



A project of the **National Coalition Against Censorship**

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American Booksellers for Free Expression
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
Association of American Publishers

September 24, 2015

Ravi Gupta
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer
RePublic Schools
3307 Brick Church Pike
Nashville, TN 37207
Via email: info@republiccharterschools.org

Dear Mr. Gupta,

As organizations dedicated to the freedom to read, the integrity of the educational system, and the application of First Amendment principles, we are writing to express concern about the expurgation of passages from David Benioff's *City of Thieves* in Nashville Prep's seventh grade classrooms.

We understand that *City of Thieves* was chosen as required reading for seventh grade students. We support the professional expertise of teachers, who are in the best position to choose books and other instructional materials that are right for their students, but we are deeply concerned that words and passages referring to sex or excrement in the book were excised and replaced. Beyond questions of copyright infringement, expurgating a book is a particularly disturbing form of censorship since it not only suppresses specific content deemed 'objectionable,' but also does violence to the work as a whole by removing material that the author thought integral. It is a kind of literary fraud perpetrated on an unsuspecting audience.

As you know, *City of Thieves* is, for all its gallows humor, a serious book with serious subject matter – the siege of Leningrad, starvation, cannibalism, death, and the coming of age of two teenage boys who must navigate a wartime landscape under incredibly daunting circumstances. If the students at Nashville Prep are ready for this content, they can certainly handle a few "curse words" and references to sex. If, on the other hand, the goal in expurgating passages from the novel was to make the book less controversial for parents, such action backfired. Indeed, expurgating the book can be seen as an open admission that the book is inappropriate for young readers.

Ray Bradbury, in response to numerous calls for redactions of his own work, eloquently condemned such actions: "[D]o not insult me with the beheadings, finger-choppings or the lung deflations you plan for my works. I need my head to shake or nod, my hand to wave or make into a fist, my lungs to shout or whisper with. I will not go gently onto a shelf, degutted, to become a non-book."

David Benioff had a particular message in mind when he wrote his highly regarded novel. Excising any part of the book and altering other portions of it inevitably affects the force and substance of that message. We strongly urge you to discontinue teaching redacted versions of *City of Thieves* and offer it to students as intended in its entirety, or, instead, teach selected unaltered passages from the work. This approach is

consistent with the law and with educational principles and will serve in the interests of both Nashville Prep and its students.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

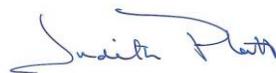
Sincerely,



Joan Bertin, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship



Chris Finan, Director
American Booksellers for Free Expression



Judy Platt, Director
Free Expression Advocacy
Association of American Publishers



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



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