

Case 7: Did one complaint get the novel banned?

A group chat says one parent's complaint got a novel banned, so Mari and Gia check what the school library's notice says.

On your own Read What happened and underline the word in the group chat that may go too far. About 4 minutes.

Your role: You're the one who reads the library notice before anyone replies "banned." **New skill:** Find what stage a process has reached.



Gia, Mari and Sami talk around a table on a rooftop terrace at sunset.

What happened

On Thursday night, a message about a novel in the library at Anika's high school appears in a group chat. The message says one parent complained, so the novel is now banned and gone from the library. Gia replies that this is censorship.

On Friday, the school library posts a notice about the novel. Mari reads it and compares it with the group chat. Gia deletes her first reply, because she had not read the notice or the novel.

Mari works the counter at the neighborhood bookshop. She switches between print and audio, and she is halfway through the novel on audio. Gia is planning a discussion at the bookshop. First, both of them want to know what stage the library's process has reached.

Your question: Is the novel really banned, and what can people who care about it do next?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example, then write your first guess in the box. About 5 minutes.

Challenge A challenge is a formal request to remove or restrict a book or other library material.

En español: impugnación

In this case: A parent's request about a novel at Anika's school started a review. The novel stays available while the committee reads it.

Reconsideration policy A reconsideration policy is a library's written process for reviewing a challenge to a book.

En español: política de reconsideración

In this case: The library's notice follows district policy: a committee review, the selection criteria, written input by the 15th and an appeal.

Selection criteria Selection criteria are the written standards a library uses to decide which materials to include.

En español: criterios de selección

In this case: The committee judges the whole novel against the district's selection criteria. The input form asks which criteria your comment addresses.

Who is involved



Mari

Works the bookshop counter

"The chat says the book is gone from the library. The notice says it stays available during the review. Those can't both be true."



Gia

Planning a book discussion at the bookshop

"I called it censorship before I'd read the notice. Now I'm planning a discussion at the bookshop, so I'd better get this right."

Before you look at the evidence, what do you think happened to the novel?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reading passage

Challenges, process and the language of book bans

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Challenge:** A challenge is a formal request to remove or restrict a book or other library material.
- **Reconsideration policy:** A reconsideration policy is a library's written process for reviewing a challenge to a book.
- **Selection criteria:** Selection criteria are the written standards a library uses to decide which materials to include.
- **Claim:** A claim is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence.
- **Correction:** A correction is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information.

The story: The speed of a word

A group chat claims that one parent's complaint got a novel "banned" from the library at Anika's high school. Gia replies, "censorship, full stop." The next day the school library posts a notice that contradicts the chat. The book remains available while a committee reviews it. Mari, who works the counter at the neighborhood bookshop and is halfway through the novel on audio, catches the contradiction. Gia deletes her reply and admits she had read neither the notice nor the book.

The case is a study in how a single word can outrun a process. "Banned" is vivid, shareable and morally clear. It also asserts a finished outcome. In practice, library disputes pass through stages, and people who want to influence the outcome need to know which stage they are in. Gia's turn is instructive. She plans a bookshop discussion aimed at getting people to the input form before the 15th, and she rules out attacks on the parent who filed the request, noting that the parent used the process too.

Your role is to read the library notice before anyone replies "banned."

- ❓ **Stop and think.** Why might advocates on either side prefer the word "banned" or the word "review"?

Mapping the process

The notice describes the procedure. A request for reconsideration has been received for one title. Under district policy, the title remains available during review. A committee will read the full work and evaluate it against the district's selection criteria. Written input may be submitted by the 15th, and the decision may be appealed.

A **challenge** is a formal request to remove or restrict a book or other library material. A **reconsideration policy** is a library's written process for reviewing a challenge to a book. **Selection criteria** are the written standards a library uses to decide which materials to include. These three terms separate what the chat merged: the complaint, the procedure that evaluates it and the standards the procedure applies. The chat's **claim** describes an outcome that the notice shows has not occurred.

The skill here, identifying the stage of a process, rests on two earlier ones. Case 1 sends you to the original source, and Case 3 defines a **correction** as a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information. A good correction in this case also respects the notice's silences. It does not name the book, the committee or the criteria, because the notice does not.

The input form reveals what the committee values. It asks for the respondent's role, whether they read the entire work and which selection criteria their comment addresses, within 300 words. Mari's plan fits that design. She will finish the book and then join her personal reasons for caring to the criteria the committee must apply.

