

Challenged Materials Committee Report

Material Being Challenged:

Library Book: *Looking for Alaska* by John Green

Date of Challenge Committee Meeting: 12/8/21

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:

- Voice of Youth Advocates, 04/01/2005
- Horn Book Magazine, 03/01/2005
- Publishers Weekly, 02/07/2005
- School Library Journal, 02/01/2005
- Michael Printz Honor Book. 2006
- Vermont Green Mountain Book Award Winner, 2008
- Kentucky Bluegrass Award Winner, 2006

Professional Reviews:

- **Horn Book Guide, 10/01/2005**
At boarding school in Alabama, narrator Miles Halter faces challenging classes, school-wide pranks, and Alaska Young, a sexy, enigmatic girl. After Alaska is killed in a car crash, Miles and his friends question whether it could have been suicide and acknowledge their own survivor guilt. These intelligent characters talk smart, yet don't always behave that way, and are thus complex and realistically portrayed teenagers.
- **Voice of Youth Advocates, 04/01/2005**
The chapter headings make it clear-Before and After. Something bad is going to happen. Geeky sixteen-year-old Miles Halter counts down the days to tragedy, drawing the reader into his new life at an Alabama boarding school. Miles, who leaves his loving parents and lonely, unchallenging school life in Florida, is a bright, shy, friendless scholar. He devours the biographies of famous writers and has an encyclopedic supply of famous last words. At Culver Creek Preparatory School, Miles is enfolded immediately into the exciting, edged-up world of his roommate, Chip Martin, and the beautiful, fearless, haunted Alaska, both veteran students of Culver. They coach and enlist Miles in an ever-escalating war of pranks and counter-pranks with a group of rich, cruel youth. The pranks war fills the world of the three friends, but their escalating craving for harmful substances (their smoking habits are nearly as alarming as their alcohol intake) and some sexual experimentation intrudes on their need to work through their academic curiosity about the meaning of life. Miles yearns for Alaska, whose signals to him are maddeningly mixed. Once the tragedy plays out, the last third of this provocative, moving, and sometimes hilarious story counts up slowly from grief as Miles tries to find his way through the fallout of depression and guilt that he suffers. Green, a familiar presence on National Public Radio, has a writer's voice, so self-assured and honest that one is startled to learn that this novel is his first. The anticipated favorable comparisons to Holden Caulfield are richly deserved in this highly recommended addition to young adult literature. -Beth E. Andersen.
- **Publishers Weekly, 02/07/2005**
This ambitious first novel introduces 16-year-old Miles Halter, whose hobby is memorizing famous people's last words. When he chucks his boring existence in Florida to begin this chronicle of his first year at an Alabama boarding school, he recalls the poet Rabelais on his deathbed who said, "I go to seek a Great Perhaps." Miles's roommate, the "Colonel," has an interest in drinking and elaborate pranks-pursuits shared by his best friend, Alaska, a bookworm who is also "the hottest girl in all of human history." Alaska has a boyfriend at Vanderbilt, but Miles falls in love with her anyway. Other than her occasional hollow, feminist diatribes, Alaska is mostly male fantasy-a curvy babe who loves sex and

can drink guys under the table. Readers may pick up on clues that she is also doomed. Green replaces conventional chapter headings with a foreboding countdown-"ninety-eight days before," "fifty days before"-and Alaska foreshadows her own death twice ("I may die young," she says, "but at least I'll die smart"). After Alaska drives drunk and plows into a police car, Miles and the Colonel puzzle over whether or not she killed herself. Theological questions from their religion class add some introspective gloss. But the novel's chief appeal lies in Miles's well-articulated lust and his initial excitement about being on his own for the first time. Readers will only hope that this is not the last word from this promising new author. Ages 14-up.

- **School Library Journal, 02/01/2005**

Gr 9 Up-Sixteen-year-old Miles Halter's adolescence has been one long non event-no challenge, no girls, no mischief, and no real friends. Seeking what Rabelais called the "Great Perhaps," he leaves Florida for a boarding school in Birmingham, AL. His roommate, Chip, is a dirt-poor genius scholarship student with a Napoleon complex who lives to one-up the school's rich preppies. Chip's best friend is Alaska Young, with whom Miles and every other male in her orbit falls instantly in love. She is literate, articulate, and beautiful, and she exhibits a reckless combination of adventurous and self-destructive behavior. She and Chip teach Miles to drink, smoke, and plot elaborate pranks. Alaska's story unfolds in all-night bull sessions, and the depth of her unhappiness becomes obvious. Green's dialogue is crisp, especially between Miles and Chip. His descriptions and Miles's inner monologues can be philosophically dense, but are well within the comprehension of sensitive teen readers. The chapters of the novel are headed by a number of days "before" and "after" what readers surmise is Alaska's suicide. These placeholders sustain the mood of possibility and foreboding, and the story moves methodically to its ambiguous climax. The language and sexual situations are aptly and realistically drawn, but sophisticated in nature. Miles's narration is alive with sweet, self-deprecating humor, and his obvious struggle to tell the story truthfully adds to his believability. Like Phineas in John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (S & S, 1960), Green draws Alaska so lovingly, in self-loathing darkness as well as energetic light, that readers mourn her loss along with her friends.-Johanna Lewis, New York Public Library

Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding The Book *Looking for Alaska* by John Green

- The challenger shared a statement concerning ethical values that have eroded our values. There are things you cannot unsee because words and pictures leave a mark. We are impacted by written and visual poisons. The female brain does not develop until 18 and the male brain until 25.
- This book includes tobacco, alcohol, blow jobs, casual sex, killing herself as a drunk driver (was it suicide?); the author knows no bounds. It does not discriminate.
- You are elected to protect our children. Would these acts be allowed to be portrayed in a talent show or school play?
- Regulation 6310 reads: "Provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards."
- Some of the books' content crosses the lines of child abuse. Do you want that on your conscience and permanent record?
- The challenger shared a quote on the first page "I have tried so hard to do right." last words of President Grover Cleveland.
- Reflect on these times and know what you chose is right for our children.

Committee's Comments on the Value of This Material

- There are a lot of lessons in this book. One was getting away from home and then you are on your own. Fitting in with a certain group and what you have to do to stay. That's part of growing up. The kid is exceptionally smart.
- Reading this book after losing students in a car accident, I now see that this is exactly the book students

should read in a year or two. The theme is how to deal with loss. I saw students mourn, but the book could give them answers.

- The book talked about how the characters dealt with the trauma and their desperate need. They felt the car accident was their fault because they let her get in the car. It is important for kids to be able to read what suicide does to your friend and how traumatizing it is to those who are left behind because they feel hopeless.
- Miles cares about his academics. This is a lesson that it's ok to be smart and study. He came from poverty but loved his mom so much.
- Shows that big jocks and preppy kids and other groups can get along with each other.
- There is an interview with the author at the end talking about the sex scenes. He did a great job on what he intended with those scenes. The author's intention was clinical, distant and unsensual; he did it to purpose. "Weird, nervous, and quizzical" was what the author wrote at the end with the purpose of evoking the senses. He used adverbs, adjectives to get across the purpose of what he was trying to do. The characters were not really passionate about each other.
- It was asserted that this is pornography. None of the sex scenes were exciting or designed in any way to get someone excited, which is the purpose of porn.
- The characters were well written. The dialogue was fantastic especially as the characters talked and dealt with Alaska's death.
- This would be a great book club choice because of the topics and engaging to talk about.

Questions the Committee Asked

How did you hear about this book?	Like the previous challenger, from other parents. Destiny is where I search.
How often has this book been read?	3 copies checked out 162 times at RSHS. We used to have more copies so I know that it's been read more.
Can parents research books through Destiny as a category?	Parents can put a note in Destiny that they don't want their kids to read certain titles. Librarians will put a note in their file so the student cannot check out what the parent restricted.

Committee's Rationale and the Decision

Rationale and Discussion Points the Committee Shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This book includes a suicide life lesson. It comes out at the end that she was putting a rose on mom's grave. The author handled it extremely well. There is lots of great value in this books' message. • It is important to consider the value of the text and what students can learn from this book. • The few problematic scenes are miniscule compared to the rest of the book. • Last two paragraphs about being immortal and how they are invincible were impactful. When kids are lost, they are immortal in their memory. They can't focus on scenes with immaturity. This book is about experiencing loss and grief and how to deal with it. • Great point about kids knowing what is authentic - so many readers can find themselves in it and not just one kid. Wow! This is what many kids are thinking, and it was a window into seeing. Insight into all different types of people and get along to make things work in their own way in terrible situations.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I lost a really good friend in high school. They left a party and were killed and this brought me back to that. I realized I was trying to figure out why all that time and coming back now and revisiting what I was going through during that time was refreshing to see. That's how you mourn. If I would have found this at a younger age, it would have been even more helpful. ● Parents can restrict what their own kids read, but they can't restrict what my kids read. I would rather have kids read and learn about it that way than try it firsthand.
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?	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.