

GRAPHIC ≠ GRAPHIC

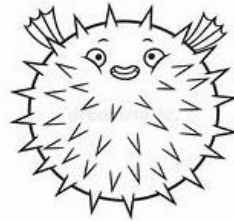
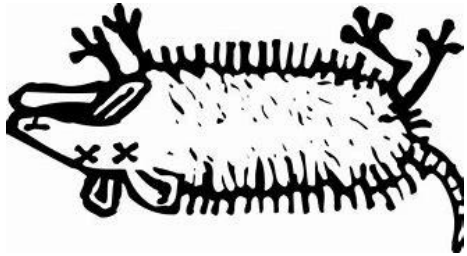
The Softer Side of Censorship

By:

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SELF-PRESERVATION

Self-preservation is defined as “the fundamental tendency of humans and nonhuman animals to behave so as to avoid injury and maximize chances of survival” (American Psychological Association, 2018).



The instinct toward self-preservation, the natural desire to protect oneself, is one of the most direct causes of **soft censorship** in libraries today.



SOFT CENSORSHIP

Soft censorship, which is often interchangeably referred to as self-censorship, is the practice of a library, or library worker, not selecting book titles based on a litany of reasons. These reasons can include but are not limited to the fear of retaliation, potential pressure from publishers, and concerns in determining which titles are age-appropriate (Whelan, 2009).

Soft Censorship is a slippery slope because people would naturally like to believe that they are the exception. While the intentions behind soft censorship are usually good, the outcome is in direct conflict with the intellectual freedom of the community.



INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

“Intellectual freedom as a concept in librarianship means freedom to think or believe what one will, freedom to express one’s thoughts and beliefs in unrestricted manners and means, and freedom to access information and ideas regardless of their content or the viewpoint of the author or the age, background, or beliefs of the receiver” (Dresang, 2006).



SOFT CENSORSHIP VS. INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Soft Censorship

- Avoids Conflict and Outside Repercussions
- Keeps Books on the Shelves
- Limits Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Undermines Intellectual Freedom.



Intellectual Freedom

- Respects Age recommendations
- Allows readers to choose
- Upholds the Right to Read and 1st Amendment Rights
- Includes points of view from every side

TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2023

The American Library Association documented **1,347 attempts to censor** materials and services at libraries, schools, and universities in 2023. Of the **4,246 unique titles** that were challenged or banned in 2023, here are the top 10 most frequently challenged.



1



GENDER QUEER
by Maia Kobabe
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

2



ALL BOYS AREN'T BLUE
by George M. Johnson
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

3



THIS BOOK IS GAY
by Juno Dawson
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, sex education, claimed to be sexually explicit

4



THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER
by Stephen Chbosky
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content, rape, drugs, profanity

5



FLAMER
by Mike Curato
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

6



THE BLUEST EYE
by Toni Morrison
REASONS: rape, incest, claimed to be sexually explicit, GLB content

7/8



HE AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL
by Jesse Andrews
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, profanity



TRICKS
by Ellen Hopkins
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, drugs, rape, LGBTQIA+ content

9



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT
by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, sex education, LGBTQIA+ content

10



SOLD
by Patricia McCormick
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, rape



OFFICE FOR
Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association

The Attack on Graphic Novels and Picture Books

18 percent of public libraries and 10 percent of schools have experienced challenges to graphic-format works (Cockcroft, 2023)

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2 of the top 5 most challenged books of 2023 are **graphic novels** (American Library Association, 2023).

“Comics and graphic novels are prime targets in the current battle to ban books at libraries across the country: the most-banned book in the U.S. was once again Maia Kobabe’s *Gender Queer*, and others, such as Mike Curato’s *Flamer*, Jerry Craft’s *New Kid*, Craig Thompson’s *Blankets*, and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, appear on multiple ban lists.” The article goes on to say, “Librarians have always been aware that comics are vulnerable to censorship. The visual medium can make taboo material literally more visible—and easier to take out of context, as shown by the claims that *Gender Queer* is obscene based on a single panel” (MacDonald, 2023).

WHY IT MATTERS...

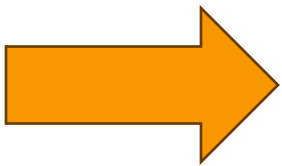
IMAGE ALTERATION AS SOFT CENSORSHIP

Out of fear, many librarians have begun to practice soft censorship by altering the images within picture books and graphic novels in their collections.

