

KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
AGENDA STATEMENT

No. 10 a.

MEETING OF August 14, 2024

Item Title:

Reviewed By

NEW BUSINESS

Superintendent

Motion related to the review and consideration of the Superintendent's determination in response to a complaint concerning instructional materials in use at KGBSD schools
RE: What Girls Are Made Of, written by Elana Arnold

Review Committee

SUBMITTED BY: 

Superintendent, 907 247 2109

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

The Board of Education is being asked to review and reconsider the determination of District Administration in relation to a complaint filed by a citizen concerning the use of the book titled, What Girls Are Made Of, written by Elana Arnold.

ISSUE:

Board Policy 1312.20 Public Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials provides an opportunity for citizens to file complaints and concerns with the District regarding materials in use in instructional programming including textbooks, supplementary textbooks, library books, and other instructional materials and equipment. Under Board policy, the complainant has a right to request reconsideration and final decision of the determination by the Board in their role as governing body over curricular matters as well as involvement in some instructional decisions.

BACKGROUND:

A complaint was filed regarding the use of the book, What Girls Are Made Of, in accordance with BP 1312.2. A review committee was formed, and a recommendation was given by the committee to the Superintendent in accordance with BP 1312.2. The Superintendent accepted the recommendation to retain the book in the Ketchikan High School library. After receipt of the Superintendent's decision, the complainant has requested a review of this decision by the School Board.

RECOMMENDATION: Uphold/Revoke/Modify the Superintendent's determination/recommendation

EXHIBITS ATTACHED

- Board Policy/Administrative Regulation 1312.20

- Complainants Request for School Board reconsideration of the Superintendent's decision
- Notice of Superintendent's Decision on Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of Instructional Materials, What Girls Are Made Of, by Elana Arnold

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

"I move that the Board of Education [revoke, modify, or uphold] the Superintendent's determination and recommendation in relation to the complaint concerning instructional materials regarding the book, What Girls Are Made Of, by Elana Arnold."

The School Board takes great care in the adoption of instructional materials and is aware that all adopted materials may not be acceptable to all students, their parents/guardians, or other district residents.

(cf. 6161.1 – Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials) (cf. 6161.11 – Supplementary Instructional Materials)

The Superintendent or designee shall establish procedures which will permit proper consideration of any complaints against the use of any instructional materials, including textbooks, supplementary textbooks, library books, and other instructional materials and equipment.

(cf. 1312.3 – Public Complaint Concerning Discrimination)

The School Board believes the Superintendent and staff are well qualified to consider complaints concerning instructional materials. Complainants are advised to consider and accept the Superintendent or designee's decision as final. However, if the complainant finds the decision of the Superintendent or designee unsatisfactory, he/she may request that the matter be placed on the agenda of a regular Board meeting.

The School Board's decision in any such case will be based on educational suitability and will not be influenced by a desire to suppress information or deny students access to ideas with which the School Board disagrees.

(cf. 6144 – Controversial Issues)

KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Adoption Date: 10/13/99

Reviewed (Policy Committee): June 2021

Complaints concerning instructional materials will be accepted only from staff, district residents, or the parents/guardians of children enrolled in a district school.

Complaints must be presented in writing to the principal on the appropriate district form. (See Exhibit.) Complaints regarding printed material must specify the precise nature of the objection. The statement must be signed and identified in such a way that a proper reply will be possible. Individual students may be excused from using challenged materials after the parent/guardian has presented a written complaint. The teacher will then assign the student alternate materials of equal merit. Use of the materials by a class, school or the district, however, shall not be restricted until so directed by the Superintendent or their designee.

Upon receiving a written complaint, the principal will acknowledge its receipt and answer any questions regarding procedure verbally and in writing. The principal will then notify the Superintendent or their designee and the teacher(s) involved of the complaint.

