

Challenged Materials Committee Report

Material Being Challenged:

Library Book: *Where I End and You Begin* by Preston Norton

Bookmark: Gateway Book Award Nominees (available through the RSHS library)

Date of Challenge Committee Meeting: 11/29/21

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:

- Booklist, 05/15/2019
- Publishers Weekly, 04/29/2019
- Kirkus Review, 04/01/2019
- 2021-22 Gateway Readers' Award Nominee (MASL)
- 2020 Best Fiction for Young Adults List (YALSA)

Professional Reviews:

- **Booklist** 05/15/2019
 Grades 9-12 - Preston (Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe, 2018) has poured his heart and soul into this latest contemporary novel, which is inspired by Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (and other mistaken-identity classics). When high-school junior Ezra and his best friend, Holden, run into Ezra's longtime crush, Imogen, and her best friend, Wynonna, breaking into school the night of the solar eclipse, the truly unthinkable happens: Ezra and Wynonna swap bodies. After Ezra accidentally discovers Wynonna's burning crush on Holden, he and Wynonna form a tenuous pact to help each other woo their respective crushes. Through their body-swapping, Ezra and Wynonna uncover each other's secrets and learn that "there was something about caring for someone—genuinely caring for them—that made you forget yourself. That made you realize you were part of something bigger. That you were important. That you were loved." This is an intricate and gorgeously plotted novel that blurs the lines between gender and sexuality, and absolutely oozes with empathy and compassion.
- **Publishers Weekly** 04/29/2019
 Norton (Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe) incorporates Freaky Friday-style body switching in this novel to explore the inner conflicts of two enemies crushing on each other's best friends. On the night of a total eclipse in Carbondale, Ill., socially anxious Ezra intends to ask longtime crush Imogen to prom. Instead, he finds himself trapped inside the body of Imogen's best friend, bold, brassy Wynonna, whose "favorite hobby" is making his life a "living hell." Much to Ezra's relief, the switch is only temporary, but then it keeps happening, and for longer periods of time. While in the girl's skin, Ezra learns of Wynonna's interest in his best friend, Holden, and seeks to soothe her estranged relationship with her father and guardian grandmother. In turn, Wynonna helps bridge the gap between Ezra and his younger sister, who has distanced herself since learning of their parents' extramarital affairs. The frequent, rather abrupt body switches and cluttered plot, which includes a production of Twelfth Night that parallels the teens' experience, prove more distracting than effective. Still, Norton's novel offers thought-provoking ideas about gender, sexuality, and compassion with plenty of comedy along the way. Ages 14-up. Agent: Jenny Bent, the Bent Agency.(June)
- **Kirkus Review** 04/01/2019
 Ezra Slevin and Wynonna Jones are sworn enemies—until they start swapping bodies and realize that they have more in common than they thought. Ezra has been in love with Imogen Klutz since the fourth grade, and after years of pining for her, he decides to ask her to junior prom. There are, however, two problems: the first is Ezra's social anxiety and the second is Wynonna, Imogen's best friend, who bullies him relentlessly. On the day of the solar eclipse, Ezra's best friend finally convinces him to ask Imogen out. But his world turns upside down when, in the middle of a scuffle, he swaps bodies with Wynonna and then switches back to himself. The incident kicks off a pattern of the two constantly flipping between each other's worlds. As they begin to uncover each other's secrets, Ezra and Wynonna realize

all they share—and that, chillingly, the switch might end up being permanent. Ezra’s narratorial voice is well-crafted and witty, and the characters are layered and complex. Although the book deftly explores the fluidity of gender and sexuality without moralizing or oversimplifying, there is little mention of race and all main characters are white. Unfortunately, while the end of the novel flies by in a stream of fast-paced action and nuanced character development, the first two-thirds are overwritten, with unnecessarily detailed descriptions and strange tangents. An entertaining queer romance that could have benefited from some additional editing. (Romance. 14-18)

Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding The Book *Where I End and You Begin* by Preston Norton

- The dialogue in this book contains foul language.
- The use of foul language overrides the story line.
- Number of curse words
- The language in this book is not permitted to be read aloud at a BOE meeting.
- The curse words used in the dialogue in this book would not be allowed in a classroom.
- If this book were a song, it would not be allowed to be sung at school (due to the language used in the dialogue).
- This book could not be read aloud to a grandparent (due to the language used in the dialogue).
- What is the consequence if a child uses the “F” word in the classroom?
- We are opening the world of pornography to kids as young as 14. There is no rush to open this up to them.
- There are references to private parts and sexual acts.
- We are desensitizing students to the words used in the dialogue.
- Removing the book will not hurt education, but protects the student’s dignity.
- The book is not educational. Removing it would not be banning it if they can still get it at a local library.
- Just because it's an award nominee does not mean it is right for our children.

Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding The Gateway Award Bookmark

- Bookmark - Not all the books on the bookmark are on the ELA approved book list for instructional purposes.
- The assignment was to read two books from the MO Gateway Nominees bookmark. This was one of those books and part of an assignment.



