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Principal Lee Kolker
Hempstead High School
3715 Pennsylvania Ave.
Dubuque, IA 52002

By electronic mail: lkolker@dbqschools.org

November 28, 2016

Dear Principal Kolker and the members of the Review Committee,

As organizations dedicated to protecting the freedom to read, we write to highlight important issues that the Committee should consider when determining whether Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* should be removed from the curriculum at Hempstead High School. It is our understanding that some parents have recently objected to the book based on its inclusion of "graphic sex scenes" and descriptions of teenage drug use. We hope that the Committee keeps our considerations in mind when determining the fate of the book.

Pursuant to Dubuque Community Schools' Policy 6226, the "sole criterion" for the committee's final decision "is the appropriateness of the materials for its [sic] intended educational use." *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has been praised by educators and readers for its literary merit and ability to resonate with teenagers. *School Library Journal*, which recommends the novel for grades nine and up, praises the book's ability to "engage teen readers." Amazon lauds the "touching, memorable novel [and] the resounding accuracy with which the author captures the voice of a body teetering on the brink of adulthood." *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list and has been published in thirteen languages.

The book explores numerous themes that are relevant to teenagers: love, bullying, depression, social isolation, and the stress of applying to college. Students who read it will gain the opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions that may help them understand and grapple with similar problems in their personal lives. All this makes *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* fully appropriate for educational use in high school.

The mere presence of "graphic sex scenes" does not in itself render a book "inappropriate" and is no justification for seeking to deny high schoolers access to a book. Countless great works of literature, including some of Shakespeare's plays, contain descriptions of sexual activity that some parents may consider "graphic." Therefore, any school district that excludes books with references to sexuality will fail to introduce students to a broad range of canonical literature and will put them at a disadvantage relative to their peers.

Removing the book from the classroom in response to a few complaints, especially when an alternative text can be offered instead, privileges the concerns of a small group of vociferous complainants over those of parents who want their children to read the book. As courts have observed, no parent has the right “to tell a public school what his or her child will or will not be taught” *Blau v. Fort Thomas Public School District, et al.* 401 F.3d 381, 395 (6th Cir. 2005). Otherwise, schools would be forced to “cater a curriculum for each student whose parents had genuine moral disagreements with the school’s choice of subject matter” *Brown v. Hot, Sexy and Safer Productions, Inc.* 68 F.3d 525, 534 (1st Cir. 1995).

On a more practical level, removing *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* from the classroom will encourage parents to demand the removal of other books, which will burden district officials and review committees. Worse, it may force teachers to second-guess their selections of reading material and choose books because they are likely to provoke complaints rather than for their educational value and literary merit. The losers here will be, as always, the students.

Decisions about instructional materials should serve all students in Dubuque. This can best be accomplished if these decisions are made on sound educational grounds by educational experts such as teachers and librarians. Policy 6226 affirms this. We hope that the Review Committee will recommend that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* remain in classrooms at Hempstead High School. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can be of any further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Svetlana Mintcheva, Director of Programs
National Coalition Against Censorship




Charles Brownstein, Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



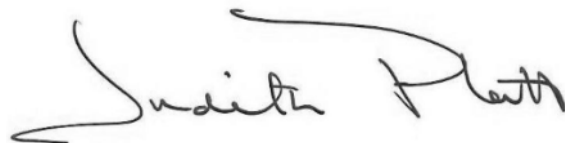
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