

Challenged Materials Committee Notes

Material Being Challenged:

Library Book: Lawn Boy by Jonathon Evison

Date of Challenge Committee Meeting: 3/31/22

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

- School Library Journal, 03/01/2018
- Publishers Weekly Starred, 02/05/2018
- Alex Award, 01/01/2019

School Library Journal, 03/01/2018

Eminently readable and deeply thought-provoking, Evison's deceptively simple novel takes on tough

issues such as race, sexual identity, and the crushing weight of American capitalism. Mike Muñoz, the 22-year-old biracial (Mexican and white) narrator, has grown up dirt-poor with his hardworking waiter mother and his brother, who is developmentally disabled. The narrative follows Mike's attempts at several other jobs after he's fired from his lawn-mowing gig while he works on his love life and tries to help out his family. After Mike recounts a great disappointment involving his biological father in the first chapter, one of several themes emerges as Mike encounters several potential father figures (often bosses), each with his own deeply flawed philosophy of life. From the cutthroat capitalism of his first boss to the upper-class cronyism of an old high school pal, each man personifies aspects of Mike's life that he cannot stand, even while he learns valuable lessons from them. Meanwhile, other story lines fix on Mike's underdeveloped understanding of his sexuality, which is not helped by the rampant homophobia and sexism of his best friend, and his equally conflicted understanding of his ethnic identity. Unfortunately, Evison's often infectious enthusiasm for his preponderance of ideas weighs down the demands of the plot. Nevertheless, the passion with which Mike and Evison share these ideas redeems the novel. VERDICT Give this flawed but exciting coming-of-age story to teens eager to engage with heavy and timely political issues.—Mark Flowers, Rio Vista Library, CA Copyright 2018 Reed Business Information.

Publishers Weekly Starred, 02/05/2018

This moving fifth novel from Evison (*This is Your Life, Harriet Chance*) enters the wry, conflicted mind of Mike Muñoz, a recently fired yard worker with a real talent for topiary and a genuine love for landscaping. When Mike is sacked after refusing to comply with a client's orders to pick up after his dog, he takes refuge in the one place in the world that's always welcomed him: the library. As he tries to figure out what to do next, Mike contemplates writing the "Great American Landscaping Novel"—the sort of novel he'd like to read—but writing novels, he realizes, isn't for people like him: "landscapers, especially unemployed ones... had bills to pay. Cars to fix. Disabled siblings to care for." Evison convincingly evokes the small disasters and humiliations that beset America's working poor. Mike's gradual growth into self-awareness is punctuated by moments of human kindness and grace that transpire in and among broken-down trucks, trailer parks, and strip malls. Focusing on the workers who will only ever be welcome in gated communities as hired help, Evison's quiet novel beautifully considers the deterioration of the American Dream. Agent: Mollie Glick, Foundry Literary + Media. (Apr.)

Concerns the Challenger Shared Regarding the Book *Lawn Boy* by Jonathon Evison

- Challenger stated that somebody suggested the book should be allowed because the main character is working out a plan for his life, job, and maybe becoming a writer. I do agree that those are good things. But this is overshadowed by the language, sexual description and alcohol abuse.
- In the first 100 pages the "f" word is used numerous times and "s" word is used many times as well.
- Words also used are "fag," "hell," and "dick." We would not allow our students to talk to each other that way at school or if a movie showed that type of language, we would need parents' permission. Why would it be allowed in the library?
- We are preparing our kids for a job, and this is not how you speak while at a job.
- This book has pervasive alcohol use. There is much talk throughout the book of underage drinking. It talks about getting drunk and then driving and drinking.
- One of the characters said he was drinking and driving Mike home. He says, "I was pretty drunk." Beers and a shot brought to him as a friend. There was no regret or recourse about this.

