

Challenged Materials Committee Report

Material Being Challenged:

Library Book: *The Breakways* by Cathy G. Johnson

Date of Challenge Committee Meeting: 12/20/21

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:

- Horn Book Guide, 10/01/2019
- Booklist, 02/15/2019
- School Library Journal, 02/01/2019
- Kirkus Review, 01/15/2019
- Publishers Weekly, 01/14/2019

Professional Reviews:

- *Horn Book Guide*, 10/01/2019

On the first day of middle school, popular girl Amanda recruits fifth grader Faith for the soccer team. Faith winds up on the bottom-of-the-barrel C team, along with a bunch of misfits. The teammates slowly bond and--realistically--never improve at soccer. Johnson's expressive graphic-novel panels show a diverse cast with all sorts of body types, skin colors, and sexual and gender identities.

- *Booklist*, 02/15/2019

Grades 5-8 - The Bloodhounds sort of suck at soccer, but winning a game is hardly the point of this ensemble story that focuses on the sometimes-awkward, shifting bonds of middle-school friendship. When Faith signs up for soccer, which she's never played before, she ends up on the C team and meets Sodacan and Marie, who introduce the rest of the players. From there on, nearly every Bloodhound gets a few pages to herself, and while that spreads the story a little thin and can make the plot a bit hard to follow, it also gives the players plenty of room to develop into appealingly fleshed-out characters. Accordingly, Johnson's character designs, with coloring by Kevin Czap, are spectacular: the middle-schoolers vary greatly in size, skin tone, and body type, and Johnson clearly paid attention to how bodies move, since her characters' gestures, facial expressions, and postures have as much to say about their personalities as do their words and actions. Readers looking for a soccer story might be disappointed, but kids after empowering, character-driven stories about realistic friendships will fall in love.

- *School Library Journal*, 02/01/2019

Gr 4-8—Faith has just joined the Bloodhounds, the middle school girls' soccer C team, made up of the least skilled players. But this isn't one of those heartwarming sports stories where an inspirational coach rallies the underdogs to victory. Instead, these Dogs lose every game and feud with one another while the coach spends most practices on his phone. Vignettes show the players' varied home lives, interests, and friendship dramas. Sketchy full-color artwork features characters with exaggerated expressions. Faith and her teammates are diverse in body type and ethnicity. One player comes out as trans and another as queer during the course of the story, and both have supportive friends. Readers who like a touch of romance will enjoy seeing two sweet relationships blossom on the page. Realistic

scenes of school, soccer practice, and sleepovers are interspersed with Faith's daydreams about adventures on horseback with a handsome butch royal messenger named Mathilda, who inspires Faith to unite her misfit teammates, team or no team. VERDICT A down-to-earth friendship story for readers of Svetlana Chmakova's *Awkward*, Jennifer L. Holm's *Sunny Side Up*, and Raina Telgemeier's *Drama*.—Sarah Stone, San Francisco Public Library.

- **Kirkus Review**, 01/15/2019

This jam-packed graphic novel featuring diverse girls tackles friendship, identity, and more. When black fifth-grader Faith is recruited to the girls soccer team on the first day of school, she hopes to be welcomed into the popular older crowd. But Sodacan and Marie, two cynical but welcoming white seventh-graders, inform her that the three of them are firmly at the bottom of the C team. At night, Faith draws and then dreams of a mysterious brown-skinned knight named Mathilda who whisks her away on magical adventures that help her navigate her waking surroundings. Each team member has life issues that they bring onto the field: Crushes, sexual harassment, rivalries, and cliques provide enough distraction to keep the team from winning. It's an exciting portrayal of young characters exploring their sexual and cultural identities, but there is an awful lot going on. With so many characters and storylines it becomes difficult to grasp any singular theme or connect with all of the personalities. Hijabi MVP Nadia helps rescue the season; vegan Sodacan recruits teammates into her all-girl band; Latinx Yarelis takes the game super seriously; Vietnamese-American Huang's busy parents are unable to attend her matches. In one of the many sensitively handled moments, one player comes out to a teammate as a trans boy during a sleepover. Happily, though it's stylized, Johnson's art successfully individuates the many characters, aided by Czap's soft pastels. Readers will be sorry there are no additional volumes planned to flesh out these characters further. Groundbreaking—and as complicated as middle school. (Graphic fiction. 8-14)

