

CUSTOMER COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK

1. Dear ImagineIF Librarians,

Thank you so much for being caring, resourceful community members who are dedicated to helping every patron.

When my family came to the Flathead Valley 11 years ago, one of the first places I stopped was the library. This was even before we officially moved in, and I wanted to see what resources you had for my homeschooling family. The librarians were so kind and thoughtful, answering all of my questions and even handing me a library card because I was a patron in a partner library. It was a lovely gesture during a difficult time for my family.

Since then, I have enjoyed library resources over and over, even though my children are almost all out of the house. I've held meetings in the community room, borrowed DVDs and dozens of books, had fun at trivia night, and more.

I was especially impressed at how the whole staff pulled together during the pandemic to help keep patrons of every age connected with staff and material. I was very sorry to hear about people being rude and aggressive when masks were required.

Thank you for your patience, your kindness, and your commitment to residents' freedom to access the information they want!

Cherilyn DeVries

2. Thank you for the great work you all are doing. I appreciate that you provide our community with books covering diverse viewpoints and perspectives. I love our library!

Jen

3. Dear Community,

Our family loves our local library. We have only been to ImagineIF in Kalispell, but we have always been a library-going family...in all of our communities. ImagineIF is different, though. It is by far the warmest, most accessible, enjoyable, best stocked library we have ever used. The librarians are friendly, patient, helpful and enthusiastic. Our kids have been able to take a full basket of books out of there every other week for years, and have never been disappointed. Talking to librarians has been an important experience for them as they work to gain real people skills...not using a device, but talking to a human to find the books they want, and being treated like what they are interested in matters.

The folks I've worked with at the library have also been engaged and invested in the larger community. When I was working with the Free the Seeds group, Megan and Deidre were an important part of getting the library involved and using it as a way to reach more folks in our area. It worked.

It would be a shame...worse than a shame, to lose these people - and the quality of our library - because of pay cuts, or undervaluing their education and experience. I really hope the Board, and other "powers that be" decide to provide a living and competitive wage for these folks...their morale and quality of life matters as much as everyone else who is getting paid more and more in this employees' job

market. Finding (and keeping) folks who care and are invested and engaged is not easy to do, and they deserve to be paid for what they bring to the table.

Sincerely,
Tawnya Rourke Kelly
on behalf of a family of avid readers and library(ian) lovers

4. To Whom it May Concern,
RE: MY HOOPLA

Oh no! I just called in because something was wrong with My Hoopla account, I could not borrow books. I was told that it had recently been discontinued.

I am grieved to hear this. I loved Hoopla and used it almost constantly.

I write to express my concern and hope that Flathead County ImagineIf seriously considers adding Hoopla back in the very near future if possible. I am sure this is a program missed by many.

Thank you for your consideration of this.

A lifetime Flathead County library cardholder,

Renee Windbigler

5. Hi Martha,

I recently became aware of the request to remove "Gender Queer" by Maia Kobabe from your lending library. Your Facebook post about the process was very informative. The library does such a great job at keeping our community informed, taking the time to listen to everyone, and standing up for our first amendment rights. Libraries are awesome. I'd like to see "Gender Queer" kept available for those who choose to check it out. Thank you, and all the folks at Imagine IF, for all your hard work!

Best wishes,

Carly Baumgarten
Kalispell

6. Dear Martha,

Thank you for supporting the freedom to access information, including literature regarding LGBTQ issues. Please stay vigilant against those who would promote censorship of our public libraries.

With Appreciation,
Rev. Jim Petersen

7. Hello Ms. Furman,

I'm hoping I'm among the more than many who are reaching out in support of NO censorship of LGBTQ books at Imagine If.

Once upon a time I was an uneducated young mother of 4 and part of a community that saw many things like this as harmful. Communities that support censorship like this in libraries are narrow minded and motivated by fearful stories. Not actually having the experiences that may be included in books as such. Therefore, motivation comes from abstract speculation. The very thing the LGBTQ community struggles against daily.

I sincerely hope we can protect ourselves from fear mongers and harmful censorship in our public libraries.

I appreciate your help with this matter.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Many thanks,
Olivia Stark She/They

8. To the Board of Trustees,

Thank you for spending your time considering the best path to take for our library and the community it serves. The choice of books our library offers is a reflection on the freedom from censorship we are fortunate to have. I hope you decide to continue to offer a non-biased selection of books that supports everyone in our community and trusts each person and family to make the best decision for themselves.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

Jessica Abney

9. To whom it may concern:

I am writing to express my sincere opposition to censorship of books in the Flathead County Library system, for adults or children, on the basis of inclusion of LGBTQ+ themes, characters, ideas, or stories.

