

Noni and the Book Ban

A Reading A-Z Level S Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,086

Connections

Writing

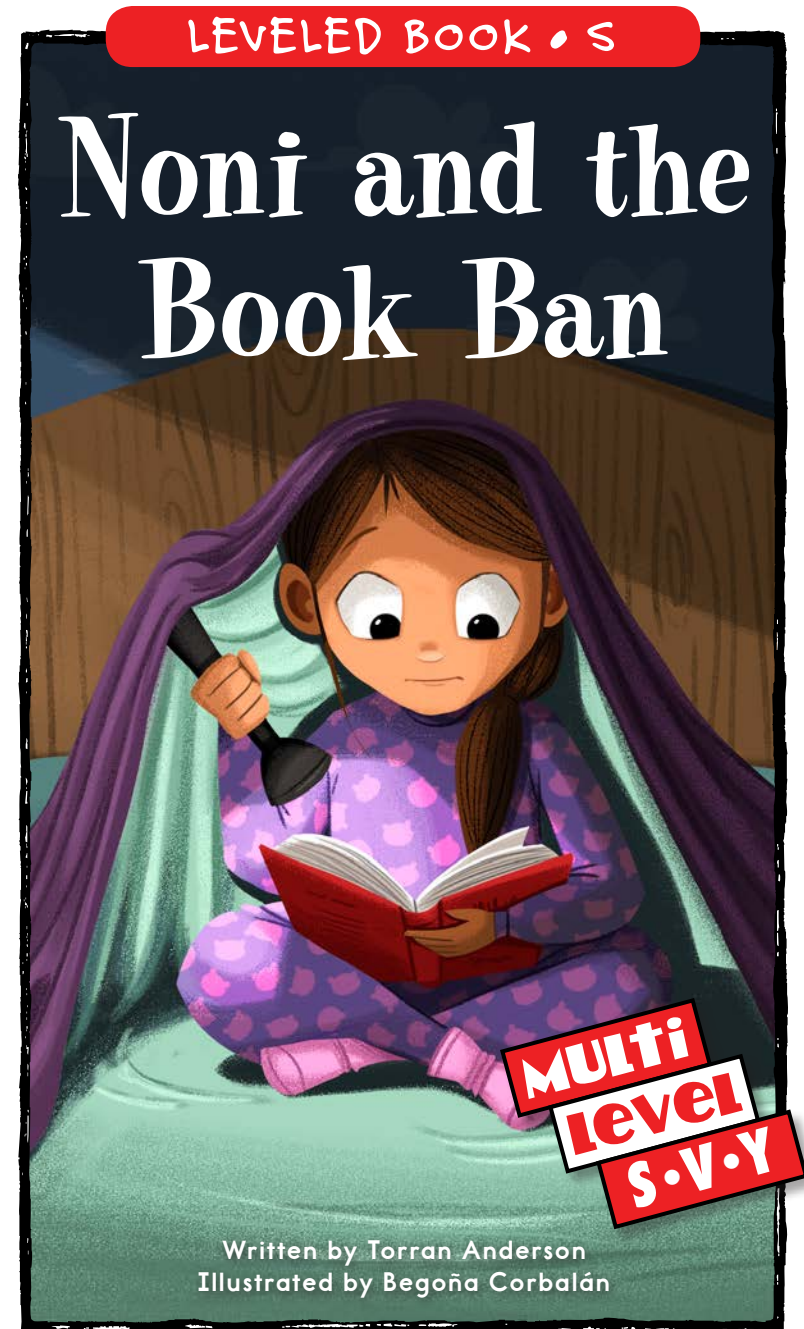
Do you think the Sergeant Rotten Teeth series should be banned from the school library? Why or why not? Write a letter to Mrs. McGuinness stating your position.

Social Studies

The First Amendment is part of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution. Research the Bill of Rights and why it was created. Discuss your findings as a class.

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Glossary

ban (<i>n.</i>)	an official order that forbids something (p. 5)
cause (<i>n.</i>)	a belief, an idea, or an aim supported by a group of people (p. 9)
column (<i>n.</i>)	a portion of a magazine or newspaper devoted to a particular subject or the opinions of a particular writer (p. 14)
committee (<i>n.</i>)	a group of people who consider or decide on a course of action (p. 4)
decisive (<i>adj.</i>)	ending in a clear or obvious way; producing a settled and unquestionable result (p. 15)
issues (<i>n.</i>)	important topics or subjects (p. 7)
protest (<i>n.</i>)	an action done to express strong disagreement or disapproval (p. 5)
quotes (<i>n.</i>)	exact repetitions of things people have written or said (p. 15)
right (<i>n.</i>)	a freedom or power that a person can justly claim (p. 7)

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Written by Torran Anderson
Illustrated by Begoña Corbalán

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Focus Question

What does Noni learn about freedom of speech?

Words to Know

ban	issues
cause	protest
column	quotes
committee	right
decisive	

The author wishes to thank Christy Friske-Daniels, the library media specialist at Tucson High Magnet School, for her invaluable help with this book.

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Correlation

LEVEL 5	
Fountas & Pinnell	O
Reading Recovery	34
DRA	34

Six weeks later, a shorter follow-up story appeared. Since I'm in the story, Miguel or Ashley really should have written it. Miguel has lost interest in the series, though, and Ashley was too mad about how the vote turned out.

The Return of Rotten Teeth

By Noni Lopez

*Whitmore Elementary School will not ban the Sergeant Rotten Teeth series by author Dan Eaton. On a vote of 3-2, the book review committee decided Monday to return the books to the library shelf. Student Noni Lopez cast the **decisive** vote.*

I went on to include lots of **quotes** from people on the board and student reactions, but the story opened with the news itself. You could say I'm giving myself a pat on the back—sure you could—but what can I tell you? A good reporter has to tell it like it is.