- **Publishers Weekly**, 01/14/2019

Tricked into joining the soccer team on her first day in middle school, Faith, a loner who is looking for somewhere to fit in, stumbles through practice and lands on the C team. Her teammates are other misfits who are more preoccupied with personal struggles than with soccer, and Faith gradually wins over many of them as friends. Faith also finds escape in her own inner life, which Johnson represents as a series of dreams with a warrior named Mathilda, with whom Faith visits a king and prepares to build a castle. Johnson (Jeremiah) presents an eclectic group of middle schoolers who are exploring issues of gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, mental health, and more. Using minimal detail, the artwork realistically portrays the characters' relatable emotions and wide-ranging reactions. Her young people also represent a diverse array of sizes, shapes, colors, and notions of attractiveness. Johnson's graphic novel will resonate with readers who are figuring out who they are and where they belong. Ages 8–11. (Mar.)

Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding The Book *The Breakaways* by Cathy G. Johnson

- This book contains content about sexuality and it is in a K-5 library.
- Sexual identity is a huge concept for 5-10 year old students.
- This book shows two 5th graders in bed being close, kissing, and holding hands.
- Rockwood should demonstrate transparency when it comes to books like this one. When students learn

about the reproductive system in 4th and 5th grade, parents grant permission for their kids to participate in the lessons.

- Every family has different morals and values.
- This book contains a concept that is hard for kids to understand.
- The book is on the shelf with all other books.

Committee's Comments on the Value and Concerns of This Material

- There is diversity in the body types, skin tones, and sexuality so kids can find someone like them in this book.
- The book highlights friendship and overcoming hardships.
- The art work is great; kids can identify with the graphics.
- The book addresses bullying and standing up for yourself.
- This is a story of finding yourself. There is value in learning about coming together as a group.
- The book is more about gender discovery than sexuality. There was a small part of it where a character was with her friend and said, "I think I'm a boy."
- I have had kids ask for books on gender identity.
- I don't think kids put the weight on gender identity that adults do.
- The book gives glimpses of kids at home and their interactions with their parents. Our kids only know what they experience.
- Everyone has stuff they have to deal with, and this book shows that.
- This book is difficult to follow. I read it twice. I had issues with flow and have a concern about early readers following it.
- It didn't flow well and jumped around.
- As to the literary value- it is okay. There were so many characters and issues that it was hard to focus on any one of them as the theme of the book and or to make connections between the chapters. Although, the concept of friendship (or lack thereof) was an overarching theme.
- The book was lacking in literary elements, but this is the nature of a graphic novel.
- There were lots of storylines going on. I didn't see it tying in, but there is value in the characters.
- The book includes mental health, representation and bullying.
- Elementary students often get a negative portrayal of MS that it's scary and up to you to find your own group. This book shows that it's possible to find your way.
- This is choice reading-not every student will or should read this book.
- Elementary students are aged 5-11. Some middle schools have this book, and it would be a good book for MS. My concern would be that there could be elementary students who are ready for this content.
- In the scene that's most problematic, two kids who are having a sleepover kiss. Does a kiss constitute sexuality? When we were kids, we had sleepovers and slept in the same bed.
- The transgender scenes in bed were completely unnecessary but did check that issue box. The author could have addressed the issue in other ways that were less sexual.
- The kissing scene happens at a moment when a child is coming out as a boy.
- I don't like that the team quit and walked off the field. It sets a poor example.
- The author did a lot with some mature topics and has included some mature content.
- This book is about so many other things other than trans kids.
- The audience might see soccer on the cover and would choose it without knowing about some of the content.
- K-2 students often read picture books, there are differences in what they choose, and some may see graphic novels as picture books leading them to pick this up.
- This book was included in the elementary library because the characters are in 5th grade even though they are in a junior high school.
- The American Library Association strongly recommends this book for 4th to 8th grade students.
- Is there a way to ensure that younger students who aren't ready for this book won't check it out?
- This coming of age graphic novel does address many of the life issues of our middle school students.

- I would not recommend this book for elementary schools.

Questions the Committee Asked

How old were the students in the book?	5th Grade
Are the picture books in a library separated out to direct younger students to them?	Some libraries have sections set up where K-2 students can find books that are appropriate for them.
Can we level books for elementary students?	It is not best-practice to level library books. Librarians are trained to direct students to appropriate books and guide them to find the best-fit books for them.

Committee's Rationale and the Decision

Consensus of the committee	The committee decided to retain the book with restriction.
How does the decision impact the accessibility of the material moving forward?	The book will have a note in Destiny that will appear when the book is checked out. It will state that the book should only be checked out to 4th and 5th grade students.