

## Challenged Materials Committee Notes

### Material Being Challenged:

Library Book: *Living Dead Girl* by Elizabeth Scott

Date of Challenge Committee Meeting: 3/9/22

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

- Examine and/or read the challenged resource
- Determine professional acceptance by reading critical reviews 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. Value of the material
5. Committee decision

### Library Media Information Shared with the Committee

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*

### Professional Reviews & Awards Regarding This Material

- **Voice of Youth Advocates**, 02/01/2009
- **Library Media Connection**, 01/01/2009
- **School Library Journal**, 10/01/2008
- **Publishers Weekly Starred**, 09/08/2008
- **Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books**, 09/01/2008

*Voice of Youth Advocates*, 02/01/2009

Alice has not always been Alice. Five years ago, Ray abducted her during an aquarium visit and everything changed. Now she is too old, and Ray is looking for a little girl-a new Alice-to take her place. Alice has found the

perfect girl, but it may not mean the freedom for which Alice has been longing. Scott creates a heartbreaking and shattering novel that goes deep into a terrifying world without ever being lurid or gruesome. The horror of Alice's tale is in its matter-of-fact presentation. Ray's behaviors—as vile and deviant as they come with an eerily rational explanation. Even more disturbing is how little anyone around Alice and Ray sees, how willing they are to accept Ray's story that he is Alice's father and that she is homeschooled because of special needs. There are no happy endings here; readers learn the horrors Ray himself faced that shaped him into the monster he is, and they see in Alice how easily transformation can happen. Scott does a tremendous job of showing the pervasive sexual and physical abuse Alice suffers without being graphic. If anything the subtlety of the descriptions is even more haunting than a detailed description would have been. This book is one of those rare novels that is difficult to read but impossible to put down and should not be missed.—Vikki Terrile.

***School Library Journal*, 10/01/2008**

Gr 9 Up—The numb voice of a teen who has been devastated by five years of captivity and compliance, a girl who has been named "Alice" by her abductor, relates her grim story. At 15, she still believes the threat by which Ray controlled her when she was almost 10 and he walked her away from a school field trip: he's made it clear that if she bolts he will kill her family. The trauma of multiple rapes on a child is portrayed, as is Ray's ongoing need to control her and his daily, multiple demands for sexual submission. Now that she's a teen, Alice is being starved; his disordered logic tells him that this will keep her a little girl. His control over her is so absolute that, although she can leave his apartment during the day and go on her own to have a wax job, her only rebellion is to steal small amounts of food. When Ray decides it is time for a new little girl, Alice complies by locating a likely next victim. In the process she meets a needy teen boy and a police officer, both of whom suspect she is in trouble and want to help her, but all does not end happily. This story lacks the vivid characters and psychological insights of Norma Fox Mazer's chilling *The Missing Girl* (HarperCollins, 2008). For an ultimately hopeful, but still realistic portrayal of a damaged survivor of abduction and sexual imprisonment, see Catherine Atkins's *When Jeff Comes Home* (Putnam, 1999)—Carolyn Lehman, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA Copyright 2008 Reed Business Information.

***Publishers Weekly Starred*, 09/08/2008**

Fans of Scott's YA romances *Perfect You* or *Bloom* may be unprepared for the unrelieved terror within this chilling novel, about a 15-year-old girl who has spent the last five years being abused by a kidnapper named Ray and is kept powerless by Ray's promise to harm her family if she makes one false move. The narrator knows she is the second of the girls Ray has abducted and renamed Alice; Ray killed the first when she outgrew her childlike body at 15, and now Alice half-hopes her own demise is approaching ("I think of the knife in the kitchen, of the bridges I've seen from the bus... but the thing about hearts is that they always want to keep beating"). Ray, however, has an even more sinister plan: he orders Alice to find a new girl, then train her to Ray's tastes. Scott's prose is spare and damning, relying on suggestive details and their impact on Alice to convey the unimaginable violence she repeatedly experiences. Disturbing but fascinating, the book exerts an inescapable grip on readers—like Alice, they have virtually no choice but to continue until the conclusion sets them free. Ages 16–up. (Sept.)

#### **Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding the Book *Living Dead Girl* by Elizabeth Scott**

- From the first page, I was sickened and shocked. This book contains fantasies of rape and suicidal ideation. I did not sleep the night I read it.
- As the mother of a daughter, I am concerned that this book is in our libraries.
- The book has a constant theme that adults don't care.

- There is pervasive vulgarity in this book.
- I think there is a lack of educational suitability with this book. What is in this, that is in our curriculum? The library is supposed to support and enrich the curriculum.
- For me, I don't understand who this book would enrich or enhance a student's learning.
- Child rape was not a blurb here and there, but this was the totality of the book.
- Imagine a child who has been assaulted in any way reading this without an adult.
- There is no benefit to this book.
- We (parents) trust the district to take care of our students. This book gives the idea that the school condones this.
- For me, the question is would you read this to your 14-year-old? Would you read this at the dinner table?
- If I can't stand to read it, why would I agree to this being read to my students?
- This depraved media serves no purpose in our schools, and students should not be subjected to this.
- We're in this mental health spiral in Rockwood, and this book doesn't help that.
- This book goes beyond what is acceptable for an adult. I have heard the opposing viewpoint that this book might be helpful for some students. This book is not that.