The Superintendent or their designee will determine whether the complaint should be considered on an individual basis or whether a review committee should be convened. The Superintendent or their designee has the discretion to deny consideration of the written complaint. Any such denial by the Superintendent or their designee shall be considered final action of the district on the written complaint.

The use of challenged materials by class, school or district shall not be restricted until final disposition has been made by the district.

A review committee may be formed under the direction of the Superintendent or their designee. It shall be composed of three or more staff members selected by the Superintendent or their designee from relevant administrative and instructional areas.

In deliberating challenged materials, the review committee shall consider the educational philosophy of the district; the professional opinions of other teachers of the subject and of other competent authorities; reviews of the materials by reputable bodies; the teacher's stated objectives in using the materials; and the objections of the complainant.

The review committee shall determine the extent to which the challenged material supports the curriculum, the educational appropriateness of the material, and its suitability for the age level of the student. The review committee has the discretion to determine whether it shall review the entire instructional material or only certain sections of the instructional material.

Within 60 days of being convened, the review committee shall summarize its findings in a written report and submit it to the Superintendent or their designee for final action. The Superintendent or their designee may approve request(s) from the review committee for additional time to conduct its review. The Superintendent or their designee shall notify the complainant of their decision regarding the complaint no later than 60 days after the review committee submits its written report for final action.

If the complainant finds that the final action of the Superintendent or their designee is unsatisfactory, they may request to have the matter placed on the agenda of a school board meeting. The Board President determines if the matter will be placed on the agenda of a school board meeting.

When any challenged instructional material is reviewed by the district, it shall not be subject to any additional reconsideration for 12 months.

State-Adopted Material

If the challenged material has been adopted by the State Board of Education, the Superintendent or their designee may forward the complaint, without action, to the Department of Education for reevaluation and decision.

KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Adoption Date: 10/13/99

Revision Date: 8/14/19

Revision Date: 12/7/23

Revision Date: 1/17/24

Community Relations

E 1312.2 CITIZEN'S REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Date:

TITLE: What Girls Are Made Of

AUTHOR: Elana K. Arnold

PUBLISHER: Carolrhoda Lab, Lerner Publishing Group ,Inc. **DATE OF EDITION:** 2017

Request received by:

Title:

Citizen's Name: Deborah Simon

Phone: [REDACTED]

Citizen Represents: Herself

Organization or Group: N/A

To what do you object? (Please be specific: cite pages, tape sequence, video frame, and words)

This is a book of horrors and despair. Chapters of a teen's tortured life interspersed with nightmarish tales of a girl with vagina's cropping up all over her body, a person systematically mutilating a female body, and other scenes reminiscent of Dante's hell. It is completely incomprehensible to me that a book such as this be in the hands of anyone, let alone a child.

- Vulgar language
- Graphic sexual encounters
- Tortured descriptions of sick, injured, and euthanized animals
- Blasphemous and twisted religious references
- Graphic descriptions of gynecological exams and abortion

(for reference purposes, the pages noted are from the Kindle Edition)

p.2 - When I was fourteen, my mother told me there was no such thing as unconditional love. "I could stop loving you at any time," my mother said.... "No one loves without conditions," she said.... "Love for a woman," my mother said, "is always conditional on her beauty. That," she said, my fingers grazing hers on the final fold, "and sex."

p.8-14 - detailed description of female gynecological exam external and internal

p. 14-15 - description of minor volunteering in a "high-kill shelter. Every time I'm there, I see the conditions under which people determine love. Youth + symmetry + quietness = love."

p. 15 - Even now, I am aware that his love for me is conditional. Condition 1: Sex. It sounds cliché, and maybe it is, but I am aware of how important sex is in our relationship. It's okay with me; I love it. I love to be with Seth. It didn't hurt, much, the first time, and it's gotten better since then.

p.18-19 - The last night of summer vacation, we did it for the first time. We had almost done it the day before, in my bedroom. I laid a towel on my sheet in case I bled, and then I watched Seth roll the condom over his penis, and I rested my head on my pillow and watched his hands push into the flesh of my thighs, spreading them apart, and I watched him maneuver his latex-wrapped erection, as he pushed and tried to get inside."

p.19-20 -

This time, in Seth's room, we didn't bother with a towel. Seth pushed down my cutoffs and bikini bottoms and went down to the ground with them, looking up at me as he pressed his tongue to my skin.