Montana has long had an independent streak, where we celebrate the diversity of perspectives and find common ground though we might be on the opposite sides of the political aisle. Our libraries should reflect this diversity of perspectives.

Many of us, especially if we happen to be straight, will find ourselves depicted over and over again in the information housed in our library. Our LGBTQ+ neighbors, whether they be kids, teens, or adults, deserve the same kind of recognition. Censoring books with LGBTQ+ perspectives sends a clear message that LGBTQ+ folks don't deserve to see themselves reflected in our public services, that they do not belong here, and this narrowminded censorship is exactly counter to the pluralistic, neighborly respect that has, and should, define Montana politics.

Thank you,
David Steele

10. Dear Martha,

I'm writing to express my support for keeping Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe in circulation at ImagineIf Library. As a local parent of a nonbinary child and a gay child, both of whom grew up visiting the Columbia Falls library regularly, I know

how important it is for children to see representations of themselves in mainstream books, television shows and movies. This group of young people have one of the highest rates of suicide in our country and it's heartbreaking that many of them in our valley feel they are alone and misunderstood.

No one is forced to look at this book, or other LGBTQ+ books or materials. No one is forced to check them out. Reading them will not make a child gay or nonbinary. They don't promote hate speech or the betterment of one group at the expense of another. Starting down a path of removing these materials from circulation, or making them more difficult to access, is a dangerous step that will erode the ability of public libraries to provide unbiased resources for learning and understanding. Please stand firm to the principles on which our libraries were built and reject the request to remove this book and others like it.

Thank you,
Krista Conger

11. Hi my name is Kendra Matheros and I am a resident of Kalispell. I think it's very important for the LGBTQ books to be kept in circulation it is important not only for kids to be able to see themselves represented in things but for the community at large to learn to respect and be aware and kind to others in the community who may not be exactly like them.

Thank you for your time
Kendra

12. Board of Trustees and Library Staff:

Our public libraries exist to provide ALL community members with the written material and information that they seek. This freedom is guaranteed by the Montana and US Constitution. Censoring books interferes with these rights and doesn't represent the greater community.

Thank you for your continued commitment to literacy in our county. Our libraries are excellent!

Sincerely,
Denise Manning
Whitefish

13. I am writing to support the right to access information. It is of utmost importance that our public libraries provide access to materials that match personal interest. It is not a library's job to decide what a community is interested in or has access to; it is the library's job to provide access to a wide spectrum of materials so that every community member is able to explore varied interests.

The U.S. and Montana Constitution both guarantee the freedom to access and choose information. The board of trustees of a public library can not interfere with these rights.

Thank you for being responsible board members,
Allison Mitchell
Columbia Falls, MT

14. I support the Library's inclusion of the book *Gender Queer* because it is every American's legal right to express opinions and relate stories as well as to have them available through a public library. That right is open to all themes, perspectives, and persuasions. To limit that right out of fear, founded or not, is an infringement on all Americans.

The challenger certainly has the right to not read the book, but does not have the right to impose his or her own concerns on the rest of us. The Flathead Valley has people who are interested in the book, and there is no legal or moral reason to ban it from our library shelves.

Mike Cronin
Retired college English instructor

15. Dear ImagineIF Library Trustees,

The following is a letter that I sent to the county commissioners. As a long-time library patron, I am very concerned about national organizations' influence over our ImagineIF Libraries. It is clear that certain groups are telling their followers to pressure libraries to remove books, which is not only an attempt to censor materials, but it is a waste of valuable time and resources.

Our libraries should be a place where all patrons have the freedom to choose the materials they like. However, I am hearing that trustees are using the discussion about the book challenge to suggest that a group of community members should have the power to censor materials. Our wonderful, well-trained librarians have done an excellent job protecting people's freedom to access materials and building a diverse library collection. There is no reason to change that now, especially when censorship could trigger an expensive lawsuit for the county. No one is required to check out any book from the library. Please vote to protect every library patron's right to access materials. Thank you for your service.

Cherilyn DeVries

Dear County Commissioners,
As you are aware, there are two book challenges happening at the ImagineIF Libraries. I am writing to you because those challenges and other issues are being handled poorly by the library trustees that you appointed.