That Friday's *Whitmore Weekly* was all about the possible book ban. I had coeditor Ashley write a **column** in support of the ban and coeditor Miguel write a column opposed to it. I ran Dan Eaton's email. And I ran an interview with Mrs. McGuinness that explained the book review committee process.

Before school let out, Mrs. McGuinness told me she wanted a student to serve on the committee: me.

"There's one catch," she said. "You'll need to read all twelve books."

"Ten down, two to go," I said.



"Good morning, Mrs. McGuinness," I said to the school librarian. "I'm Noni Lopez, reporter for the *Whitmore Weekly*, and this is Miguel, a coeditor. Can you comment on the missing Sergeant Rotten Teeth series?"



"We had a parent complain about the series, so I pulled the books until they can be looked at more closely," she said.

"Can we talk to the parent?" I asked.

"No, but you can contact the school book review **committee**—they'll give the books a hearing." Mrs. McGuinness smiled at us. "That way everyone can share their thoughts."



"But Sergeant Rotten Teeth is dangerous to our teeth," Ashley said.

"Part of our book review process is to hear different ideas about the books in question. If you don't like them, Ashley, we'd like to hear why."

"Gladly," Ashley said.

"And Miguel here can say why he thinks the books should stay in the library," she added.

Under his breath, Miguel mumbled something in disgust. It sounded like *tooth care*.



"I don't know what that is," Ashley said, "but I do know you can't put any book in the world in our *grade school* library."

Mrs. McGuinness took a slow sip of her tea before she spoke. "Here's the thing about books in a school library: they're books that students choose for themselves."

"Exactly," Ashley said. "Those books should be the easiest to ban."

"Actually, it's just the opposite," said Mrs. McGuinness.

"Because in the library"—I grabbed Dan Eaton's email and read from it—"we have . . . the chance to think, question, and decide issues for ourselves?"

Mrs. McGuinness nodded. "In that case, freedom-of-speech rights are strongest."

"What if it's a book on how to build bombs?" Ashley asked.

"That probably wouldn't need a big review process to ban, because it presents a clear danger."

Miguel and his coeditor, Ashley, stormed into the Monday newspaper meeting, arguing as usual.

"The Sergeant Rotten Teeth books are the best!" Miguel shouted.

I hadn't read them, but I knew the hero had disgusting teeth and used his bad breath to fight off bad guys.

"Are you kidding me?" Ashley huffed. "The pictures alone made my mom and me want to barf."

"Your mom?" I asked. "Did she complain?"

Ashley nodded proudly. "She's protecting us."

"Not me," Miguel said. "In fact, I'm staging a **protest**." He took a stack of papers and slammed them down on the table.

Save Sergeant Rotten Teeth!

*Protest the book **ban**! Meet Wednesday morning to stage the final scene from Book 4 . . .*

zombies and all!



I decided to cover the protest for the newspaper . . . but first I needed to read that series. I borrowed the books from Miguel and read under the covers until almost midnight. By book seven, the hero's teeth have all fallen out. I wondered, *Are these books actually trying to get kids to brush their teeth?*



Ashley rolled her eyes. "How do you know what his real message is?" she asked.

"Because he told me." I held up a printed version of his email.

Ashley's mouth gaped open. So did Miguel's, salad greens and all.



Wednesday afternoon, Miguel, Ashley, and I sat in Mrs. McGuinness's office.

"Kids are going to take these books the wrong way and ruin their teeth," Ashley said. "Cavities are forever!"

"Cavities aren't what's at stake," I said. "Freedom of speech is—the First Amendment."

“Ban Sergeant Rotten Teeth!” Ashley screamed.

“Go find your own protest!” Miguel shouted. “This one is taken!”

“Your teeth will thank me later,” Ashley said.

Her friends waved their giant toothbrushes. The zombies waved their arms. I stepped in between the two groups. “These books don’t encourage cavities,” I said. “Dan Eaton wants readers to figure out his real message.”



Tuesday morning I located the webpage of Dan Eaton, the author, and explained the whole deal. That afternoon, he wrote me back!

Dear Noni,

*You’re right. I wanted to encourage tooth care in a fun way. Even if you hate my books, though, the First Amendment supports the **right** to keep my books in your library. If the school bans them, kids lose the chance to think, question, and decide **issues** for themselves.*

Best wishes,

Dan

I let out a little cheer. I might not like Dan Eaton’s books, but I liked Dan Eaton.

The First Amendment

An amendment is an addition or change to the U.S. Constitution. The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment gives Americans several freedoms, including freedom of speech. The courts consider books a type of speech, and libraries and courts must sometimes consider how much freedom people should have to “hear” (read) that speech.



“Save Sergeant Rotten Teeth! Save Sergeant Rotten Teeth!” Miguel chanted. He was dressed like his hero, with what looked like salad greens stuck in his teeth.

A dozen kids dressed as zombies chanted around him, stumbling and mumbling, “Breath mints, breath mints.”

Miguel breathed on the zombies, who fell to the ground, pinching their noses and moaning. I tried to interview different zombies about the books but failed.

“I can’t stand the smell,” said one zombie as he shook his head from side to side. “My brain is melting . . . curse you, Rotten Teeth!”

I shook my head, too—I wasn’t sure this protest was helping their **cause**. Then behind them, I spotted Ashley. She was dressed like a giant tooth, and two of her friends followed her with enormous toothbrushes.

