



Jonathan Hart, Ph.D., *Superintendent*
Stacey Brown, Ed.D., *Supervisor of Humanities*

jhart@readington.k12.nj.us
sbrown@readington.k12.nj.us

P.O. Box 807 • 52 Readington Road • Whitehouse Station, NJ 08889 • (908)-534-2195 • (908) 349-3042 fax

Report of the Reconsideration Committee

TO: Readington Board of Education

FROM: Book Challenge Committee

DATE: January 17, 2023

RE: Book Challenge

Reconsidered item: *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews

Location: RMS Library

Committee membership: Per Regulation 9130, the Reconsideration Committee included the department head where the work is used, a teacher of the subject area of language arts, a library staff member, a board member, a lay person (in this instance, a parent of a middle school child who is familiar with literature), and the principal of a school where the work is used.

Meetings: 12/6/2022 and 1/4/2023

Guidelines:

In compliance with Policy 2530, Policy 9130, and the American Association of School Librarians Standards, the committee adhered to the following guidelines:

- Provide a wide range of materials suited to the varied interests, abilities, reading levels, and maturation levels of the pupils to be served
- Review the challenged materials against the standards for the selection and maintenance of resource materials established by Board Policy
- Keep the work on the shelf and available for circulation during the review process
- No challenged material can be removed solely because it represents ideas that may be unpopular or offensive to some
- Review the work as a whole, not isolated passages taken out of context
- The principles of intellectual freedom, the right to access of materials, and the integrity of the certificated library/media personnel must be defended

Process:



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Each member read the book in its entirety, read and discussed policies 2530 and 9130, and reviewed the submitted reconsideration form and packet of background information about the item. Using the attached rubric, committee members evaluated the book relative to the selection criteria in Policy 2530, the district's mission and goals, and state instructional regulations. The committee further considered the complainant's concerns and evidence. After discussing the merits, drawbacks, and concerns about the book as a literary work, the committee reached the following recommendation.

Findings and Recommendation:

The committee recommends that *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews remain in the RMS library as a text for self-selection and continue to be identified as a teenage selection for our 8th grade students or those students demonstrating advanced maturity levels. Parents have the option of contacting the library and asking for their child's access to this book to be limited.

Supporting evidence

Selection criteria

Using the 5-point scale listed below, committee members provided the following average ratings and evidence for how well the book meets the selection criteria established in Policy 2530.

	5 Very well	4 Well	3 Somewhat	2 Slightly	1 Not at all
Criteria	Average Rating				Evidence
Support the needs of students	4.67				- Meets students' varying reading levels and interests. - It shows different types of kids and their lives. May help students understand a subject that is hard to talk about with their own families. - Students can connect and/or understand the world around them when it comes to instances such as navigating identity, social situations, family dynamics, friendships, etc. - The inclusion of the book supports student choice. It offers a humorous, irreverent, and realistic portrayal of a



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		teenager dealing with a peer's terminal disease and death.
Relevant to today's world	5	- Sickness transcends time. This book is just as valid today as when it was written. - It shows the harsh reality of navigating the high school social environment.
Represents artistic, historic, literary qualities	4.67	- The book was written in a format that was unique that may be of interest to some readers. - The book demonstrates how two students used filmmaking to bond over their shared creations. It offered passages set up as a movie script to vary format. - Author uses a variety of writing styles within the piece to convey events/conflicts within the story that are fitting to the voice of the narrator. - Higher-level literary elements (ex: Deviation from the traditional trajectory of a plot)
Reflects problems, aspirations, attitudes, and ideals of society	4.67	- It shows different societies (Jewish, Black, White). It also covers how groups of students are categorized and what people assume their interests are. - Explores death, friendships, filmmaking, self-esteem, family life, and personal growth. - The characters in the book represent real world issues in society. - Narrator faces many challenges in establishing his identity within the social constructs of young adulthood. - The portrayal of teens from two drastically different backgrounds gives insight into socioeconomic disparity. The book also demonstrates the disconnect often found between adolescent talk and action.
Contributes to objectives of the instructional and/or	4.67	- Opens conversations as to how to deal with problems. - Writing style is unique.