 **Stop and think.** How does the input form's design shape who can take part effectively?

Guidance, law and contested terms

The American Library Association's toolkit models a formal reconsideration process in which a committee reads the whole work, and it offers guidance on selection criteria (American Library Association, updated January 2018). This guidance is professional, not legal, and districts adapt it. State legislatures are now writing the rules more directly. Colorado lawmakers advanced a bill requiring clear reconsideration policies (Chalkbeat Colorado, February 10, 2025). Reporting from Tennessee found that a stricter law altered the review steps and that some books quietly disappeared (Chalkbeat Tennessee, September 17, 2024). In Florida, the governor backed limits on repeated challenges (PBS NewsNight, February 23, 2024).

The constitutional status of removals is unsettled. A law-firm client alert explains that the Fifth Circuit applied the government speech doctrine to public library book removals, creating a split with the Eighth Circuit (Cahill Gordon and Reindel, September 22, 2025). National data complicates the picture further. ALA's annual list tracks how many challenges were filed, by whom and how many led to removals (American Library Association, April 20, 2026).

Guidance, law and contested terms, continued

The book connection offers a contrast. In Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988), Matilda's father tears pages out of her library copy of *The Red Pony* because he disapproves of her reading, and no one reviews his choice. A real school library is supposed to follow a written process instead. The novel does not set rules for real libraries, but it shows what a process is for.

Professional ethics names the values in tension. The ALA code commits librarians to “resist all efforts to censor library resources” (ALA Code of Ethics, 2021). The NEA code says educators “shall not unreasonably deny the student's access to varying points of view” (NEA Code of Ethics, 1975). Using the right word for the stage is where fair advocacy starts.

 **Stop and think.** With federal courts split, what can local participation accomplish that litigation cannot?

Sources

Real source | American Library Association | January 2018

Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit: formal reconsideration

Real source | American Library Association | January 2018

Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit: selection criteria

Real source | Chalkbeat Colorado | February 10, 2025

Colorado bill to curb school library book challenges clears first legislative hurdle

Real source | Chalkbeat Tennessee | September 17, 2024

Under stricter Tennessee law, some school library books quietly disappear

Real source | PBS (NewsNight) | February 23, 2024

Tackling Frivolous Challenges to Books in Public Schools

Real source | Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP (**law-firm** client alert) | September 22, 2025

Fifth Circuit Holds That Government Speech Doctrine Applies to Public Library Book Removals, Creating Circuit Split With Eighth Circuit

Real source | American Library Association | April 20, 2026

American Library Association releases 2025 Most Challenged Books List as National Library Week Begins

Real source | Penguin | June 24, 2026

Matilda by Roald Dahl: authorized extract

Real source | American Library Association (ALA) | 2021

ALA Code of Ethics

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Look at the evidence

On your own Read the notice and the input form, and fill in both boxes for each one. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Library notice

Reconsideration notice, posted Friday by the school library

A request for reconsideration has been received for one title in the library collection. Under district policy, the title remains available during the review. A review committee will read the full work and evaluate it against the district’s selection criteria. Written input may be submitted by the 15th. The committee’s decision may be appealed.

Look closely: Which sentence tells you where the book is right now? Underline it.

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | Input form

Review committee input form, due the 15th

Name and role (student, parent, staff or community member). Have you read the entire work? Yes or No. Which selection criteria does your input address? Comments, 300 words maximum.

Look closely: Who can send input? What does the form ask before your comments?

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

[illegible][illegible]

Key idea: book challenges

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

A **challenge** is a formal request to remove or restrict a book or other library material. A challenge starts a review. On its own, it does not remove a book. A complaint, a temporary change and a final decision can happen at different times. Check which stage a process has reached before you repeat a claim.

A **reconsideration policy** is a library's written process for reviewing a challenge to a book. The American Library Association (ALA) recommends that libraries adopt one, and its example has a committee read the whole work. **Selection criteria** are the written standards a library uses to decide which materials to include. ALA's guidance is a professional recommendation, not a law. Each district's adopted policy and the applicable law govern its own process.

Whether removing a book breaks the law is a harder question. Federal courts disagree about how the First Amendment applies when a library removes a book. The answer can depend on where you live. Right now, the notice at Anika's school describes a review, and the novel is still available.

Professional standards

Real source | American Library Association (ALA)

ALA Code of Ethics: Principle 2 (of 9)

"We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources."

In plain words: Library workers who follow the ALA code support people's freedom to read and oppose censorship of library materials.

