

Committee for the Reconsideration of Instructional Materials

Section I: Conclusion Report

Committee Members

Willie Dickerson, Executive Director of Secondary Education, Chair of Committee

Sarah Jones, PTO Representative

Brian Bass, WCS Secondary School Principal

Jay Galbreath, WCS School Board member

Melissa Ralston, WCEA Representative

Structure and Process of the Committee

The reconsideration committee was established by Superintendent Jason Golden in October 2022. At that point, each committee member was given the five books named in the complaint to read. Each individual committee member read the text through the lens established in the Board Policy—specifically if the text supports the curriculum, if the text has strength and value, and if the text has objectionable content.

The committee met on October 28, 2022 by Zoom to determine future meeting dates and the structure of our meetings. Following the meeting, the committee was sent a copy of the complaint that was filed with the attachments: Board policy 4.403, revised Board policy 4.403, Board policy 4.401, SOP 4.403, and the rubric for reconsideration committee. Included in the email was a list of agreed meeting dates. The committee decided to meet on November 10, November 14, December 1, and December 6 all at 3:00 p.m., December 9 at 10:00 a.m. and January 4 at 3:00p.m. We agreed to discuss Speak, Where the Crawdads Sing, and The Perks of Being a Wallflower on November 10. We agreed to have these read by November 7. Our deadline for reading Every Last Word and The Field Guide to The North American Teenager was December 1.

The complaint received from the complainant was twofold. First, there was an objection to these five books being used as a part of the curriculum. Second, there was an objection to four books being a part of the library collections that students may select to read.

Due to changes in Board policy 4.403 and related state policy, the committee asked for the guidance of the legal department as to which policy we should use to guide our work. Legal met with the committee during the Nov. 10th meeting and again during our December 1st meeting. It was determined that the committee should use policy 4.403 because it was the existing policy when the complaint was received. The State Textbook committee met at the end of November to give guidance to school districts on library books. That and two subsequent meetings were postponed, and no guidance has been received to date.

Per policy 4.403, the committee met on December 6th with the complainant to hear his concerns about these books. The committee also met with the school's 10th-grade ELA curriculum team responsible for planning this assignment and selecting the books which gave students choice in the selection of an optional text. In addition to hearing from the complainant and teachers, the committee consulted with a

variety of resources which included: recognized evaluative reviews of the books from several sources, librarians in WCS, and the Secondary HS ELA curriculum specialist, who also attended several of the committee meetings.

The committee met for approximately **18+ hours in face-to-face or Zoom meetings** to complete the work. This time does not include the individual reading of the 5 books, nor does it include the compilation of the findings into the Conclusion Report.

Assignment

Lit Circle Assignment for English II, Unit 2–Ravenwood High School

Unit 2 of the SAVVAS textbook explores the topic of social isolation. Through various fiction and nonfiction texts, students will aim to answer the essential question, “Do people need to belong?”. Students will have the opportunity to dive deeper into the topic of “outsiders and outcasts” by reading an independent novel accompanying the whole-class anchor text, “The Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka. During this unit, students will participate in Literature Circles which will allow them to have a common reading experience with their peers, practice communication and presentation skills.

Lit Circle groups will complete three assignments for their chosen books followed by a culminating presentation and whole class Socratic Seminar that connects the themes of the lit circle novel with the unit anchor text and supplementary texts from the SAVVAS textbook. Each group completes a series of assignments for their novel that deal with identifying direct and indirect characterization of the protagonists and antagonists, examining the effect of literary devices, and analyzing possible themes. The culminating presentation will include these elements in addition to an objective summary and a book review with pros, cons, and critical summary.

For the culminating whole-class Socratic seminar, students will connect unit texts to personal experiences, real-world events, and/or other media they have consumed to delve deeper into the unit essential questions. Students will develop 4 thought-provoking discussion questions and answers. The answer to each question must require a thorough analytical response and must include at least one piece of evidence (with an in-text citation). One piece of evidence must come from the article “Revenge of the Geeks”, one piece of evidence must come from any other text read in Unit 2, and two pieces of evidence must come from the literature circle book.

ELA Standards Covered by this Unit

9-10.RL.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; cite the strongest, most compelling textual evidence to support conclusions.

9-10.RL.KID.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development; provide an objective or critical summary.

9-10.RL.KID.3 Analyze how complex characters, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text to impact meaning.

9-10.RL.CS.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, such as how language evokes a sense of time and place...

9-10.RL.CS.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning text structure, plot structure, and/or time manipulation create effects such as mystery, tension, or surprise.

9-10.RL.CS.6 Analyze how point of view and/or author purpose shapes the content and style of diverse texts.

