

# Committee for the Reconsideration of Library Materials

January 20, 2023

- Section I: Conclusion Report..... 2
  - Committee Members..... 2
  - Structure and Process of Committee..... 2
  - Selection Process for Library Books in High Schools ..... 2
  - Policies for Reconsideration ..... 3
  - Reconsideration Timeline ..... 4
  - Complainant..... 4
  - Conclusion of Committee ..... 5
- Section II: Library Book Review..... 5
  - Book Overview ..... 5
  - Noteworthy Reviews..... 6
  - Learning Connections ..... 8
  - Relevant Tennessee Law..... 9
  - Relevant U.S. Supreme Court Cases ..... 9

## Section I: Conclusion Report

### Committee Members

Laurette Carle, Executive Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Donna Clements, WCS (Williamson County Schools) Board of Education member appointed by Board Chair

Brigid Day, WCEA (Williamson County Education Association) representative, appointed by WCEA President

Allison Fisher, WCS high school level principal

Abby Peterson, parent organization leader at school involved

### Structure and Process of Committee

The reconsideration committee was established by Superintendent Jason Golden on November 7, 2022, per prior Board Policy 4.403 Library Materials. Books were purchased and provided to each of the five members so they could read the book in its entirety before the first in-person meeting. There were five meetings for the committee. Each member spent an average of approximately 30 hours on this reconsideration including reading, meeting together, researching, and considering. Only the teacher member of the committee received compensation for this work. Others added it to existing professional and personal time and responsibilities.

- A kickoff meeting was held virtually for introductions and a brief review of the Policy and task before us. After this meeting, all members were provided with copies of the Board Policy and the Request for Reconsideration submitted by the complainant.
- The second meeting was to receive legal guidance from WCS General Counsel Dana Ausbrooks and then discuss the concerns raised by the complainant about the book to surface questions the committee needed answered by either the complainant or other parties to inform our decision.
- A third meeting was the official hearing for the complainant to help the committee fully understand the request.
- A fourth meeting was held to judge the material for its strengths and values and the objectionable content raised by the complainant. During this meeting, we had a lot of discussions but did not reach consensus, so we decided to meet again after the Winter Break.
- A fifth meeting was held to reach a recommendation by majority vote and review wording in this report. Each member reviewed a draft of the committee summary and used their own notes to offer input on collaborative edits on a template started by the chair prior to the meeting.
- A sixth meeting was held via Zoom to approve final editorial edits.

### Selection Process for Library Books in High Schools

School libraries exist to provide all students with a quality education that supports their intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development. Library Media Specialists in Williamson County Schools have been guided by local Board Policy 4.402 (deleted October 2022 during revisions and merging of policies) which for many years included the following considerations for all collections:

1. To provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum and personal needs of the students, taking into consideration their varied interests, abilities, and learning styles;
2. To provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards;
3. To provide a background of information which will enable pupils to make intelligent judgments in their daily lives;
4. To provide materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that students may develop, under guidance, the practice of critical analysis;
5. To provide materials which realistically represent our pluralistic society and reflect the contributions made by these groups and individuals to our American heritage; and
6. To place principles above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive media collection appropriate for the users.

Library Media Specialists also consider the school curriculum, staff requests, student/parent suggestions, community demographics, peer-reviewed journals, national and regional award winners, and the balance within a collection. An informal book selection team seeks out reviews from professional journals, especially noting those materials with starred reviews and noting the age of the recommended audience. They utilize respected sources of book jobbers such as Follett, PermaBound, Bound-to-Stay-Bound, and the Junior Library Guild. The librarian works within the site level budget to select and purchase books from a jobber with approval from the school principal. The books then enter the collection for circulation. Books that no longer meet the school's needs are removed from the collection when they are no longer relevant, current, of interest to students or in poor condition.

Librarians include books with varied content because those books can provide a safe format for parents to converse with their student about sensitive issues and because books can allow students to vicariously experience situations and prepare them for navigating their own future.

Students and parents are encouraged to discuss family standards in book selection so that the student can practice voluntary inquiry selecting a book for reading enjoyment and learning.