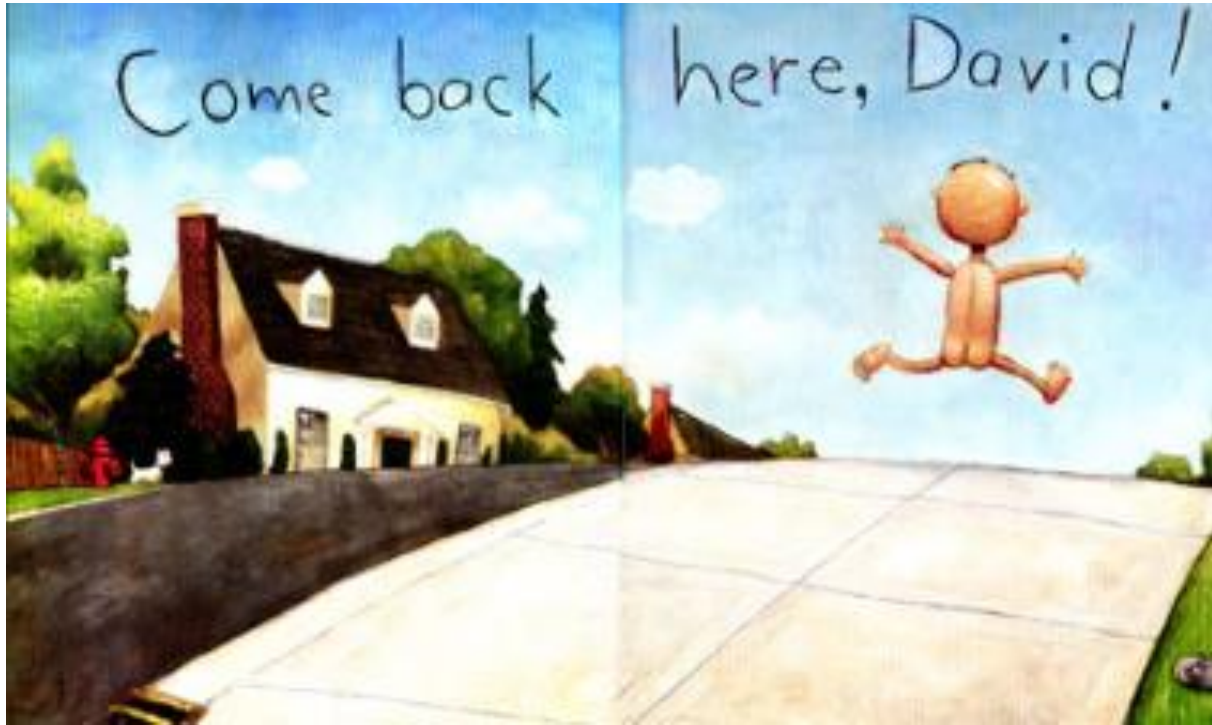
"Every school librarian interviewed for this story agreed that censorship of any kind is wrong. But in states around the country, librarians are choosing between altering illustrations to keep books on shelves or risk losing those books entirely and possibly losing their jobs.

It's easy to criticize those who choose to deface books and alter illustrations. But that's a stance safely taken by those who don't have a state superintendent who claims schools and libraries are choosing to "peddle porn," like Oklahoma state superintendent Ryan Walters routinely does. Or when they don't have to worry about their school receiving a bomb threat after a librarian posts a TikTok saying that her radical agenda is teaching kids to love books and be kind, as happened at a Tulsa, OK, elementary school" (Bauld, 2024)