My legs were shaking, so I sat down on the edge of his bed, and my legs fell open to make room for his mouth. He licked and licked like a cat at a bowl of cream, and when the inside of me felt as wet as the outside, we tried again.

This time, Seth touched my face and looked into my eyes as he fit his penis up against me, as he pushed inside.

p.25 - minor's boyfriend (also a minor) gives her a vibrator as a present for their 3-month anniversary because, as he says, "It's no big deal...Wade [character's brother] says it's hard for some girls to come without some...help." "Don't cry. Con't cry. "I don't need one of these," I say, and I hate my voice, the wobble in it, I hate that Seth has maybe talked to his brother about me, said to him, "So you know the girl I'm dating, Nina? She's pretty cool. But no matter how much we do it, or how long I lick her, she just can't come."

p. 29 -

We wander into Lavish, this slutty little dress shop where half the girls in our class go to buy dresses for the semiformal dances, and Louise raises her eyebrow and says, Want to?"

I laugh and say, "Why not?" And then it's on. We both still remember the rules—the left half of the store, from the entrance all the way to the dressing rooms in the back, is mine, and the right half is hers. We go our separate ways just inside the door, and the hunt begins.

Simple rules. Three dresses for each of us. Ten minutes to find them. Then, to the dressing rooms. Sluttiest dress wins.

p.33-35 -

He snatches me up like a cellophane-wrapped candy and kisses me on the mouth. His arms circle around me and I want to be devoured, I want to be sweet for him and melt on his tongue. I hop up and wrap my legs around his waist, feel already his satisfying hardness. We go like that up the stairs, all sixteen of them, with me in Seth's arms, my tongue in his mouth.

In my room I've lit candles, which Seth doesn't mention, and when he throws me onto the bed, the one on the nightstand flickers out. He shrugs out of his sweater, pulls his T-shirt over his head and tosses it aside, then kicks out of his shoes and yanks down his jeans and his underwear in one fierce movement. Then he's there, naked, the thick horn of him wet-tipped and hard, and a rush of wetness floods the cotton lining of my thong.

"Take off your bra."

I feel, thrillingly, like I'm in a movie, like I'm on display for a vast and important audience, like the whole world is watching as I reach behind my back and unhook the strap. My bra falls into my lap and I push my chest forward, pretending that I think my pointed little breasts are beautiful.

Seth thrusts forward onto the bed and between my legs and against the thin lace barrier that separates us. The hard nose of my teddy bear pokes against my back and I twist to reach it, grab it by an arm or a leg, and toss it to the ground.

My thong gets twisted as Seth takes it off, and I hear it rip when he grows impatient and yanks too hard. I shouldn't care but I do, because the thong is brand new and it matches the bra, and lace can't be sewn back together. But I don't say anything, and then Seth rises above me like a wave and smiles, and I smile back and then he pushes into me, hard and fast and it hurts and feels good all mixed together.

He puts one hand on my stomach to hold me still, he likes it best, he said, when I don't move a lot, when I let him be in charge, and I know too that he likes to feel himself inside of me, under his hand, the back and forth motion of it.

It's clear from his face when he's close, and I brace myself for a second, for the way he usually pulls out roughly right at the end, but then he looks into my eyes and grins, asks, "Okay?"

"Okay," I answer, and then his eyes close and his mouth twists and a vein on his forehead bulges out and he thrusts again and again hard into the center of me and I want to like it but I sort of don't, and I feel him spasm, and spasm, and he makes a sound that would be funny in different circumstances before he is still.

