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SLM 506: Selection and Use of Media

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**Instructions for the Application of Ethical Principles of Librarianship**

Group A: *A school board member removes books from a high school media center because a citizen said the books contain offensive language. Neither the citizen nor the board member has read the books in question.*

As the media specialist, if this scenario took place in my school, I would first ask for the book to be returned to the library. I would go to the school board and explain that there is a procedure that books must go through before being removed from the shelf. Each county should follow their selection and evaluation procedures if a book is challenged. A book should not be removed simply because one citizen disapproves of it. It is unethical to remove a book from a library before it has been taken through a review process. According to the Library Code of Ethics, all efforts should be made to resist censoring materials. Books are a freedom of expression; as such, patrons should use their own critical judgment when choosing what to read. One person cannot deem a book unfit to read for everyone.

After speaking with the board member, I would then speak with the citizen who brought up the complaint about the book. I would calmly listen to him or her explain their issue with the material in question without agreeing or disagreeing with his or her opinions. Before handing the citizen a *Request for Reconsideration of Instructional Materials* form, I would explain my selection criteria and how the book is age appropriate, connects to the curriculum, shows diversity, and is written by a reputable author. Books in the library collection have all received at least three positive reviews from professional selection sources. From there, if the citizen was still not satisfied, I would continue by explaining about the procedure for challenging a book. A committee for the reconsideration of materials consists of one supervisor of school librarians, two media specialist, one teacher, one administrator, and community members of three parents and three high school students. This committee will reevaluate the book and make their decision from there. I would suggest that he or she read the book first since the reconsideration form will ask for specific examples of why this book should be removed from the school library shelf.

I would then return the book to the shelf where it would continue to circulate until further notice came from my superior with the decision from the committee. If the book in question was approved to remain in the library, it could not be taken through the reconsideration process again for another three years.

Group B: *A parent comes into your media center and asks that you restrict her son, who is in middle school, from checking out any graphic novels.*

I would first take the time to calmly listen to the parent about her concerns with her child reading graphic novels. Without giving my personal opinion, I would start by sharing the library mission statement that requires the librarian to serve a broad range of community ideas, needs and wants. The materials selected are to support intellectual growth and individual interests. In the Freedom to Read Statement, as the school librarian I cannot limit an individual’s freedom to choose what they read. All the materials purchased follow very specific selection criteria, even graphic novels. Graphic novels are chosen if they are age appropriate, connect to the curriculum, show diversity and are written by a reputable author. In order to be purchased, graphic novels need at least two positive reviews from professional selection sources deeming it an appropriate match for a middle school library.

After explaining my selection process, if the parent seems a little more open to the idea of graphic novels, I might provide her with titles of books or web addresses where she could go to read more about how graphic novels can be useful in the classroom setting. Graphic novels can also aid in motivating, or capturing the interest of reluctant readers, which tends to mostly be middle and high school boys. The parent may have a bias opinion that graphic novels are solely comic books with little depth. I would direct the parent to the web sites of Graphic Novels for Libraries: Recommended Titles for Children and Teens, and Graphic Novels for Teens through VOYA and Booklist online. Resources, such as these lists, recommend titles for outstanding graphic novels. By looking at quality graphic novels on their own time, as a family they might decide on their own selection criteria to satisfy both the parent and student.

In an effort to avoid censorship, as the librarian, I am to trust my students with what they choose to read and I do not require teacher or parent approval for students to check out age appropriate materials. However, ultimately parents know what is best for their children. Even after explaining my section process, if the parent still felt strongly about her son not checking out graphic novels, then I would encourage her to express those concerns to her child and make that decision based on their family needs.

Group C: *A parent comes to the media center to inform you that her family is moving and she needs a list of all the books checked out by her daughter, who is in middle school, so she can make certain all books that have been checked out are returned before the family moves.*

I would ask the parent if she has informed the office of her family’s intent to move. Once the office has received the information, the guidance councilor will circulate a withdraw form with all materials that are due back to the school. This form will circulate to all her daughter’s teachers and to the media specialist. According to the American Library Association Privacy and Confidentiality statement, one cannot exercise the right to read if the possible consequences include damage to one's reputation, ostracism from the community or workplace, or criminal penalties. Choice requires both a varied selection and the assurance that one's choice is not monitored. Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association; and, in a library, the subject of users' interests should not be examined or scrutinized by others. Therefore, I would not be able to hand the list of materials checked out by her daughter to the parent.

If the parent insists on receiving the list immediately, I would inform the parent that part of the American Library Association Code of Ethics states that it is the Liberian’s job to protect the users right to privacy and confidentiality in regards to what materials they check out. Therefore, I would not be able to provide the parent with a list of books currently checked out by their daughter. Instead, I would direct the parent to have her daughter request a list of outstanding books if she thought she still had materials checked out of the library