### [Policies and State Law for Reconsideration](#)

Because this reconsideration request was initiated at the school level before a new Board Policy went into effect on October 24, 2022, the committee followed the structure and procedure of the previous Board Policy 4.403 (Library Materials, last revised 04/16/2019) for composition of the committee. However, with the passage of the Age-Appropriate Materials Act of 2022 in Public Chapter 744 (codified in TCA 49-6-3803), the committee was charged with making a *recommendation* to the principal and to the superintendent and School Board instead of presenting a *decision* to the school principal, complainant, affected school employees, and Superintendent of Schools. That step aligns with the new Board Policy 4.403 for Library Materials (issued 10/24/2022) and state law. The Age-Appropriate Instructional Materials Act of 2022 charges districts to ensure that materials are both age-appropriate and aligned with the mission of the school.

## Reconsideration Timeline

Date	Action
October 18, 2022	Reconsideration forms from complainant turned in to Assistant Superintendent of Teaching, Learning and Assessment
October 19, 2022	School principal and librarian met with the complainant to discuss concerns about the book and request for removal of the book from library
October 22, 2022	WCS School Board revised Policy 4.403
October 31, 2022	School emailed complainant about their decision to keep the book in the library; complainant decided to move forward with reconsideration at the district level
November 7, 2022	Ad hoc Reconsideration Committee established, and Committee Chair appointed by Superintendent
November 11, 2022	Committee Chair emailed committee members about coordination for getting book to them and inviting them to a kickoff Zoom meeting
November 16, 2022	Held Committee kickoff introductory meeting via Zoom and later via phone for those who could not attend at arranged time
December 5, 2022	Met for legal guidance from WCS General Counsel and to surface questions for both the hearing and the committee discussion
December 13, 2022	Held hearing to listen to concerns of complainant and ask clarifying questions
December 15, 2022	Met for discussion and worked toward consensus recommendation
January 9, 2023	Met to reach recommendation and edit draft summary report
January 19, 2023	Met virtually for confirmations agreeing to final language and edits for recommendation report
January 20, 2023	Submitted final recommendation and conclusion report to Board Chair and Superintendent for consideration to put on next appropriate School Board meeting agenda

### Complainant

The complainant met with the principal and librarian of the high school in mid-October before deciding to formally submit the reconsideration request on October 31, 2022. The complainant is a concerned community member who is neither a WCS staff member nor a parent of an enrolled student. The complainant was provided with a one-hour hearing with the committee on December 13, 2022, during which all concerns were shared and heard by the committee members. The committee learned that the complainant first became concerned with *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer upon receiving a list of 44 books from a citizens group based in Florida who had flagged certain pages of each book on their own template to ask for reconsideration of books in Florida. The complainant used that group's template to summarize concerns about this book. The pages of the book were 42, 84, 127, 145, 177, and 275. The complainant had not read the book in its entirety.

## Conclusion of Committee

Even though we did not receive the guidance expected from the Tennessee Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission on how to determine the “level” of objectionable content or age appropriateness of materials that might dictate the removal of a book from the library per state law and recognizing the professional duties and expertise of our school librarians and procedures in place for parent communication regarding student library use, the committee recommendation is that the book *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer remain in our high school library. The committee unanimously recommends the book remain in the high school library; however, we have conflicting recommendations about availability. Four committee members recommend it remain available for all high school students while one committee member recommends it only be available to students ages 16 and older.

## Section II: Library Book Review

### Book Overview

The reconsideration request asked for the removal of the book *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005) from the Franklin High School library. The book has been in circulation at Franklin High School for 8 years. It has also been in 3 other high school libraries, but no libraries at the middle or elementary levels. There have been no complaints from students or the families of students who have checked out the book.

Summary of the book (from the publisher):

Nine-year-old Oskar Schell has embarked on an urgent, secret mission that will take him through the five boroughs of New York. His goal is to find the lock that matches a mysterious key that belonged to his father, who died in the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11.

This seemingly impossible task will bring Oskar into contact with survivors of all sorts on an exhilarating, affecting, often hilarious, and ultimately healing journey.

Jonathan Safran Foer emerged as one of the most original writers of his generation with his best-selling debut novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*. Now, with humor, tenderness, and awe, he confronts the traumas of our recent history.

Strength and value of the book (from the ad hoc committee):

The committee experienced the book as a beautifully written, powerful story with strong character development and unique literary devices. The multigenerational story is challenging and rigorous for readers and is one of the only historical fiction books available related to the personal impact of September 11, 2001. It depicts both internal and external conflicts very well. The mystery portion of the plot is engaging while the ultimate message is that love and connection with others is critical for overcoming incredible sadness and grief after tragedy.