"Fuck," he says, collapsing against me. I run my fingers up and down his spine, feel a few bumps back there, new ones. He hates that he has acne on his back—acne, he calls it—so I move my hand away to not draw attention to it. Soft now, his penis shrinks inside me and then slips out.

When I get up to go to the bathroom, a runny path of semen, like egg whites, trails down my leg. I am horrified. It feels like I've just peed myself. I don't know what I expected. I guess I thought it would just sort of absorb inside me, or really, I guess I never thought about what would happen at all. The other times when we didn't use a condom, Seth would pull out and come on my stomach or—those two times—on my back. And then he'd use his T-shirt or a sock to wipe me off. But this time, as I walk to the bathroom connect to my room, the sticky wetness drips down my thigh, a couple of drops falling silently to the carpet.

p.35-36 -

It's not that I don't have orgasms. It's just that I don't have orgasms with Seth.

He doesn't know this because I haven't told him. Why would I? It would just make him feel bad. And it's not his fault that I don't have orgasms when we're together. And I don't need that stupid vibrator, either. Part of me wants to yell at him, What kind of a present is that?

But I don't yell, and I don't tell Seth about the orgasms I do have, that I've been having since I was fourteen years old, all by myself in all kinds of ways—with my hand with the sharp spray of water from the showered, with a pillow, under the covers and between my legs.

And maybe none of these counts. Maybe they're not "real" orgasms, since they're always when I'm alone. It's like that question: if a tree falls in the woods and no one hears it, does it make a sound? Probably solo orgasms don't count if a boy isn't there to witness them. To cause them.

p.49 - description of morning-after pill being purchased by presumably a minor in a drug store

p.56 - After watching bungee jumpers, character's boyfriend says he wants her to jump off a bridge with him without equipment.

p.57 -

I pull him off the trail behind some trees and I push him against a tall rock, and before I can worry if someone will come by and see us I go down on my knees like the guy on the bridge, except instead of tightening a harness I'm unfastening his pants.

I pull him out of his underwear and he's soft in my hand. I don't look up at his face before I open my mouth and pull him into it, and I pull and I suck until he grows hard and he makes sounds that mean he likes it, and I keep going and going and when he says, I'm going to come," I don't pull away.

The jet of him is warm and salty and tastes like thickened sweat. He breathes hard and his hands are tight fists at his eyes.

p.57-58 -

*Yet I, least of all souls
Take Him in my hand
Eat Him and drink Him,
And do with Him what I will!*

It's a real thing written by a religious mystic way back in the thirteenth century. She was talking about worshipping Jesus, but come on. She was talking about sex, right? Sex with Jesus?

That was what she wanted—to give Jesus head. And I totally understand it.

When you love someone the way that I love Seth—the way that woman who wrote the poem loved Jesus—you want to serve him. And you want to paralyze him so he can't go away.

Grandparents tell their grandchildren, "I'll eat you up!" It's the same idea, in a weird way. You want to consume the person you love. You want to eat him so he's inside you, so he becomes part of you, so he can't leave you.

Grandparents eating grandchildren. Chewing the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus every Sunday in church. Swallowing Seth's cum on the trail. Is it different?

Is it?

p.60 - graphic description of flogging, torture, and decapitation

p.66-68 - graphic description of character repeatedly masturbating

p.88-89 - mother and daughter discussing orgasm and sex "Sex and death. That's what everything reduces to, in the end."

p.91

I lay in a bath full of tepid water, imagining myself as Teresa, massaging myself with a rough washcloth, pretending it was the hand of God, until I came, suddenly and hard, for the first time. My mother was in the next room, and she heard me in there, she heard the sound I made, a sharp inward breath, a little high-pitched cry.

"Nina?" She asked. "Are you okay?"