9-10.RL.IKI.9 Analyze a variety of related literary texts and evaluate how an author draws on, alludes to, or transforms source material to provide a deeper ... interpretation of the text.

9-10.RI.KID.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development; provide an objective or critical summary.

9-10.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author presents and develops key ideas and events to impact meaning.

9-10.RI.CS.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices...

9-10.RI.CS.5 Analyze how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.

Key to understanding Section II



BOOK TITLE: **EXAMPLE**

__ *The title of the text being referenced.*

Does the text...

...support the curriculum?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have strength and value?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have objectionable content?	Yes	No	Potentially, use with adjustments



The yellow highlighted word is the answer to the question in column one.

These are the questions the reconsideration committee answered per policy 4.403.



Conclusion of the Committee:

The text is recommended to be used. This is the final recommendation.

The text is recommended to be removed from use.

The text is recommended to use with the following instructional adjustments

Section II: Book Reviews

BOOK TITLE: Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

Does the text...

...support the curriculum?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have strength and value?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have objectionable content?	Yes	No	Potentially, use with adjustments

Conclusion of the Committee:

X The text is recommended to be used (As an option with other books to choose from with a disclaimer that it includes objectionable content).

_____ The text is recommended to be removed from use.

_____ The text is recommended to use with the following instructional adjustments

BOOK TITLE: Speak

Concern(s) expressed by complainant:

- Use of sexually explicit scenes.
- Use of profanity.
- Use of drugs/alcohol is beyond reasonable for choosing these books.
- Included review from booklooks.org

Conclusion of the Committee:

The committee had the following concerns and comments:

- Deals with heavy topic (sexual assault). Should give heads up to students and parents. Provides opportunity for parents to have conversation with their students.
- Doesn't glorify rape or drinking.
- Tells story of what can happen when you tell parents you are somewhere you are not. Have three beers and what can happen.
- This is not a required reading book but can be an option.

The committee finds there is value in the use of this book as a book of choice for an optional assignment. Teachers will give more details in their prior communication to parents while using the district's SOP.

Noteworthy accomplishments:

- Printz Honor Book, 2000
- Best Books for YA, 2000
- Golden Kite Award, 2000

BOOK TITLE: The Field guide to the North American Teenager by Ben Philippe

Does the text...

...support the curriculum?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have strength and value?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have objectionable content?	Yes	No	Potentially, use with adjustments

Conclusion of the Committee:

X The text is recommended to be used (As an option with other books to choose from with a disclaimer that it includes objectionable content.)

_____ The text is recommended to be removed from use.

_____ The text is recommended to use with the following instructional adjustments

BOOK TITLE: The Field guide to the North American Teenager

Concern(s) expressed by complainant:

- Use of sexually explicit scenes.
- Use of profanity.
- Use of drugs/alcohol is beyond reasonable for choosing these books.
- Included review from Common Sense Media

Conclusion of the Committee:

The committee had the following concerns and comments:

- The protagonist feels he is a misfit/outsider which is the theme of the 10th grade 2nd 9 weeks unit.
- The protagonist is a minority whose parents are divorced black immigrants from Haiti. The boy and his mother move from bilingual Montreal, Canada to Texas and has to adjust to the new culture
- The book captures insights from the minority perspective. For example, the protagonist's mother expresses outrage her son was disrespectful to the police because she was in fear of his safety.
- The book addresses bullying, and stereotyping immigrants and another character had a mental breakdown and tried to commit suicide but had sought therapy and was doing better. These characters learn to look past their stereotypes and come together as a hockey team.
- Another character is from India and had to deal with her parents' academic pressures for her to achieve academically and go on to college when she wanted to pursue photography
- However, the book is very colloquial and casual in style and seemed more like recreational reading.
- Profanity is used pervasively throughout the book in an intentional effort to capture the modern teenage voice. The "f word" is used multiple times, including a time when the protagonist yells "Jesus f____, dude, congrats!"
- The book has sexual language and content but it is not explicit or graphic: Ex: "Shouldn't you be going down on Ian?...What are you going to blow my boyfriend, next".
- Teachers stated that students said that the use of profanity in the book is more than is used in high school. Also, it was not needed to make the point.
- Teachers reported that several minority students resonated with this book because they identified with the protagonist which is something that rarely happens with school assignments.

The committee finds there is value in the use of this book as a book of choice for an optional assignment. Teachers will give more details in their prior communication to parents while using the district's SOP.

Noteworthy accomplishments:

– Best Fiction for YA, 2020

BOOK TITLE: Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens

Does the text...

...support the curriculum?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have strength and value?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have objectionable content?	Yes	No	Potentially, use with adjustments

Conclusion of the Committee:

X The text is recommended to remain an option for Senior English as one of the many books offered to students by teachers as optional reading to supplement the ELA adopted curriculum.