It is clear from the discussions during library board meetings that the newer trustees lack understanding about their responsibilities. During a discussion about their recent decision to lower the salary of the library director during a search for a new director, Heidi claimed not to be aware of the high cost of housing in the Flathead Valley. Recently, County Administrator Peter Melnick told Rotary members that the cost of housing is preventing the county from filling open positions. It would be helpful if the trustees were aware of this situation, too.

As for the book challenges, every citizen has the right to challenge a book. However, if the trustees vote to remove books based on the dubious reasons that have been given (the books aren't well written), this would certainly trigger lawsuits around censorship. As County Attorney Travis Ahner has stated in the past, lawsuits are not a good use of taxpayer funds, and I would suggest that the trustees should

be informed about their liability in this situation.

The ImagineIF Libraries are a treasure in the Flathead Valley and the state. The librarians work very hard to ensure every patron's freedom to access the materials they want, without regard for their political, economic, religious, or other affiliations. It is alarming to see that the commissioners appointed people to the library board who do not understand their responsibilities, the librarians' responsibilities, or how the library and public meetings work.

For your reference, here are legal decisions guaranteeing the freedom to access materials and rejecting censorship.

Cherilyn DeVries
Kalispell

1. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the right to receive information, See *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 521 U.S. 844, 117 S. Ct. 2329, 2346, 138 L. Ed. 2d 874 (1997) a fundamental right that is enjoyed by both adults and children. See, e.g., *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 867-68, 102 S. Ct. 2799, 73 L. Ed. 2d 435 (1982) (plurality opinion) (noting that "the right to receive ideas is a necessary predicate to the recipient's meaningful exercise of his own rights of speech, press, and political freedom"); *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Community Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 511, 89 S. Ct. 733, 21 L. Ed. 2d 731 (1969); *Campbell v. St. Tammany Parish Sch. Bd.*, 64 F.3d 184, 190 (5th Cir.1995); *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls, Tex.*, 121 F. Supp. 2d 530, 547 (N.D. Tex. 2000).
2. Government officials may not remove books from school library shelves "simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to `prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion.'" *Pico*, 457 U.S. at 872, 102 S. Ct. 2799 (quoting *West Virginia Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642, 63 S. Ct. 1178, 87 L. Ed. 1628 (1943)). See also, e.g., *Campbell*, 64 F.3d at 190 (same); *Sund*, supra.
3. It is unconstitutional for a government body to confer a "heckler's veto" on the complaining patrons, effectively permitting them to veto lawful, fully-protected expression simply because of their adverse reaction to it. The Supreme Court repeatedly has invalidated other "heckler's veto" regulations as antithetical to core First Amendment values. See, e.g., *Reno*, 117 S. Ct. at 2349 (noting that "heckler's veto" gives "broad powers of censorship" to "any opponent of indecent speech"); *Forsyth County v. Nationalist Movement*, 505 U.S. 123, 134-35, 112 S. Ct. 2395, 120 L. Ed. 2d 101 (1992) ("Speech cannot be ... burdened, any more than it can be punished or banned, simply because it might offend a hostile mob"); *Sund*, supra.
16. Thank you for your thoughtful and informative post. I'd like to express my opposition to censorship to your board. It is clearly a parent's responsibility, and not the library's, to determine which books their child reads. Adults are perfectly capable of selecting books based on their personal preferences.
Karlyn Gibbs

17. I am writing to hopefully provide balance to the disproportionately small number of vocal advocates for book banning and witch burning. I strongly believe that a library is not complete until everyone can find at least one book that they find offensive. Please continue your strongest efforts to provide access to all points of view, with special emphasis on supporting groups who are being persecuted by those who wield power.
18. Please don't give in to the homophobes on your review of the books. They won't stop there. A small but vocal minority can't be allowed to determine what the rest of us can read/see.
Thanks, Barney Stucker – Bigfork
19. What is next? Book burning! Please keep these and all "questionable" books on the shelves. Do not let some petty, ignorant, close-minded minority gain a foothold in our library. Kathleen Reiss
20. With reference to 11/18/21 Interlake article, PLEASE keep the books in question in your collection. Personally, I would like to see a lot LESS Christian content, for instance. But I am not marching in the streets about it. We need less censorship, not more, and ImagineIf is a bastion of "real news" in an increasingly dark climate here in the Flathead. I thank you.
21. I am sad that the library would consider banning books because a small few people find it offensive. It is pretty simple. If you don't personally like a book title, don't read it. Please leave the books on the shelf. Some of these books may be the only source of information that our teens may have access to. Dana Grove
22. Law requires if a book is to be removed, an inquiry must be made into the motivation and intention of the party calling for removal. If the party's intent is to deny access to ideas with which it disagrees, it is a violation to the first amendment! Mary Jo Gardner
23. I recently read an article in the Daily Inter Lake regarding "Gender Queer; A Memoir" and "Lawn Boy." I understand that some, perhaps many, people feel that these books are offensive to their moral compass. I'm going to imagine that there are many books at the library that I would find offensive as well. However, I am thankful that there are all sorts of people with all sorts of viewpoints and that each can find a book that resonates with them or teaches them about people very different from themselves. I would advise library patrons not to check out books they find offensive, but keep them on the shelf for those whom these books appeal. Thank you Imagine If Library for stocking the library with books and other materials for all sorts of people. Heidi Miller
24. I just wanted to send a note of support to the librarians for their choice of materials available to the public. Reading can be such a personal thing. Doing the work to research books and finding something for a diverse population is hard work. I appreciate you. Lynn Ritzdorf
25. in response to the Daily Interlake editorial of Nov. 21st, I support our freedom of access to information through the library. This is best achieved by the work of trained information professionals and not the view of a few who are offended.