It was several seconds before I could answer. "Yes," I said. "I'm fine."

p.93 - *It was my job to provide the conversation, the levity, the propelling engine of excitement forward through Rome. I knew that it was, and I did my best, though she didn't make it easy. I pretended I didn't notice the way she'd disappear behind her eyes, and I fought to keep my*

tone bright and energetic, as if I could snap her back into the present moment if I managed to be perky enough.

p.94 - "You're going to get drunk eventually." Mom said. "The first time might as well be with me."

p. 95 -

"You look happy, my mother said.... "Are you drunk yet?"

I shook my head no. I wasn't drunk; drunk wasn't really a thing. I was just, I don't know, loose, sort of. Relaxed. Everything felt...better. The fork in my hand felt more solid. My mother, across from me, the red in her cheeks, looked hopeful, somehow. Everything would be okay, I felt. The warmth in my chest was proof of that. Life, it was beautiful.

p.97 -

"In the morning, I asked my mom through the pounding pressure of my headache, "Why did you make me get so drunk?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she answered. "Now get dressed. We're taking a train to Florence."

p.103 - description of transvaginal ultrasound

p.104-106 - descriptions of abortion

p.114-120 graphic description of character's abortion

p.118 -

"Are you religious?"

"Sort of," Beech says. "My grandparents on my father's side are Hungarian Jews. They're not Orthodox or anything, though. Not for a long time. My mom's family is full of right-wing Christian nut jobs. They were super pissed when she married my dad and converted. They said it could never work."

p.124-125 Planned Parenthood worker forces birth control on character

p.128-129 graphic description of injured dog that peers bring to the main character]

p.136 - "Look at this one's nipple," Mom said, and I turned my attention to where she pointed. This figure's chest was splayed open, the breasts flipped almost upside down, like open doors. I felt Saint Agatha twitch behind me with recognition of her twin. "See the color of it? The shape of it? Try to believe that's not sexual."

p. 140-145 - description of characters taking drugs and looking at lewd items on computer "Hey," he said, "Don't tell him I was smoking weed, okay? I don't want him to think it's cool."

p.145- 148 - minor characters looking at adult website to build a sex doll

p.150-151 - description of mutilated sex doll

p.155 - mother takes minor daughter to a torture museum with graphic and specific descriptions of the instruments.

"I've always wanted to visit this place," Mom said, "but I didn't get the chance until now." Why anyone would have a torture museum on their "always wanted to visit" list was a mystery to me, but I followed.

"That one," Mom said her my shoulder, "was inserted in the vagina. It's pear shaped when it's closed, but there's a handle you can turn—it's a screw, see?—that spreads apart the four petal-shaped sections. The sharp tips, of course, and the metal petals would tear a woman to shreds."

p.160 - graphic description of euthanized and rendered animals

What do you feel would be the result of reading/viewing this material?

Nightmares and dizzying horrific post-traumatic flashbacks.

For what age group would you recommend this material?

None.

Did you read/view the entire selection?

Yes, unfortunately.

If not, what percentage did you read/view, or what parts?

N/A

Is there anything good about this material?

Nothing whatsoever. While the author attempts to justify the work as an exhortation to "decide on your own what your heart is," it is simply too little, too late and not at all borne out in the narrative. Ironically, a book that would scar any reader begins and ends with a mother who scars her teenager by telling her that there is no such thing as unconditionally love because she could stop loving her daughter at any time.

What would you like the school to do about this material?

Do not assign it to my child Withdraw it from all students Reevaluate it

Are you aware of how this work has been assessed by literary critics?

The fact that the book's front cover proudly displays a recommendation from the author of *Sex & Violence* is evidence enough of its critics' assessments. One must take sentiments such as "beautifully written and evocative," "stunning in its honesty and depth," and memorable because, "This book will rip your heart out" with a hefty grain of salt when they come from from authors of books entitled *Other Broken Things* and *The Game of Love and Death*. Critics often used by libraries deem its writing as "forced" and "best suited to mature YA readers."