Samples of image
alteration in libraries
across the country



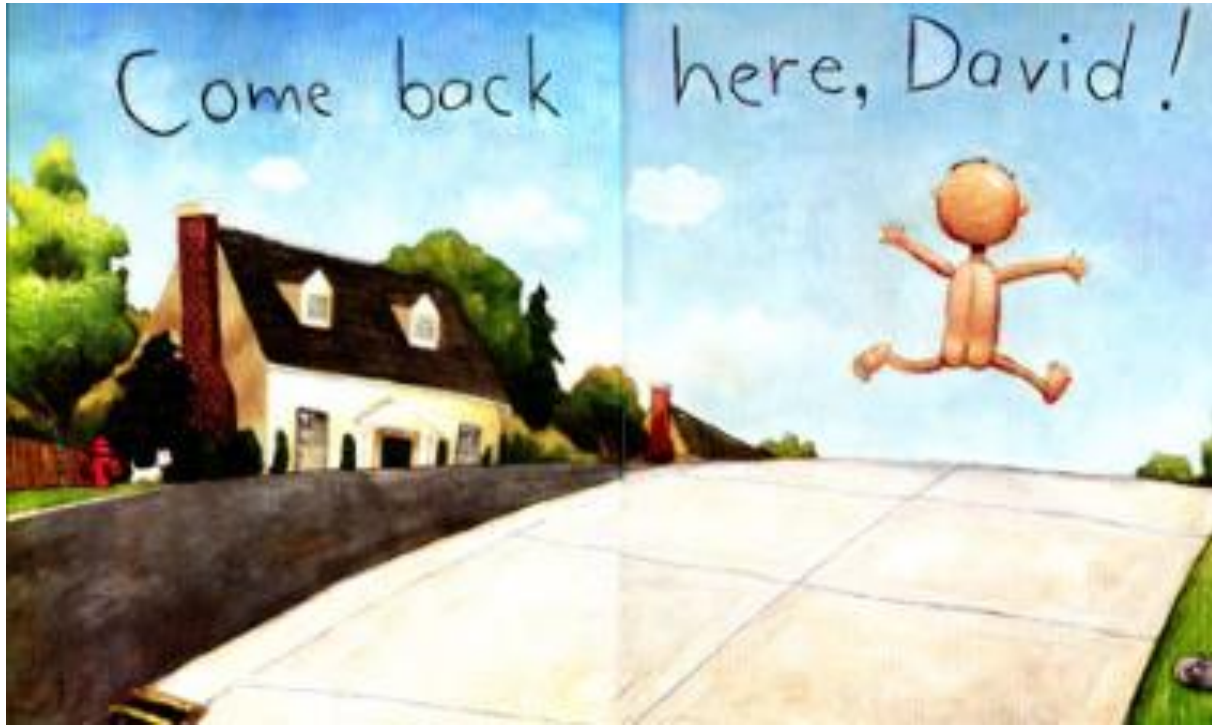
THE IMAGES IN QUESTION?



"Elsewhere in Oklahoma, a library media specialist has taken a black Sharpie to two copies of *No, David!* by David Shannon, drawing shorts to cover up the image of a small boy's bum. It's her tradeoff to keep the book available to students in the face of recent state legislation that prohibits pornographic or sexualized content in school libraries—at the risk of school districts having their accreditation downgraded.

"It's something I'd rather not do, and I know my colleagues would rather not deal with. But it's the reality of what we're facing here in Oklahoma," says the library media specialist, who also requested anonymity" (Bauld, 2024)

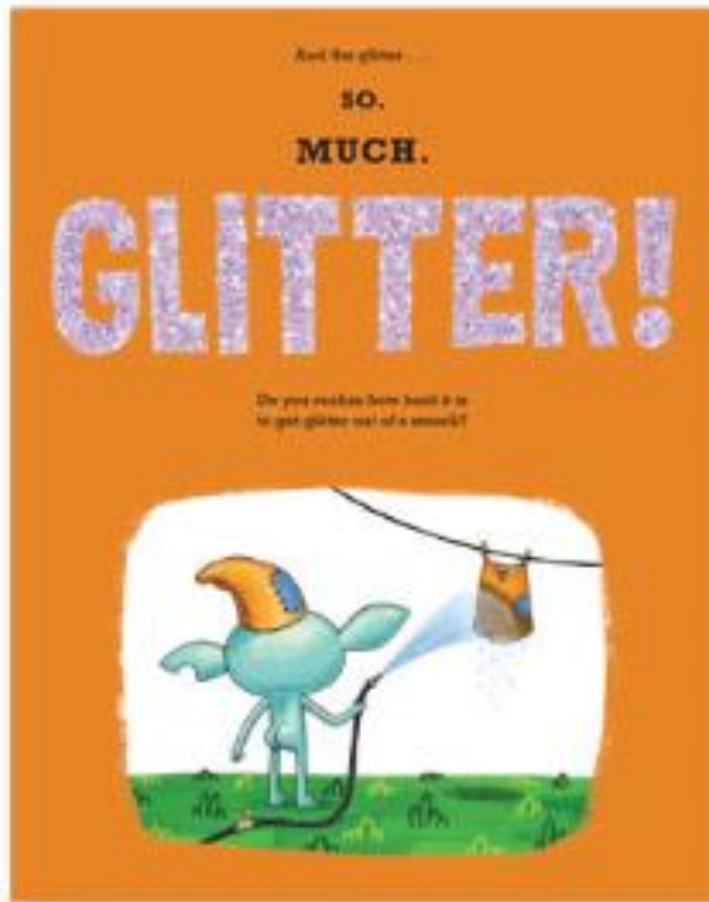
THE IMAGES IN QUESTION?



