

### Story 3: School Librarian

I do find myself self-censoring when ordering books occasionally, especially graphic novels. I'm in a high school in Arkansas, where self-censoring stories and challenges are both prevalent. I want to buy graphic novels and comics from Vertigo and Dark Horse comics, but worry that visual images will attract more negative attention than the same sexual or violence content in purely text form. I am lucky to have a highly intelligent, well-read student population, and I think they would love access to Fables and V for Vendetta and texts like that - but don't buy them because I worry about the repercussions. I usually quash that self-censoring when it comes to novels, but then again recently I denied a student request to buy Sookie Stackhouse novels because of the content.

Part of my trepidation comes from the fact that I do have students from conservative backgrounds who complain to me when a novel has a "bad language", let alone sex or violence, and I feel like I'd have to keep track of who checks out what and warn the students I know are sensitive to content when they try to check out a book that might upset them. I do wonder how often this happens in school libraries, and whether librarians feel the need to protect specific students and use self-censoring as a way of making it easier to avoid upsetting students.

# From the Field: Librarians talk about Self-Censorship

## Story 1: Youth Services Librarian

I have a personal example of self-censorship, a very recent one. Sometime in January I read LIVING DEAD GIRL (LDG) one of the most disturbing books I have read in a very long time. For the second time in my career (and I know there was a first time, but I'm blessed if I can remember when or what) I thought about not putting a book on the shelf.

"This book is too disturbing."

"This book is horrifying." "This book will cause nightmares."

and finally "This book makes me uncomfortable as hell." Hold on.

Wait a minute. What did you just think?

I re-read the book. It wasn't any easier the second time around, but I must say that LDG is absolutely brilliant. Without graphic language, with incredible intensity, brilliant character development and a deceiving simplicity this novel brings to life a horror that no child should have to experience. This is an incredible piece of writing. I buy multiple copies of "A Child Called It" and "Go Ask Alice" and other books that are not even close to being

this well-written. This novel, no matter how uncomfortable it makes me, deserves a place on these shelves because the writing is superlative and the subject matter significant.

So LDG is on the YA shelves. On display. With my post-it note on the front that says "This one took me way out of my comfort zone, ripped out my heart and put it through a trash compactor. Tell me what you think." We need to talk our selves through these moments. We know better. All of us.

## Story 2: School Librarian

I work very hard to be open in my selection process, but this year I have been challenged a couple of times at the behest of a parent, my principal asked me to remove a book from my collection and my assistant principal encouraged me not to put a book in the collection.

The first situation occurred when I received some books from a publisher due to my work on Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers Committee. The book, *Art of Modern Rock: Mini #1: A-Z* by Dennis King has images of numerous rock posters with some showing cartoon posters with women's breasts/nipples showing. The parent complained that I had a whole

collection of these (she was actually referring to my graphic novel collection). My principal went so far as to tell me that given my issues (I made a chain of command error earlier in the year, secondly and had deigned to talk to the press last summer about school library funding problem in regard to the state's manner of funding us); he went so far as to say that I was lucky that if she had gone to the district with this he had no doubt that I would have been reassigned back to the classroom.

After that meeting, I pulled some of my graphic novels to take a closer look, after about a month I calmed down internally and put them back out. I don't carry anything over Teen.

The second book, *Body Drama* by Amanda Redd is another book I received from my Quick Pick committee participation. It is an incredible book but has some pictures of genitalia, butts, backs, and breasts. I sent it home with a student, whose father is a doctor, and he sent it back and hoped it would be put into the collection. But with my position being somewhat precarious, I took it to my Assistant Principal and he glanced through it and suggested that I give it to the Public Library due to my present situation so as to avoid bigger problems.