What do you believe is the thesis of this work?

In the Afterward, the author graphically describes a "horror story about a girl whose mother wouldn't let her shave her legs" ending in a bloody, gore-filled description that was told to her at age eleven and a later encounter with a fellow college student who held a razor to her neck threatening to rape her. This is to apparently explain her reason for writing a book to exhort readers not "to listen to anyone who tells you what girls are made of." This a hollow sentiment, however, negated by her explanation that she doesn't "write books to teach lessons" but "to sort through the things that fascinate, scare, repulse, and thrill me." This book does, indeed

read like a horror movie, starting with a fourteen-year-old's mother stating matter-of-factly that "there is no such thing as unconditional love" because "I could stop loving you at any time" and seeing that child through graphic gynecological exams, sexual encounters, an abortion, and terrifyingly blasphemous museum visits with that mother.

In its place, what work would you recommend?

N/A

Signature withheld due to the Ketchikan Gateway School District and School Board's past illegal release of Personal Identifiable Information.

Signature of Citizen

Action taken:

Date:

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District

333 Schoenbar Rd. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

Ph. (907) 247-2116 Fax: (907) 247-3823

Michael Robbins, Superintendent •



May 6, 2024

Via email to: [REDACTED]

Deborah Simon
[REDACTED]

Re: Notice of Superintendent's Decision on Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of Instructional Materials ("What Girls Are Made Of" by Elana Arnold)

Dear Dr. Simon:

This letter is the notice pursuant to Administrative Regulation 1312.2 from the Superintendent of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District regarding your request to have the book "What Girls Are Made Of," written by Elana Arnold, published in 2017, withdrawn from use for all students.

In your request to have this book withdrawn from use for all students, you highlighted the following concerns about the book:

- "Vulgar language"
- "Graphic sexual encounters"
- "Tortured descriptions of sick, injured, and euthanized animals"
- "Blasphemous and twisted sexual references"
- "Graphic descriptions of gynecological exams and abortions"

The District's review committee met to discuss your concerns about "What Girls Are Made Of." The review committee acknowledges that "What Girls Are Made Of" may be a difficult book to read, the review committee is in full agreement that it should be kept on the shelves at Ketchikan High School. The review committee described that "What Girls Are Made Of" 'explores what it means to be a female today, through the lens of one 16 year old girl. Nina is struggling with a dysfunctional family, a break up with a boyfriend, and owning up to a terrible act of bullying. Required service at a dog shelter helps Nina begin to see her own value and gain a sense of self.'

The review committee noted that the concerns about vulgar language, graphic sexual content, and disturbing scenes are comment elements in modern literature. The review committee explained that "works on these topics are vitally important in

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supporting 'students personal needs and [enabling] them to make intelligent judgments in their daily lives.'

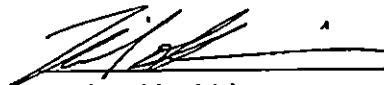
One review committee member noted: "Reading about Nina's experience may lead to our students protecting themselves from the sort of relationship that Nina found herself in – one that so often leads to disappointment. The story may result in conversations with peers, teachers, parents, friends and therefore this book should be available to our students. Do not remove it from our libraries."

The review committee noted the 'overwhelmingly high regard' for this book. Reviews of this book note that it "speaks deeply to what it means to be human, a young woman, and one who seeks to understand herself more fully."

I accept the recommendation of the review committee to retain "What Girls Are Made Of" by Elana Arnold in the Ketchikan High School library collection. This book will not be retained in the library collection of any other schools in the District.

Upon receipt of this decision, you are entitled to bring your request, as well as this decision and the report of the review committee, to the School Board for consideration and final decision. If you wish to bring your request to the School Board, please notify me in writing of your wish to do so.

Sincerely,
Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District



Michael Robbins
KGBSD Superintendent

Encl/as

cc: Rick Dormer, Principal, Ketchikan High School