

BRIDGMAN PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOOK CHALLENGE POLICY
Bridgman Public Library Joint Board of Directors

1. Purpose:

The Bridgman Public Library (hereafter referred to as “The Library”) and The Board of Directors (hereafter referred to as “The Board”) believe in freedom of information for all, and will not practice censorship. The selection of library materials is based on the patron's right to read and the freedom from censorship by others. The Board recognizes that a collection of diverse materials may result in some complaints or requests for reconsideration.

2. The Library’s Policy:

- A. The Library and The Board fully endorse the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights (Appendix A), Freedom to Read Statement (Appendix B), and Freedom to View Statement (Appendix C).
- B. The Library views the choice of reading and viewing materials as a purely individual matter. Patrons are free to reject books and other materials of which they do not approve but patrons may not exercise censorship to restrict the freedom of others.
- C. Responsibility for materials selected and read, heard, or viewed by children and adolescents rests with their parents or legal guardians.
- D. No items will be sequestered to control access to the community.
- E. A formal process for handling challenges, detailed below, will be followed to assure that challenges are handled in an attentive and consistent manner.

3. Book Challenge Procedure:

A. Patron complaint

- a. Individuals or groups may initiate complaints about specific materials in the collection by talking to a member of the Library staff or emailing the Director.
- b. The staff member or the Director should offer a copy of this policy and a *Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials* form (attached to this policy), and explain the formal complaint procedure.
- c. No further action is taken by the Library at this point.

B. Acknowledgement of Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Form

- a. All *Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials* forms should be given directly to the Director by Library Staff.
- b. Once received by the Director, the request shall be acknowledged by letter. This letter will contain copies of this policy and the Collection Development Policy.
- c. The Director will notify The Board of any formal complaints, usually through the Director’s Monthly Report. Email may also be used if the Board Meeting is more than two (2) weeks in the future.
- d. If the complainant has checked out the item, no further action will be taken until said item is returned to the Library.

C. Evaluation of Library Materials

- a. The Director will form a Review Panel of five (5) individuals. Three (3) persons will be from The Board and two (2) will be Library Staff.

- b. The Review Panel will:
 - i. Read, listen to, or view the material in its entirety.
 - ii. Review the material in relationship to the Library's Collection Development Policy and the rest of the collection; and
 - iii. Consider what literary critics and reviewers think of the material.
- c. After coming to their own individual conclusions, the Review Panel will meet with the Director to discuss the material and recommend one (1) of the following actions with reference to the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom:
 - i. Retain the challenged material in the collection
 - ii. Retain the challenged material, but move it to another location
 - iii. Withdraw the challenged material

D. Notification of Decision

- a. The Library Director will notify The Board of the Review Panel's decision.
- b. The Director will write a letter to the complainant stating the decision of The Library, as well as the reasoning behind the decision.
- c. The letter will include the steps the complainant may take if they are unsatisfied with the decision made by the Review Panel.

E. Reconsideration by the Library Board of Trustees

- a. If the complainant is not satisfied with the written decision of the Review Panel and Director, he or she may bring the matter to The Board.
- b. To initiate consideration by The Board, the complainant must write a letter to the Library Director or President of The Board and request that the matter be placed on the agenda of the next regular meeting. The letter must be received at least two (2) weeks prior to the next regular meeting of The Board. If received after that time, the matter may be deferred until the next regular meeting.
- c. The President of the Board, or his/her designee, shall acknowledge receipt of the complainant's letter in writing, and shall include the date, time, and place of the meeting at which the matter will be considered. All Board meetings are open to the public.
- d. Once the *Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials* is on the agenda, The Board shall decide by a majority vote of the members present whether it wishes to further consider the *Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials*.
 - i. If The Board votes to consider the matter further, another Review Panel will be selected to evaluate the challenged material and the matter is placed on the agenda for the next regular meeting.
 - ii. If The Board does not vote to consider the request further, the matter is closed.
- e. The decision of The Board is final.

Appendix A

Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.
- VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.

Appendix B

Freedom to Read Statement

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. *It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority.*

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. *Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.*

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. *It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. *There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.*

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. *It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous.*

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.*

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.*

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

Appendix C

Freedom to View Statement

The FREEDOM TO VIEW, along with the freedom to speak, to hear, and to read, is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. In a free society, there is no place for censorship of any medium of expression. Therefore, these principles are affirmed:

1. To provide the broadest access to film, video, and other audiovisual materials because they are a means for the communication of ideas. Liberty of circulation is essential to insure the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression.
2. To protect the confidentiality of all individuals and institutions using film, video, and other audiovisual materials.
3. To provide film, video, and other audiovisual materials which represent a diversity of views and expression. Selection of a work does not constitute or imply agreement with or approval of the content.
4. To provide a diversity of viewpoints without the constraint of labeling or prejudging film, video, or other audiovisual materials on the basis of the moral, religious, or political beliefs of the producer or filmmaker or on the basis of controversial content.
5. To contest vigorously, by all lawful means, every encroachment upon the public's freedom to view.

Statement of Concern About Library Resources at Bridgman Public Library

The Bridgman Public Library Joint Board of Directors, hereafter referred to as The Board, has delegated the responsibility for collection development to the Library Director. If you wish to request reconsideration of library materials, please return this completed form to: Bridgman Public Library, Library Director, 4460 Lake Street, Bridgman, MI 49106 or to any Library employee. The materials referred to on this form will be reviewed and you will be informed of the results. This review does not automatically result in withdrawal of the material(s).

PLEASE PRINT:

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____ HOME CELL (Please circle one)

Do you represent: Self? _____ Organization? _____ Today's date _____

Resource to be reconsidered:

Book ___ Periodical ___ Movie ___ Audio Book ___ Newspaper ___ Other _____

Title _____

Author/Producer _____

What brought this resource to your attention?

Have you examined (read / viewed / listened to) the entire resource? _____

If not, what portions have you examined? _____

What concerns you about this resource? (use back and additional pages if necessary)

Are there resource(s) you can suggest to provide additional information (such as reviews) and /or other viewpoints on this topic? _____