Question: The district notice says the title stays available during review. Does that match the group chat's claim that it's "gone"?

Your answer

The notice says ____, so ____.

A state debated requiring clear reconsideration policies, showing a challenge is a process, not an instant ban.



A state law changed the review steps, so you have to check which rules and stage actually applied.

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Sort the evidence

On your own Fill in the diagram to show who decides at each stage, which rules apply and where input goes. About 8 minutes.

Replace “banned” with the real chain of decisions. Who decides at each stage, which rules bind them, and where can a student’s input land?

Keep, restrict or remove the novel after review

Who decides

The school review committee, which reads the whole work and votes
District-level appeal and, finally, the school board

Under which rule

District reconsideration policy and selection criteria
State law and unsettled First Amendment case law (Pico had no majority opinion)

Who lives with it

Your way in

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what to check first and explain why, then fix the two marked lines. About 5 minutes.

A group chat says, “One parent complained, so that novel is banned.” What should you check first?

- ☐ **A** Find the library’s policy and where the review stands.
- ☐ **B** Ask everyone in the chat whether they like the book.
- ☐ **C** Read the passage people are upset about, then decide.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student’s first draft

This is so messed up. One parent complains and ❶ now the whole school can’t read the book?? That’s literally censorship and it’s illegal because of the First Amendment. ❷ Whoever complained is a terrible person and should mind their own business. Everyone should go to the board meeting and yell at them until they put it back. Books like this are the only ones some of us actually finish. I read part of it last year and it was actually really good. I’m so done with this school honestly.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Write an explainer for a public library newsletter or a campus newspaper on how a school library review works. Use the district’s reconsideration notice as the example. Separate the district’s adopted policy, the ALA’s guidance and what courts have and have not settled.

Use: Case documents: the group-chat claim, the reconsideration notice, the committee input form and Mari’s statement. Real sources: the ALA toolkit summary, Chalkbeat reports from Colorado (2025) and Tennessee (2024), a law-firm client alert (September 2025) and the ALA’s most-challenged books release (April 2026).

You’ll make: Explainer, 450—600 words, with a labeled source list

Time: 90 minutes

- 1

Reread Evidence A and mark the stage the novel is at now.
- 2

Fill in the chart: law, adopted policy and professional guidance.
- 3

Label each source by type: example, news report, secondary source or national data.
- 4

Draft the stage, rules and source-list sections in the Your draft boxes.
- 5

Finish the explainer on lined paper, 450 to 600 words, with a labeled source list.
- 6

Check your explainer with the questions on the Check your work page.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

The novel’s stage

Policy, guidance and courts

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 35 minutes.

How a review works

Policy, guidance and the courts

Labeled source list, first two entries

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Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions, mark your level in each rubric row and write one change you made. About 6 minutes.

Does your explainer state the novel's stage accurately?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it separate the district's policy, the ALA's guidance and court decisions?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it describe Pico as a decision with no majority opinion?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Are your sources labeled by type, with no one named who filed a challenge or gave input?	☐ Yes ☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ Repeats "banned."	☐ Mentions a complaint without stage.	☐ States the current stage from the policy.	☐ States stage, next steps and input route.
Reasoning	☐ Declares a legal verdict.	☐ Treats outrage as the argument.	☐ Separates complaint, review and decision.	☐ Connects input to criteria and notes legal uncertainty.
Audience & purpose	☐ Attacks people.	☐ Rallies without direction.	☐ Gives a useful participation route.	☐ Invites participation while respecting other readers and the parent.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Tone only.	☐ Corrects the stage and removes attacks.	☐ Explains how each change helps the chat act accurately.

One change I made after feedback

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Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete the sentence frames below. About 8 minutes.

- 1** Whose reading experience is missing from the crew’s discussion of the novel?

- 2** Gia says nobody should go after the parent who asked for the review. Why might that matter for her bookshop discussion?

- 3** How does calling the same action a “review,” a “restriction” or a “ban” change what people think happened?

My take

My claim: ____.

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

[illegible]

Talk about this case at home

Case 7: Did one complaint get the novel banned?

In this case, a group chat claims one parent's complaint got a novel banned from a school library. Your student compared that claim with the library's notice and learned how a book review works.

Questions to talk about

- 1 What is the difference between a book being reviewed and a book being removed?
- 2 Where could someone find out how a library decides which books to keep?
- 3 How can people disagree about a book without attacking each other?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.