What is the old quote? If you don't offend at least some, your focus is too narrow. Keep up your defense of professional selection of library materials. Lawrence "Max" Maxwell

26. Please continue to offer books that speak to all people in our community. By considering a ban on queer books, we are telling queer community members that they need to be censored, that they are not welcome, and that is not ok. If people do not want to read the books, then they should not check them out. Leave the enrichment to those of us who seek and appreciate it. Thank you for NOT banning books! Donivee Randall-Jones
27. I am writing in support of the two books *Gender Queer* and *Lawn Boy* remaining within the library's collection. There is already a paucity of literature within the library for underrepresented communities/groups in the Flathead Valley. The books offer diverse reading material that students with underrepresented identities could relate to and serve an important role in increasing tolerance and acceptance within our community. David Smith
28. The decision to include "*Gender Queer: A Memoir*" and "*Lawn Boy*" were made by professional librarians in their continuous attempt in a multiplex world to be responsible to our varied citizen's right to freely access information. I think that Imagine If does incredible work in meeting the needs of all of our community and I want to support their efforts to continue free from government, religious or political views. Thank you Imagine If for all the big and little ways you welcome each of your patrons and invite us to be curious, be uncomfortable at times and learn about our world in all its facets so we can make educated choices for our ALL of us. Imagine If exemplifies open heart, open mind and it is needed now more than ever! Don't ban books. Margaret Strainer
29. Dear ImagineIf Board of Directors, Thank you for the valuable service you provide for the library patrons of this valley. I appreciate the time and energy it takes to serve on a board.

I recently read about the controversy caused by several gender identity books on the shelves of the public library. I hope you persevere to keep these books on the shelves. Nobody is requiring that they be read - it's personal choice. The public library should always be a place to research or discover new ideas. If parents don't want their children to read these books then it's up to them to keep an eye on what their children's eyes touch - that's not the role of the public library. Please keep, and expand the selection of books that expose "alternative" lifestyles. It's our best chance at understanding differences and bridging gaps that cause discord. Thank you, Lisa McKeon
30. Dear Trustees: I am a retired former Kalispell teacher and mental health counselor who has learned that two books held at our local Imagine If Library, *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison and *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, have recently been challenged by individuals who may have been influenced by a video that went viral. Like any public library, the mission of our own Imagine If Library is to provide fair access to books and information, endeavoring in all ways to uphold the First Amendment of the Constitution. To censure these particular books, ones that have been added to our library's collection after careful consideration by professional librarians holding advanced degrees in collection management, due to the personal convictions of patrons, is antithetical to our library's mission. As a trustee of the county library, I

beseech you to uphold this mission and the First Amendment, and to encourage any detractors to avail themselves of library staff assistance and their own adult supervisory responsibilities when selecting books appropriate for their children. Sincerely, Robin Graham

31. Dear Pam, Brad, and Randy,

I am writing to express my concern about recent attempts to censor available books at our public library. As a Flathead County resident, I deserve the freedom to access information at my local library without interference or censorship from community members who may not like the content of a book. Libraries are intended to be used and enjoyed by all. If the Library Trustees unwisely try to censor books, they will likely be involved in lawsuits that will challenge their misguided actions. It is incumbent on you to ensure that constitutionally protected rights remain for all residents of Flathead County. I appreciate your time. Sincerely, Michele Tohtz