

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 5 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 6 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?

[illegible]

Reading passage

Banned, or under review?

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 4 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: A rumor on Thursday night

On Thursday night, a message spreads through a group chat. It is about a novel in the library at Anika's high school. The message says one parent complained, so the novel is now banned and gone from the library. Gia replies fast: "censorship, full stop."

On Friday, the school library posts a notice about the novel. Mari reads it. Mari works the counter at the neighborhood bookshop, and she is halfway through the novel on audio. She compares the notice with the chat. "The chat says the book is gone from the library," she says. "The notice says it stays available during the review. Those can't both be true."

Gia deletes her first reply. She had not read the notice, or the book.

Your job in this case is to read the library notice before anyone replies "banned."

 **Stop and think.** Why do you think the rumor said "banned" instead of "under review"?

What stage is the process in?

In Case 1, you learned to find the original source. Here, the original source is the library's notice. It says a request for reconsideration has been received. The book stays available during the review. A committee will read the whole book and judge it against the district's selection criteria.

What stage is the process in?, continued

People can send written input by the 15th. The decision can be appealed.

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 **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.

So the chat's **claim**, that the book is banned, does not match the notice. In Case 3, you learned that a **correction** is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information. The chat needs one. The book is under review, it is still on the shelf, and anyone who cares can send input by the 15th.

Mari plans to use the input form. It asks whether you read the whole book, so she is finishing it first. Gia plans a discussion at the bookshop. She has one rule: nobody goes after the parent. "They used the process too," she says.

 **Stop and think.** Which sentence in the notice tells you where the book is right now?

Book challenges in real life

The American Library Association recommends that libraries adopt a reconsideration policy. Its example has a committee read the whole work (American Library Association, updated January 2018). That is professional advice, not a law. Rules differ by state. In Tennessee, reporters found that a stricter state law changed the review steps (Chalkbeat Tennessee, September 17, 2024).

 **Stop and think.** Why does Gia say nobody should go after the parent who asked for the review?

Sources

Real source | American Library Association | January 2018

Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit: formal reconsideration

Real source | Chalkbeat Tennessee | September 17, 2024

Under stricter Tennessee law, some school library books quietly disappear

Look at the evidence

On your own Read the notice and the input form, and fill in both boxes for each one. About 10 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

One question I still have

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

One question I still have

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 is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Key idea: book challenges

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 6 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 ____, but the chat says ____.

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 6 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 6—8

Your task

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

Draw the steps of a book review and write a message correcting the group chat.

Use: The Matilda extract, the chat claim and a simplified district process.

You'll make: Flowchart plus 3—4 sentence message

Time: 45 minutes

- 1 Read the chat message in What happened, and underline what it says happened.
- 2 Circle the sentence in Evidence A that says where the book is now.
- 3 Write the four stages on the flowchart in order.
- 4 Mark the stage the novel is at now.
- 5 Write a message of 3 or 4 sentences in the Your draft box.
- 6 Write one question you would ask the librarian.

Show it your way

Write it: Write 3—4 sentences with the frame “A complaint was made. Right now, __. The next step is __.”

Say it: Explain the steps of a book review to a partner, pointing to where the novel is right now.

Show it: Fill in the flowchart (request filed, under review, decision, appeal) and put a sticker on the current stage.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

The four stages, in order

The next step

[illegible][illegible]

Your message, 3 or 4 sentences

A complaint was made. Right now, _____. The next step is _____.

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 5 minutes.

Does your message separate the complaint from the decision?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it name the stage the novel is at now?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it avoid attacking the parent?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Did you write a real question for the librarian?	☐ 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

[illegible]

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

I think the crew should ___ because ___.

The evidence that changed my first guess is ____.

One question I still have is ___.

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 no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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.