The book does contain a few pages with profanity and mature content of a sexual nature. If read in isolation, these few passages may raise questions for some. When taken in context within the entire work, they do not outweigh the opportunity and option for some high school students to experience the book’s inherent strength and value. The committee does not see the six quoted pages as evidence that the book is pervasively vulgar. Four committee members determined it is

age-appropriate for high school students. One committee member determined it is age-appropriate for students ages 16 and older.

## Noteworthy Reviews

*Booklist* (February 1, 2005 (Vol. 101, No. 11))

This follow-up to Foer's extremely good and incredibly successful *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) stars one Oskar Schell, a nine-year-old amateur inventor and Shakespearean actor. But Oskar's boots, as he likes to say, are very heavy--his father, whom he worshiped, perished in the World Trade Center on 9/11. In his dad's closet a year later, Oskar finds a key in a vase mysteriously labeled "Black." So he goes searching after the lock it opens, visiting (alphabetically) everyone listed in the phone book with the surname Black. Oskar, who's a cross between *The Tin Drum*'s Oskar Matzerath and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*'s Christopher Boone, doesn't always sound like he's nine, but his first-person narration of his journey is arrestingly beautiful, and readers won't soon forget him. A subplot about Oskar's mute grandfather, who survived the bombing of Dresden, isn't as compelling as Oskar's quest for the lock, but when the stories finally come together, the result is an emotionally devastating climax. No spoilers here, but we will say that the book--which includes a number of photographs and some eccentric typography--ends with what is undoubtedly the most beautiful and heartbreaking flip book in all of literature.

*Kirkus Reviews* starred (January 1, 2005)

The search for the lock that fits a mysterious key dovetails with related and parallel quests in this (literally) beautifully designed second from the gifted young author (*Everything Is Illuminated*, 2002).

The searcher is nine-year-old Oskar Schell, an inventive prodigy who (albeit modeled on the protagonist of Grass's *The Tin Drum*) employs his considerable intellect with refreshing originality in the aftermath of his father Thomas's death following the bombing of the World Trade Center. That key, unidentified except for the word "black" on the envelope containing it, impels Oskar to seek out every New Yorker bearing the surname Black, involving him with a reclusive centenarian former war correspondent, and eventually the nameless elderly recluse who rents a room in his paternal grandma's nearby apartment. Meanwhile, unmailed letters from a likewise unidentified "Thomas" reveal their author's loneliness and guilt, while stretching backward to wartime Germany and a horrific precursor of the 9/11 atrocity: the firebombing of Dresden. In a riveting narrative animated both by Oskar's ingenuous assumption of adult responsibility and understanding (interestingly, he's "playing Yorick" in a school production of *Hamlet*) and the letter-writer's meaningful silences, Foer sprinkles his tricky text with interpolated illustrations that render both objects of Oskar's many interests and the word and memories of a survivor who has forsworn speech, determined to avoid the pain of loving too deeply. The story climaxes as Oskar discovers what the key fits, and also the meaning of his life (all our lives, actually), in a long-awaited letter from astrophysicist Stephen Hawking.

Much more is revealed as this brilliant fiction works thrilling variations on, and consolations for, its plangent message: that "in the end, everyone loses everyone." Yes, but look what Foer has found.

*Library Journal (June 1, 2011)*

In this tender novel, nine-year-old Oskar scours New York City searching for a lock that will fit a key belonging to his father, who died in the Twin Towers. (LJ 3/1/05) (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

*Publishers Weekly (January 31, 2005)*

Oskar Schell, hero of this brilliant follow-up to Foer's bestselling *Everything Is Illuminated*, is a nine-year-old amateur inventor, jewelry designer, astrophysicist, tambourine player and pacifist. Like the second-language narrator of *Illuminated*, Oskar turns his naively precocious vocabulary to the understanding of historical tragedy, as he searches New York for the lock that matches a mysterious key left by his father when he was killed in the September 11 attacks, a quest that intertwines with the story of his grandparents, whose lives were blighted by the firebombing of Dresden. Foer embellishes the narrative with evocative graphics, including photographs, colored highlights and passages of illegibly overwritten text, and takes his unique flair for the poetry of miscommunication to occasionally gimmicky lengths, like a two-page soliloquy written entirely in numerical code. Although not quite the comic tour de force that *Illuminated* was, the novel is replete with hilarious and appalling passages, as when, during show-and-tell, Oskar plays a harrowing recording by a Hiroshima survivor and then launches into a Poiindexterish disquisition on the bomb's "charring effect." It's more of a challenge to play in the same way with the very recent collapse of the towers, but Foer gambles on the power of his protagonist's voice to transform the cataclysm from raw current event to a tragedy at once visceral and mythical. Unafraid to show his traumatized characters' constant groping for emotional catharsis, Foer demonstrates once again that he is one of the few contemporary writers willing to risk sentimentalism in order to address great questions of truth, love and beauty. Agent, Nicole Aragi. 11-city author tour; foreign rights sold in 12 countries. (Apr. 4) Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