Questions and Clarifications Committee Members Had for the Challenger	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you agree that parents have a right to tell children they cannot read a certain book?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes I do. I shouldn't have to research every book, but I should be able to trust the books that are in the schools. I can trust that with virtual learning that chromebooks are safe as they are blocked from certain websites. However, I am not there at school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you agree that parents have the right to tell their children that they can read a certain book in a school library?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If I wanted my child to read an editorial or Playboy, doesn't mean that all parents would allow this. If I want my child to be open to harmful books doesn't mean that all children should be allowed. This book is not healthy, not beneficial. Not even healthy for an adult unless they are a pedophile or have a mental issue. To ban Mark Twain would be ridiculous, but this book is about pubic hair being removed because a rapist liked to rape a child.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your request it seems logical you don't want it banned, but removed from the high school library is that true?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I heard the argument from opposing views. I like to hear other reviews. One talking point is that this book might help someone going through this. I understand that. This book is not just one or two acts of sexual misconduct. It is the entirety of the book. It would not help or be beneficial for any child 18 or under or for any adult. I don't know why a parent would opt for the child to read this book.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can tell your children to not or to read a book. Is that accurate?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think that if something is so vulgar and not educational suitable then yes, I have the right to request the book be removed. For example - a book about terrorism that gives instruction on how to</li> </ul>

	<p>make a bomb? Would those be ok to have on the shelf if it's written well? Our issue is this book. I understand that you are playing devil's advocate, but it is hard for me to understand how anybody would find this particular book educational. It should not have been in our library. How are parents supposed to have any recourse for books that are harmful that got into our library? What's going to stop another child from showing my child even if I told my child not to read it?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If you successfully have a book removed do you realize that you will probably violate the rights of the other 98.9 percent. If you are successful then you are violating the other parent's right to tell their students to read a book. This is a big concern for me. You should not be able to make a judgment for the other parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I understand that. But I don't feel like taking something that is not school appropriate is wrong. Example If there was a Penthouse (magazine) and I asked it to be removed is that a federal offense? Am I then taking away their rights? The answer is yes. I understand your position and you can obviously understand my decision.</li> </ul>

<b>Committee's Comments on the Value of This Material</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A question was asked if it was a prerequisite that those on the committee read the book - yes</li> <li>● A question was asked: Did the challenger say that the victim died at the end. I thought it was said that the main character committed suicide. It does not end with the victim being murdered or committing suicide. This is not true. It was a survivor story.</li> <li>● Can you explain why this was postponed - a committee member was sick and we waited until they were well enough to attend.</li> <li>● There are heavy topics in this book. It was short and easy to read. It may keep reluctant readers interested because it was short and quick. This is a strength.</li> <li>● The book hasn't been super popular recently, but it's about violent things without being violent. You have to read between the lines to understand what is happening.</li> <li>● Question was asked about the age of this book and how long would it typically be kept in the library. The libraries have a natural purging process. If books are damaged, are old, or not being checked out very often, the books are purged.</li> <li>● Our society is fascinated with true crime. It mirrors the Shawn Hornbeck story. Feel like there is empathy for what goes through the victim's mind. You might ask the question, "How can someone help their abuser," but this helps understand the mindset of someone in this type of situation. I didn't necessarily enjoy the book but can see the benefits for building empathy for those who are in the situation.</li> <li>● It is important to have tales like this about abuse as I would want my child to have an understanding of how this happens. It was difficult to read, but those scenes were not included for arousal.</li> <li>● It would depend on the student if they get the inferences.</li> <li>● Trafficking is a huge problem. Most of our kids live in a privileged bubble and wouldn't know what that looked like or what it would look like. She was trapped. An officer was trying to help her. You read to experience things that you're not going to experience yourself. It is a part of life. Kids cannot just read about unicorns and rainbows. Kids are interested in crime shows. It is not ok to limit others' experiences because somebody doesn't want their child to read the book. We can't have only topics that people agree with. Just because we have books about slavery doesn't mean we back slavery.</li> <li>● Elizabeth Smart's book is dark, but a student wanted to read it as she connected with it. Students need options like this. The challenger said she feels like a reader would feel the only way out would be death</li> </ul>	

or suicide. Helps sympathize and maybe you come across someone who is going through this and you could reach out and help them find their voice. Page 39 and 40 it's not about rape, but women getting taking advantage of and about women finding their voice. We hope that Rockwood students would never be in this scenario but reality is, it's out there.

- I agree without a lot of the comments stated. Part of the mission statement is providing windows and mirrors and this book does this. Importantly this book could be super graphic and detailed, and it is not. I've been through trauma - the book speaks to how your brain dissociates to how it reacts to things being done to your body.
- She called it a tall tale- it is fiction, but it happens. It happens all the time and shielding children from it is not the answer. These issues are on the news. The author does a nice job opening up on these topics. The challenger does not have a high schooler yet. What if they know someone who is going through this and they can help a friend out. Maybe not as dark as this, but something similar. Maybe experiencing a less horrific situation. Because something is difficult to read, doesn't mean we have to remove it.
- If a child picks it up and doesn't like it, then can bring it back.
- I have a freshman and senior; the challenger asked would you talk about this at the dinner table. I respect her thoughts, but these things are talked about as your kids mature.
- I have daughters who are 19, 17 and 15 year old. I am certain that there are a bunch of people who would be shocked at what we talk about. But they are open with me, and they know I am safe to talk to. Not everybody has adults nearby that can be open and have a safe place to go. My kids have a sheltered life and would need to learn about this stuff through movies and books. Just because they read does not mean they are going to turn into a bad person.
- I would never say a kid that reads this book would become a pedophile as was suggested. This book was more on how to avoid this situation.

**Committee Decision is to retain without restriction.**

How does the decision impact the accessibility of the material moving forward?

The book will remain in Rockwood libraries. Parents may request that their child not be permitted to check out the book. Parents may also request a daily email reminder of what their child has checked out from their school's library.