ-inspired *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction and hero worship of flamboyant ice-skating champion Johnny Weir. Kobabe is a straightforward cartoonist who uses the medium skillfully (if not particularly stylishly), incorporating ample cheery colors, with a script that's refreshingly smooth and nondidactic for the topic. This entertaining memoir-as-guide holds crossover appeal for mature teens (with a note there's some sexually explicit content) and is sure to spark valuable discussions at home and in classrooms.

### Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding The Book *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe

Note: there were five challenge forms submitted for this book. The first person to turn in a form was the speaker. The concerns from the other forms were shared when the speaker was finished.

- The purpose of his challenge is to protect children.
- This book contains 4 images that the challenger believes are a depiction of pornography and are offensive. By distributing the book, the challenger believes the district is violating state and federal law.
- The concerns regarding this book do not have anything to do with gender.
- The speaker provided a general definition of pornography that included material, such as books or photographs, that depicts erotic behaviour and is intended to cause sexual relief or excitement.
- The book contains cartoons that sexually encourage children and is grooming. Subject matter being introduced gives 14-year olds the right to look at pornography.
- RSD is obligated to enforce all state and federal laws including principals, librarians and district level administrators.
- Students become curious and they become more sexually active when exposed to this type of material. The book does not teach abstinence as RSD should be teaching.

Concerns shared on additional challenge forms that were not also shared by the speaker:

- This book encourages students to use hormone blockers and gives medical advice. The book should be pulled from the library.
- Rockwood and parents teach children abstinence and this book promotes teenage sex and risk of STIs. The book baits children into high risk sex. Remove the book.

### Legal Definition of Pornography as it Applies to Library Books

Section 573.030 (14) defines pornographic to minors as “any material or performance if the following apply: (a) The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the material or performance, taken as a whole, has a tendency to cater or appeal to a prurient interest of minors; and (b) The material or performance depicts or describes nudity, sexual conduct, the condition of human genitals when in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal, or sadomasochistic abuse in a way that is patently offensive to the average person applying contemporary adult community standards with respect to what is suitable for minors and (c) The material or performance, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value for minors.”

This does not apply to library books because they, taken as a whole, contain literary value. Further, there is a strong argument that library books are protected by the First Amendment.

### Committee’s Comments on the Value of This Material

- This book serves as a mirror or a window for some of our students. The feeling of being a different gender is unique.
- In order for something to be considered pornography its sole purpose has to be to pleasure and excite sexually. This book was not meant to be erotic or entertaining, but to be used as information. It was not used to arouse. It does not meet the criteria of pornography. These are normal thoughts of sexuality for teenagers.
- The book was an encouraging and uplifting account on what it means to not understand who you are or your place in the area of LGBTQ. It offers important information on diversity. It is difficult to find these types of books. It is extremely well done, literary, intelligent and honest. It is meant to be a guide for people trying to find themselves.

- A committee member shared that gender non-conforming adolescence is at a high risk of suicide. It is an incredible contribution to the library. It is a wonderful choice for those who are non-binary.
- The pictures are not used for arousal. The symbols and literary ideas would speak to a lot of students. I'm ok with my kids reading it, and they are freshman and college level. I think it would be too dangerous to remove from the library.
- I found this book very powerful, and I am thankful that it's available. I have empathy for those who may be struggling with these concerns. I shared this book with my junior. It's powerful, and it touches on emotions and mental health. This book may help someone contemplating suicide so that they may not feel alone with their struggles. This book is helpful.
- I have a junior with language disabilities. I look at the book and think that if my child had these questions about themselves, I would want them to read it.
- Usually when a book is being talked about among the community, kids check it out, and that has not been the case with this one.
- The images are shocking, but only shocking when taken out of context. When it is put into context with the emotion being described, it's not the same. It's not just an image. It's about a person going through an emotional struggle. It is not meant for arousal.
- The pictures are consensual. *I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings* is not a graphic novel, but has a vivid description of non-consensual sex. It's because it's visual and that's what is making parents upset. This is consensual and exploratory between two adults.
- I do not find these images shocking. There is an undercurrent that this is abnormal and deviant.

### Committee's Rationale and the Decision

#### Rationale and Discussion Points the Committee Shared

- The book had literary merit, but that I questioned why the author felt the need for selected pages to be included.
- This is a memoir and a true story. It was mentioned that it's a comic, but it's not really a comic, it's a graphic novel. The fact that it's visual, does not mean it's meant for laughter. We support those who do not want their kids to read it, but shouldn't remove it for those who may want or need it.
- While the pictures can catch you off guard, there is value in having this book available to students who want to read it. The freshman son of a committee member mentioned that he has several friends who could learn from the book.
- This one is a tough call, but after looking at the value and the message the book sends, the benefit outweighs the concerns.
- I do understand parent perspectives with some of the images. We want to protect our kids from these images. I think the benefits of the depictions of self exploratory and consensual activity between the characters in terms of sex that is not typical, outweighs concerns about the pictures.
- I've been all over the place about this book. The images startled me at first. Ultimately, I don't believe that books should be removed.
- I struggled with this one as well. I shared with friends not in the school district and they struggled as well. The pictures are bothersome. If it was just the text, it would be ok. At first, I thought there should be a warning or restriction. But what if the restriction keeps a student who needs it from the book? Are books with violent graphics making kids violent?
- In my first read I thought they were brilliant and enlightening. There is a lot of information for non-binary students. Are those scenes necessary to convey the mirrors that we are talking about? Had the pictures been left out, I would have no hesitation. With the pictures, I am concerned, but don't consider them erotic. They are part of a memoir and what the character experienced.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Everybody is offended by something and we're all offended by something different.</li> <li>● Graphic novels are very popular right now. If we do this, does this mean that librarians have to go through every graphic novel? What about violence as a graphic novel? Even <i>The Giver</i> as a graphic novel is more meaningful as a graphic than written in words.</li> <li>● Putting it on restriction behind the desk makes it difficult for those who want it or need it to check it out, so behind the desk is really not a great option.</li> <li>● Any parent can say they don't want their kid to read it and put this in Destiny so it can't be checked out by that student.</li> <li>● I first saw the images on Facebook and yes that's completely without justification because it was outside the context. If they read the entire book, they would understand the meaning of the pictures.</li> <li>● If these were pictures of a woman and man, I would still be offended. However, I support the book being on library shelves because it is a choice.</li> <li>● It is a slippery slope; if we put a restriction on this book, what else do we have to remove?</li> <li>● I support not restricting the book in the library. There is a common ground to be sure everybody is represented.</li> <li>● The issues brought up in this book are too important for the book to be restricted.</li> <li>● I just want people to know that this was not a casual conversation, and we wrestled with this decision.</li> </ul>
<p>Consensus of the committee</p>	<p>The committee decided to retain the book as a library book without restriction.</p>
<p>How does the decision impact the accessibility of the material moving forward?</p>	<p>The book will remain in the school's library as a choice for students to check out. Parents may contact the librarian if they wish to restrict access to this book for their child.</p>