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Review of Censorship and the School Library Media Center

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CENSORSHIP AND THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER

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CENSORSHIP AND THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER. Nancy Kravitz.
Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2002, 222 pp., ISBN 0-313-31437-3 (paperback).

Issues of intellectual freedom and censorship have been written about frequently. What makes this book stand out is its emphasis on schools and school libraries or media centers. Censorship challenges are so emotional because they involve our children. Some concerned parents are passionate about what kinds of books and literature they want their children to read or not read.

Kravitz begins by defining censorship, selection, challenge, ban, intellectual freedom, and other terms that are used throughout the book. Next, she looks at the groups that have been involved in censorship and what they stand for. Parents have been the largest group to challenge school materials; sometimes they want to make sure that their child doesn't have to read something that they find objectionable, but sometimes they want to make sure that no one reads the book. Political groups, religious groups and minorities have also challenged books for various reasons.

Historically, the number of challenges has been steadily increasing in the last forty years. Most challenges are for general books, but some are for textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and other materials. In schools, the challenges can be to the curriculum that is being taught in the schools as well as the book used for the curriculum. Kravitz summarizes many of the court cases that have been important to censorship cases through the years. In highlighting the books that have been challenged, even the recent *Harry Potter* books are included.

The big difference between this book and others on censorship is the chapter dealing with policies and procedures. Kravitz emphasizes the importance of having clear written selection policies that would be important even if censorship were not an issue. Ideas are included for the

philosophy, goals, objectives, criteria for selection, policies on controversial materials and procedures for handling any kind of challenge to the materials that are in the school or library. Suggestions for how school librarians should handle a formal challenge if one occurs are also provided. In all of these matters, being prepared is key to being successful.

Included in the appendix are the ALA Library Bill of Rights and supporting documents, the AECT Statement on Intellectual Freedom, NCTE Student's Right to Read, resolutions which oppose Internet filtering, and a sample selection policy and forms for challenges. Lists and other materials from the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom give insight into the wide range of materials that have been challenged.

This book is well-researched and cited and should be in every school library media center. The information about what to include in a good materials selection policy is particularly helpful. Another recent book on censorship, *Banned in the U.S.A.* (Greenwood, 2002), shares some of the same information from the Office of Intellectual Freedom and presents the history of censorship by reviewing many of the books that have been challenged or banned. The selection policy information in Kravitz's book makes it a better choice for school library media centers. Highly recommended.

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