- The main character quit drinking once when his boss went to jail.
- This book is irresponsible and goes against Rockwood's drug-free program.
- There is a description of a sexual encounter with minors. Fourth graders are involved in oral sex, and that is mentioned five times. A minor having sex should not be read, and the book especially shouldn't continue to mention it.
- Ebay refuses to sell this book.
- Characters are talking about a girl's chest in a rude manner.
- The book depicts sex with new boyfriend. I understand that kids are going to have sex, but they do not need to read about it. It encourages these behaviors. This is not responsible behavior. With child sex trafficking at a high, this puts them at risk because it desensitizes them to it.
- I fail to see how this would help educate our students. It does not align well with the school of character.
- We need a better way of looking at these books before they are let into our libraries. Librarians need to look at the reviews.
- I wish there was a checklist for librarians to look at for books like: is there sex, rape, drinking, etc.
- I would like the book to be removed as it does not enhance our children's education and brings down the character aspect of Rockwood.

Committee's Comments on the Value of This Material

- Challenger mentioned that librarians need to look at the reviews on the book. It was shared that Librarians rely on professional reviews from professionals who would be experts in children and adult literature. With common sense media, as the challenger stated, anybody can write a review whether they have a background or not.
- Questions: Can a parent block a book for their child? Yes. A parent can call and say my child should not read certain books and the librarian will add that to their account.
- I disagree with the review about the deterioration of the American dream. When I finished the book, I thought he was embracing the American dream, and I think that is a value. There were values in accepting all people, and he didn't give up. He has promise and hope in his life.
- Different perspectives from him and his poor family offer a lot. Some of our students are living in families like this. The book gives them a better idea of what is happening in their or others life. I think it gives a good perspective on that. It was not brought up a lot, but he had a sibling with a disability and this shows the things he dealt with. That he helped care for this sibling and the strains it put on the family.
- The word that comes to mind is intersectionality. The diversity is not just LBGTO, and not just hispanic, not just poor and low income. It's all those things and the intersection of all of those problems. A lot of books are not yet focusing on this, and I think that it is still coming into its own light.
- I feel like even though there was a lot going on in his life, there was always hope. No matter how dire his situation was, he still pushed through. This is important for kids to see.
- When I was teaching, I liked to highlight passages that had a commentary on other things. There were so many in this book. If I was teaching this book, which I am not, the things that I could highlight would be poverty and racism and so many others throughout the book. I could verbalize where kids could understand. I didn't see where it talked about underage drinking as the challenger stated. He was 22.
- I agree, underage drinking is not in the book. Drinking and driving opens up the talking point and kids can talk with their parents. They could discuss consequences. It opens up the door to talk about tougher topics that are in the book.
- Great coming of age story. He didn't know where he wanted to go. That point of view is important for kids to realize that it is an ongoing search.
- He had a blue collar job, and this book emphasized that is ok. He worked with his body which was very satisfying. It showed that you do not have to keep up with the Jones' or that physical work was "less than" other types of work.
- The main character tried to do the best that he could.
- This was more of a modern story through different scenarios. He did not know what he wanted; he

encountered a lot of phonies in his life, but there was this realization and it became an epiphany and a resolution where he could find himself. There was an actual resolution to the story. Unlike *The Catcher in the Rye*, where there was no end. He found his way out of the poverty he was subjected to.

- Challenger said it promoted alcohol, profanity and sex, but I think it is realistic fiction. The language and content is what kids talk about. The situations are real whether people like it or not. These situations exist. Realistic fiction is what motivates kids to read. This is the largest section in our libraries. People can understand what they are going through. It was beautifully written and hilarious and would challenge readers. Good book if a kid wanted to push themselves a little further. Looking at the drinking, if you think this is the way out, then it's not a problem with the book, but maybe the person. The purpose of the drinking and looking negatively on their life. This was very purposeful and this is how we teach kids. Just going through a book to catch profanity, sexual content, etc., is not really reading the book. I think some parents are more overshadowed by the language and are not seeing the real purpose of the book.
- I agree. This book was very inspiring, and I could think of a couple of students who could find themselves in this type of situation and could help them face and overcome it. The challenger said it was banned and not being sold on Ebay, but it is listed on Ebay. I'm not sure where she got this information from. As far as the inappropriate sex between two fourth graders. I understand her issue with how often it came up, but it reflects Mike's situation and how it affected his life going further. It helped him work through it, and that's why it kept coming up. When this happens, it stays with the kid and the book shows them how to work through it. The book portrayed that realistically.

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.