

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

Where is the book in the process?

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: Two messages, two days

On Thursday night, a claim about a novel in the library at Anika's high school moves through a group chat. One parent complained, it says, so the novel has been banned and removed. Gia answers with the certainty of someone who cares about the freedom to read: "censorship, full stop." The reply fits her values. It does not fit the evidence, because there is no evidence in the chat yet.

The evidence arrives Friday, when the school library posts a notice. Mari, who works the bookshop counter, reads it against the chat. She is dyslexic and moves between print and audiobooks, and she is halfway through this novel on audio. She points out the contradiction plainly. The chat says the book is gone. The notice says it remains available during the review. Both cannot be true.

Gia deletes her first reply. She had not read the notice or the book. She is now organizing a discussion at the bookshop and wants it to be useful, which means getting people to the input form before the 15th with something to say. She also sets a boundary that many online arguments skip. Nobody goes after the parent who asked for the review, because that parent used the process too.

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

? Stop and think. The chat collapsed a complaint, a temporary change and a final decision into one word. Why is that collapse so common?

Stages, not verdicts

The new skill in this case is finding what stage a process has reached. It depends on two earlier ones. From Case 1, you go to the original source, here the library's notice. From Case 3, you know that a **correction** replaces wrong information with accurate information where people saw the mistake.

The notice describes a sequence. A request for reconsideration has been received. The title remains available during the review. A committee will read the full work and evaluate it against the district's selection criteria. Written input is due by the 15th. The committee's decision may be appealed. A **challenge** is a formal request to remove or restrict a book or other library material. It opens that sequence, but it does not end it. A **reconsideration policy** is a library's written process for reviewing a challenge to a book, and **selection criteria** are the written standards a library uses to decide which materials to include.

With the sequence in view, the chat's **claim** can be judged precisely. It collapses three different events into one: a complaint, a possible temporary change and a final decision. Only the first has happened. The notice also has gaps. It does not name the novel, list the committee members or quote the criteria, so a careful reply should not fill those in.

Mari's approach to the input form shows how to join the process rather than just comment on it. The form asks whether you have read the entire work and which criteria your input addresses, with a 300-word limit. She is finishing the book first. Her experience with books like this explains why she cares, but it is not the policy, so she plans to connect the two.

 **Stop and think.** What should a careful correction leave out, given what the notice does not say?

Professional guidance, state law and the courts

The American Library Association recommends that libraries adopt a formal reconsideration policy, and its model process has a committee read the whole work (American Library Association, updated January 2018). Its separate guidance on selection criteria explains how libraries evaluate resources (American Library Association, updated January 2018). That guidance is professional advice. Districts adopt their own policies, and states write their own laws. Colorado legislators advanced a bill to require clear reconsideration policies (Chalkbeat Colorado, February 10, 2025). In Tennessee, reporters found that a revised state law changed the review steps and that some books quietly left shelves (Chalkbeat Tennessee, September 17, 2024).

The constitutional question remains unsettled. A law-firm analysis explains that the Fifth Circuit treated public library book removals as government speech, creating a split with the Eighth Circuit (Cahill Gordon and Reindel, September 22, 2025). The answer to whether a removal is legal can depend on where you live.

Professional guidance, state law and the courts, continued

Professional codes sit on both sides of Gia’s evolving view. The ALA code says, “We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources” (ALA Code of Ethics, 2021). The NCA credo asks communicators to “understand and respect other communicators’ intent before evaluating and responding to their messages” (NCA Credo for Ethical Communication, 2024). Holding both is the discipline this case asks for.

 **Stop and think.** How can someone oppose removing a book and still respect the parent who filed the challenge?

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 | 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 (ALA) | 2021

ALA Code of Ethics

Real source | National Communication Association (NCA) | 2024

Credo for Ethical Communication

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?

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 are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has rounded corners and a thin black border around the edges.

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.

[illegible]

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 **1** now the whole school can’t read the book?? That’s literally censorship and it’s illegal because of the First Amendment. **2** 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

Grades 11–12

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 10 minutes.

Write a briefing on the law and policy of school library challenges for student council.

Use: Pico summary, ALA toolkit and a district policy.

You'll make: Briefing, 450–550 words

Time: 60 minutes

- 1 Reread Evidence A and mark each stage the notice describes.
- 2 Fill in the chart: which rules are law, which are policy and which are guidance.
- 3 Read the Pico summary and note why it has no majority opinion.
- 4 Note one reason state rules differ, using the In the news sources.
- 5 Draft three core paragraphs of your briefing in the Your draft boxes.
- 6 Finish the briefing on lined paper, 450 to 550 words, with a participation route.
- 7 Check your briefing with the questions on the Check your work page.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Law, policy and guidance

Law: _____. Policy: _____. Guidance: _____.

What Pico left open

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.

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 25 minutes.

The situation and the stage

Law, policy and guidance

Why the law is unsettled

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.

Do you distinguish law, policy and guidance?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you represent Pico accurately, including the lack of a majority opinion?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Is your tone neutral?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you recommend a student participation route?	☐ 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

Notes

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete the sentence frames below. About 10 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 ____.

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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.