_____ The text is recommended to be removed from use.

_____ The text is recommended to use with the following instructional adjustments

BOOK TITLE: Where the Crawdads Sing

Concern(s) expressed by complainant:

- Use of sexually explicit scenes.
- Use of profanity.
- Use of drugs/alcohol is beyond reasonable for choosing these books.
- Included review from geeksundergrace.com

Conclusion of the Committee:

The committee had the following concerns and comments:

- Most reviews acknowledge that this book is intended for an adult audience (not young adults).
- There are many opportunities for teachable moments, both for parents and teachers, on the topics of how to handle sexual assault and recognize victim grooming tactics.
- The book could lead to constructive conversations about regrets, trust in relationships, and emotional and physical consequences.
- The book captures the instructional unit's theme of "Outsiders and Outcasts" exceptionally well.
- The book is beautifully written, including descriptive, figurative, and nuanced language and use of metaphors.
- The characters are strong and make both good and bad choices.
- Movie rating systems are very clear about what content and the volume of certain types of content is allowed within each rating level. We do not have the benefit of such a clear rating system with books.
- Some passages contain sexual content. There are a couple of detailed sex scenes that are not gratuitous and drive plot points.
- The book describes reasonable emotional and physical consequences of engaging in premarital sex.
- There are significant scientific tie-ins related to nature, conservation, and ecosystems.
- This is one of a few books a parent and a student may have both read, thereby fostering a home-school connection.
- This is a commercially successful book. There are other books that would satisfy the requirements of the curriculum and be considered to have more literary value.
- The teachers who developed the list of book options clearly offered a variety of books to appeal to a wide range of students.
- In adhering to the WCBoE SOP, teachers should include brief yet thorough disclaimers of objectionable content (for this book, that may include sexual assault, domestic abuse, profanity, graphic sexual situations, abandonment, alcohol abuse, and implied violence) and offer specific passages upon a parent's request.

The committee finds there is value in the use of this book as a book of choice for an optional assignment for students in the 12th grade. Teachers will give more details in their prior communication to parents while using the district's SOP.

Noteworthy accomplishments:

- Goodreads Choice – Best Historical Fiction, 2018
- Edgar Award Best First Novel by American Author, 2019

BOOK TITLE: Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

Does the text...

...support the curriculum?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have strength and value?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have objectionable content?	Yes	No	Potentially, use with adjustments

Conclusion of the Committee:

The text is recommended to be used.

The text is recommended to be removed from use as required or optional use.

The text is recommended to use with the following instructional adjustments

BOOK TITLE: Perks of Being a Wallflower

Concern(s) expressed by complainant:

- Use of sexually explicit scenes.
- Use of profanity.
- Use of drugs/alcohol is beyond reasonable for choosing these books.
- Included review from booklooks.org

Conclusion of the Committee:

The committee had the following concerns and comments:

- While it does have strength and value, there is so much objectionable content it takes away from the strength and value.
- Sends the message that the character's behavior and choices (drug/alcohol use, consensual and non-consensual sexual experiences) are the typical teenage experience.
- Includes sexually explicit content that would be inappropriate for class discussion or assignments.

The committee finds there is **not** adequate value in the use of this book as an instructional material or used for instructional purpose.

Noteworthy accomplishments:

- Best Books for YA, 2000

BOOK TITLE: Every Last Word by Tamara Ireland Stone

Does the text...

...support the curriculum?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have strength and value?	Yes	No	Yes, use with recommended adjustments
...have objectionable content?	Yes	No	Potentially, use with adjustments

Conclusion of the Committee:

X The text is recommended to be used (As an option with other books to choose from with a disclaimer that it includes objectionable content.)

_____ The text is recommended to be removed from use.

_____ The text is recommended to use with the following instructional adjustments

BOOK TITLE: Every Last Word

Concern(s) expressed by complainant:

- Use of sexually explicit scenes.
- Use of profanity.
- Use of drugs/alcohol is beyond reasonable for choosing these books.
- Included review from Common Sense Media

Conclusion of the Committee:

The committee had the following concerns and comments:

- Accurately reflects outsider/outcast.
- Mental health is growing portion of our society.
- Consensual “first time”, detailed but not graphic.
- Kissing and making out: In pool, bed, and car.
- Very little inappropriate language (136, 297).
- Author made accurate reflection of Obsessional OCD based on personal experience.
- Book was pro-therapy and didn’t serve to create stigma for mental health.
- Manifestations of imaginary girl-trauma/coping mechanism.

The committee finds there is value in the use of this book as a book of choice for an optional assignment. Teachers will give more details in their prior communication to parents while using the district’s SOP.

Noteworthy accomplishments:

- Children’s and Young Adult Book Lovers’ Literary Award, 2015