"Shannon sympathizes with librarians and their feeling that "an altered book is better than no book at all." But he worries about what comes next with this sort of "piecemeal censorship."

"Next time are they going to take that Sharpie to David's pointy teeth—round them off a bit? Or change *No!* to *Please reconsider your actions, David?* Pretty soon it's not the book I made at all. It's also not the book that the majority of parents, educators, and kids want to read," Shannon says" (Bauld, 2024).

THE IMAGES IN QUESTION?

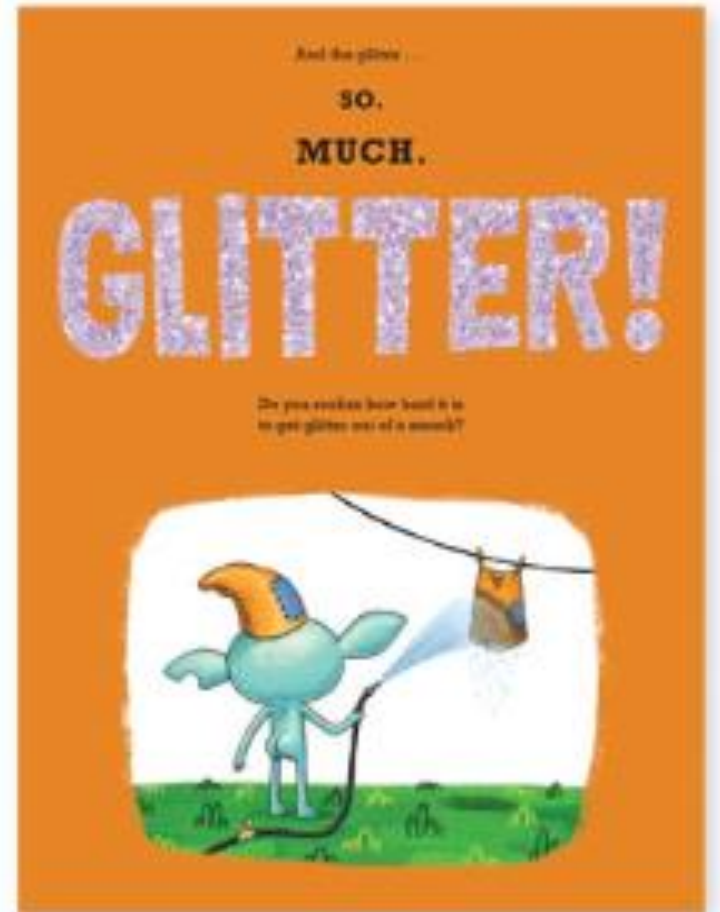


“FIRST, I THINK IT’S IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THERE’S NOTHING INHERENTLY SEXUAL OR PORNOGRAPHIC ABOUT NUDITY. SECOND, AND PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, GOBLINS ARE NOT REAL. LASTLY, AND I CANNOT EMPHASIZE THIS ENOUGH, BUTTS ARE FUNNY.”

—Alex Willan

THE IMAGES IN QUESTION?

"I do worry about the practice of altering books in this way," he says. "Do we tear out pages or cover up text that a small but loud group of people find offensive? Do we let them decide what everyone else's kids get to read? I think that librarians need the help and support of their communities to push back against this type of censorship "(Bauld, 2024).



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

As difficult and as uncomfortable as it may be, especially when dealing with children, librarians must resist the urge to soft censor. In the interest of intellectual freedom we must leave the choice with the patron and trust the age recommendations for the materials.

According to the ALA Bill of Rights, Article 1 “Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. **Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation**” (American Library Association, 2006).

In order to uphold the intellectual freedom of students and adhere to the professional standards of librarianship, soft censorship of materials already deemed age appropriate should be eliminated.

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