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 excerpt at the bottom of page 374 near the end of the book explains why this book has value, “I think,” I said, “that there are so many words and labels for who we can be, and what we can be attracted to, and what we can identify as that it’s sometimes easy to forget ourselves. The important thing is you.”
- There is value in the story that this book tells.
- There are references to Shakespearian plot lines that are given a modern twist.
- This book helped with understanding dyslexia, what it’s like to have dyslexia and other disabilities.
- A fresh contemporary view of a diverse range of LGBTQ characters and topics.
- The book was funny and well written. Valued the range of representation in a funnier view and not tragic.
- The book highlights people’s differences and the message is to have empathy for those differences.
- Liked the growth of Ezra's character: he didn’t see value in living and didn't understand why he did not feel like living. But at the end, the characters realized their value.
- Whoever you are, you can identify and find comfort in the book.
- Sexuality portions are needed to tell the story and are not gratuitous.
- Reading this book teaches empathy and that is important. The way it taught empathy was valuable.
- We have so many students struggling with mental health and questioning their place in the world, and it was refreshing to have a book on this subject in a more funny way.

Questions The Committee Asked

What does it mean to retain the book with restrictions?	Retaining with restrictions means the book is available, but placed behind the desk or in a “reserved” section. There are currently no books in high school libraries that are restricted.
Are other school districts retaining them with restrictions and placing them behind the desk?	It's not something the American Library Association recommends. Most local school districts do not place restrictions on high school library books.
How far could restrictions go if we start retaining with restriction? We (the committee) don't have the authority to infringe on the rights of the reader.	Discussion continued over the talking point that everyone’s idea of what is acceptable and not acceptable is different. They discussed how difficult it would be to define what is “unacceptable.” The committee agreed that not every book is for every reader, but that a wide variety of books should be available in the library so every child can find a book they connect with.

<p>How are books categorized in the library? How do librarians help students find good fit books?</p>	<p>Books are categorized by genre: mystery, science fiction, etc. Librarians try to match up on what students read and liked in the past.</p>
<p>Do library books have to be on the RSD 6-12 Approved Book List?</p>	<p>No. Library books and books that are assigned for instructional purposes are two different things. Books that are assigned for instructional purposes are reviewed in the context of the curriculum so they can be added to the approved book list. Two teachers have to have read them and must submit evidence of their connection to the curricular standards. Even though books appear on the approved book list, students still have choice in what they read for assignments.</p> <p>The purpose and use of the school library differs from assignments that students must complete. Library books are always a student choice. Library books are chosen based on the guidelines outlined in the library handbook (see above). Parents always have the option to restrict what their students check out in the library.</p> <p>Teachers may take students to the library and ask them to pick a book. The book may not be on a list, but it is a choice. Parents should be aware that kids can pick any book in the library, and the book their student chooses may not be on the approved list for classroom assignments.</p>

<p align="center">Committee's Rationale and the Decision</p>	
<p>Rationale and Discussion Points the Committee Shared</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need to think long and hard on the Gateway books recommendation and how we handle this. Regardless of knowing the content, teachers are making it an assignment. We need to be more conscious of what we are asking the kids to read. ● It helped clarify my thinking when I thought about first amendment rights. I'm not comfortable with the language. However, it is a voluntary system, and I would have put the book back and not read it. The book does qualify for the first amendment because the book is not mandated, but offered as an option. Didn't like the book, but it is not right to stop others from reading. ● While the language is how many high school students talk, we would hope they would know not to use that language in an instructional setting at school. We can all be desensitized to it but hope that our kids know when to use the language and when not to. ● The language, while not something we necessarily approve of our kids using, is authentic and realistic with high school students. ● The concerns vs. value, don't really match up. The concern is over language and not the actual content of the book. The value far outweighs the concern ● Parents sometimes question classical books as well. How do we determine what is offensive since everyone has their own definition of that? ● The answer to the objection over the book is that because it is a library book and not required, they have the opportunity to put it down and walk away. However, it should be available for anybody who would want to read it. ● Students whose parents didn't want their child to read a gateway book, had a choice to read two other books not on the gateway list. ● There is a gray area: The assignment was to select two books from the

	Gateway nominees not knowing what they contain. Library books go through a different process than required books.
Consensus of the committee	The committee decided to retain the book as a library book without restriction.
How does the decision impact the accessibility of the material moving forward?	<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 want to restrict access to this book for their child.</p> <p>The bookmark will remain as an option for students to pick up in the library. The Gateway Books are not required reading and are a choice for students to read.</p> <p>Note: The bookmark was challenged because students were assigned to read two books off the list in ELA classrooms. These Gateway books are not on the 6-12 RSD Approved Book List for use in classroom assignments. When the parent brought that concern to the teacher, adjustments were made to the assignment and students were offered additional options that were on the 6-12 RSD Approved Book List .</p>