*School Library Journal (July 1, 2005)*

Adult/High School-Oskar Schell is not your average nine-year-old. A budding inventor, he spends his time imagining wonderful creations. He also collects random photographs for his scrapbook and sends letters to scientists. When his father dies in the World Trade Center collapse, Oskar shifts his boundless energy to a quest for answers. He finds a key hidden in his father's things that doesn't fit any lock in their New York City apartment; its container is labeled "Black." Using flawless kid logic, Oskar sets out to speak to everyone in New York City with the last name of Black. A retired journalist who keeps a card catalog with entries for everyone he's ever met is just one of the colorful characters the boy meets. As in *Everything Is Illuminated* (Houghton, 2002), Foer takes a dark subject and works in offbeat humor with puns and wordplay. But *Extremely Loud* pushes further with the inclusion of photographs, illustrations, and mild experiments in typography reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (Dell, 1973). The humor works as a deceptive, glitzy cover for a fairly serious tale about loss and recovery. For balance, Foer includes the subplot of Oskar's grandfather, who survived the World War II bombing of Dresden. Although this story is not quite as evocative as Oskar's, it does carry forward and connect firmly to the rest of the novel. The two stories finally intersect in a powerful conclusion that will make even the most jaded hearts fall. -Matthew L. Moffett, Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

### *School Library Journal's Adult Books for High School Students: 2005*

School Library Journal editors appoint a group of professionals working with teens in library settings to review and select a list of exceptional adult level books to recommend to high school students. The list usually includes both fiction and non-fiction books. The *School Library Journal's Adult Books 4 Teens* list was tracked through NovelList Lists through 2018. Jonathan Foer's book *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* was added to the list in 2005 and 2006.

#### *Reviews & Awards*

- Booklist, 02/01/05
- Kirkus Reviews starred, 01/01/05
- Library Journal starred, 03/01/05
- Publishers Weekly starred, 01/31/05
- School Library Journal, 07/01/05
- Teacher Librarian, 10/01/09
- Wilson's Fiction, 10/01/10
- Wilson's Senior High School Core Collection\*, 10/01/07
- Wilson's Senior High School Core Collection\*, 10/01/11\*\*

\*H.W. Wilson's Senior High Core Collection (23rd Edition) identifies essential material available for high school libraries and young adult collections. It is a helpful guide to over 4,500 recommended fiction and nonfiction titles for adolescents and young adults, grade nine through twelve.

Librarians have relied on the expert recommendations in Senior High Core Collection for years for collection development guidance. It is an ideal tool for Purchasing & Title Selection, Readers' Advisory, Curriculum Support, Collection Development & Maintenance and Professional Development.

\*\* Taken from another format.

### Learning Connections

This library book is not being used in classrooms for instruction in WCS curriculum. It is on a College Board resource list as a choice for AP English Literature. It does connect with certain topics in the high school curriculum, including but not limited to:

- U.S. History Standard US.92 includes the impact of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks
- U.S. History Standard US.47 includes analyzing the response of the U.S. to the plight of European Jews before the start of the war, the U.S. liberation of concentration camps during the war, and the immigration of Holocaust survivors after the war.
- English I, Unit I: American Voices Essential Question: What does it mean to be American?



- English III, Unit 5: Facing our Fears Essential Question: Victims and Victors: How do we respond when challenged by fear?

#### Relevant Tennessee Law

- TCA § 49-6-3803 Materials Review for Age-Appropriate Instructional Materials Act of 2022

#### Relevant U.S. Supreme Court Cases

- Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503, 89 S.Ct. 733, 21 L.Ed.2d 731 (1969).
- Abrams v. United States, 250 U.S. 616, 40 S.Ct. 17, 63 L.Ed. 1173 (1919)
- Brown v. Louisiana, 383 U.S. 131, 86 S.Ct. 719, 15 L.Ed.2d 637 (1966)
- Bd. of Educ. v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)
- Miller v. State of California, 413 U.S. 15 (1973)