

Dear Community,

ImagineIF Libraries staff is aware of a national conversation involving two books held in our library system: *Gender Queer* (2019) by Maia Kobabe and *Lawn Boy* (2018) by Jonathan Evison. After a video of a parent at a school board meeting went viral, libraries across the country have received requests to remove the two titles.

These books were at schools in Texas and Virginia and started a parent conversation over whether they are appropriate for school-aged children to access. Both of the books are in our adult collection.

We have a formal request to remove one of these books, *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. I want you to know about our collection development process and how we handle complaints and requests for removal.

I imagine you might be thinking the following:

“Those books are dangerous and inappropriate and need to be removed.”

“I think you just should put these books behind a desk, then people can just ask for them if they want them.”

“Why are you spending money on these books with this terrible content but not some others that you should obviously own?”

“Children should not be able to check out these books, and where they are right now anyone can get to them.”

“Who buys these books for the library, and does the community get any say in what gets purchased?”

“There is an underlying political agenda infiltrating the library system.”

“The library caters more to one part of the community over the other.”

“The library has more books focused on gay subject matter than other types of subjects.”

How does the library select books and other items?

I have the responsibility to protect the public's right to freely access information, that is, free from interference from government, religious or political views.

The library is obligated to provide a wide range of views, including those that may be considered unorthodox or unpopular.

I understand that content contained in many books in our collection can upset and disturb patrons. Encountering a book that violates one's own worldview can cause feelings of stress, sadness, surprise and anger. Yet the library needs to provide free access to our current materials so you can make up your own minds.

Materials are selected by highly trained library professionals who select a diverse array of materials to serve the whole community. Professional librarians are trained to identify and overcome their own personal biases in order to select materials fairly.

Professional librarians have a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science. While obtaining their degree, they take at least one semester-long course, and sometimes several subject matter courses, on collection management.

These classes cover organizational models for managing collections; planning, policy and budgeting; developing collections including how to fairly select materials; managing collections; marketing and outreach; collection analysis including evaluation and assessment; and cooperative collection development and resource sharing among libraries.

The supervisor of the ImagineIF Collection Services department has the system-wide responsibility for overseeing the selection and maintenance of all materials and formats within the collection of the library, with additional professional staff selecting for certain collection areas. This responsibility is monitored by the Library Director and Assistant Director, and is delegated to these individuals as a result of their education, training, experience, and job classification.

As a snapshot, here is a rough breakdown of how many LGBTQ+ titles and Christianity related titles we hold at ImagineIF Libraries, and how much of the collection they represent.

LGBTQ+ Titles: 626 Items in our Collection, 0.6% of all Collections
Christianity Titles: 2107 Items in our Collections, 1.5% of all Collections

As another example, here is a rough breakdown of our adult fiction collections.

Adult Fiction (general): 6414 Total Items, 43% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Horror: 247 Total Items, 2% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Inspirational: 1300 Total Items, 9% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Mystery: 2324 Total Items, 15% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Romance: 915 Total Items, 6% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Sci-Fi: 1042 Total Items, 7% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Thriller: 2607 Total Items, 17% of Adult Fiction Collection
Adult Western: 211 Total Items, 1% of Adult Fiction Collection

What are my rights?

The public library is responsible for protecting every library patron's First Amendment right to read, view and listen to library resources.

Members of the public also have the right to express complaints about library materials, which is another fundamental way the library upholds your First Amendment guarantee to free speech.

Books and other materials are purchased by trained library professionals at ImagineIF according to selection criteria as follows, as stated in our Collection Development Policy:

- Customer demand and interest
- Critical reviews
- Presentation and readability
- To balance of all sides of an issue
- Author's reputation and significance as a writer
- Reputation and standing of the publisher
- Local or national significance

- Availability of the material or information elsewhere
- Quality of the physical format
- Reasonable cost

If there is a book we are missing from the collection, we want to know about it. We will always do our best to add requested titles if they are available for us to purchase.

How do you protect children from harm?

I know that parents are very concerned about protecting their children. I would never want to take away a parent's freedom or right to protect their children. That is why library staff rely on parental supervision for their children's library use. Because all families are different, every parent or guardian has the right to choose for their own family what is appropriate.

In a school library, the situation differs somewhat because parents generally do not accompany their children while selecting materials. At the public library, parents can monitor their child's check outs and ask for help from library staff to determine whether a title will be appropriate for their child.

Our staff is available to research whether a title will fit a parent's requirements, and we always recommend that parents read a book first before giving it to a child.

How can I participate in the process to choose items?

I appreciate hearing from patrons about specific titles they want to see in the library, and those they don't like. Importantly, it helps us gauge community interest and taste and helps us shape the collection.

The library can also add most books to our collection via patron request. You may speak with any staff member or submit a request for a book or other item on our website.

You can read the whole Collection Management Policy and Appendices by following these links. The appendices come from the American Library Association, the national organization that works to make sure libraries protect every person's fundamental rights under the Constitution.

- imagineiflibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/5000-Collection-Management-approved-10-25-17.pdf
- imagineiflibraries.org/policy/freedom-to-view-statement/
- imagineiflibraries.org/policy/library-bill-of-rights/
- imagineiflibraries.org/policy/the-freedom-to-read-statement/

What if I think a book needs to be removed, labeled or restricted?

The process for handling complaints about materials is stated in the policy and also copied here:

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant will be asked to fill out and return a written and signed Citizen Comment on Library Materials Form. This form may be obtained from any ImagineIF staff member. In the absence of a fully completed form there is no formal complaint and no action will be taken. After the library director has received a fully completed written complaint, she or he shall establish a review committee to investigate the complaint. The committee's recommendation is then presented to the Library Board of Trustees for a final decision.

Right now, I am establishing a review committee to investigate the complaint about the book Gender Queer. I expect to have a recommendation for the Board at a future board meeting, after our professional staff review the material per the process stated in our policy.

Please reach out to me with questions or concerns. It is my duty to understand and respond to community concerns. Is there something I missed?

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