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library program		- Text can be analyzed through a variety of lenses aligning with literary units of study (ex: theme, character growth, etc.) - The book looks at a difficult subject in a way that appeals to readers who aspire to more mature content. It offers a Jewish protagonist operating in a plot that does not revolve around their religion. - An option for choice or leisure reading.
Appropriate to the level of the user	4.67	- Great for young adults. Speaks to them as their peers might. - The book is marked for 8th grade readers only and marked with a teen sticker. - If the user is a student who reads at a high school level (and we are obligated to provide texts for students at all levels) and is likewise of appropriate emotional maturity for the book. - This book is reserved for mature 8th graders only. Several resources list it as relevant to ages 14 and older. - This text is listed as appropriate for grade levels as young as 7th grade.
Represents differing viewpoints on controversial subjects	4.33	- Shows Jewish, Black, and White, as well as different societal controversial subjects groups, handle each other as well as death. - This book offers different viewpoints on death as well as on family upbringing and socioeconomics. - Narrator navigates a friendship with a character from a different socioeconomic status and is exposed to varying viewpoints on certain ideas/situations. - A few references to the narrator's negative perspective on his religion.
Provides a stimulus to creativity	4.67	Particularly in relation to filmmaking and how one would go about honoring someone who is dying. One character decides to pursue this field as a



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		course of study in college. The text is written in a very witty, unique style that is very appropriate for the narrator's character and stimulates the reader's interest in the piece.
Quality and durability appropriate to intended uses and longevity	4.83	- This book has been part of the RMS library collection for 10 years. - Withstands the test of time. Valid thoughts and points on growing up, deciding what to do with your life, and dealing with tough situations (friendships, death). - This is an award winning book, I imagine it will be relevant for years to come. - Even though the book was published over 10 years ago, the struggles that the main character deals with are not isolated to the time period. - Can be considered a modern coming-of-age story

Findings and Rationale:

It is the committee's position that when books are self-selected by students for leisure reading or independent reading assignments, it is the right and responsibility of a student and their family to make determinations regarding what is or is not appropriate for the student to read. It is the school district's responsibility to provide reading material suited to the students' varied interests, reading levels, and maturation levels.

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl meets the requirements of District Policy 2530 as described below and was rated by Teaching Books for grades 7-12, Common Sense Media for ages 14 and up, Kirkus for ages 14 and up, Booklist for grades 8-11, and Publishers Weekly for ages 14 and up. This novel is reserved for students in 8th grade or those demonstrating an advanced maturity level equal to an 8th grader or above. Therefore, the distribution of this book is in line with guidelines produced by professional organizations.

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl includes characters of multiple races, religions, and socioeconomic statuses, making this book a window for some students, offering a view that may be different from their own experiences. For other students, this text is a mirror that reflects pieces of their own lives. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* addresses the topics of death, terminal illness, and grief and provides mirrors and windows for



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students who have experienced the death of a loved one or know someone who has. As we do have students in our district who have unfortunately experienced the death of family members or friends, this text can help students learn about grief and loss as well as how to respond to these difficult situations. Lisa Athan, founder and director of Griefspeaks, provided consultation in this area and encourages the reading of books focused on grief for teens. She also supports the idea of using books such as *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* to give perspective to students and help them understand how to assist a grieving friend.

Although it includes vernacular that is not common for some, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* portrays one of a variety of viewpoints. The exchanges in question are not examples of how the characters behave in a school setting, and the committee was unable to identify a correlation between reading this text and discipline for inappropriate comments of a similar nature in school. This novel is part of the collection of multiple middle school libraries in the region, and according to District Policy 9130, we cannot remove material from a collection solely because it presents ideas that may be unpopular or offensive to some.

This text does have literary value through the windows and mirrors it provides for some students, as well as artistic value through a clearly defined author's voice and unique text structure. This book also was listed in Capitol Choices 2013 - Noteworthy Titles for Children and Teens, Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) Choices 2013 list - Young Adult Fiction, YALSA 2013 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, YALSA 2013 Best Fiction for Young Adults, and YALSA 2014 Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults. In addition, independent reading and self-selection of books are cornerstones of the district's literacy program. The board approved 8th Grade English Language Arts Curriculum (2022) states, "The Readington School District middle school literacy program provides a balanced instructional approach which includes study of authentic and rich literature, word study, and experience and practice in effective writing traits. By the time our students are in eighth grade, they are able to handle difficult texts independently. Students will focus on reading texts in the 6-8 grade band level independently as well as sustained practice with texts in the 9-10 grade band level as "stretch" texts, which will require scaffolding by teachers. Our curriculum is designed to be responsive to the developmental stages. Our differentiated approach allows students to be engaged with reading and writing experiences appropriate to their point in development, and our teachers assess students at regular intervals to inform their instructional decisions." In these ways, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* supports the district's mission and goals when it is reserved for those students in the age and maturity range for which the book is designated.

It is the committee's belief that parents and guardians play a major role in guiding their child's reading and library use. A wide variety of materials are available in our



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school and classroom libraries, and each family has the right to determine which library resources are acceptable for their children. This same right must be available to all parents in the district.