

SWITCH
AROUND
THE
GRAMMAR



Ain't That a Shame

What to do when bad grammar happens to good characters

A parent of a second grader was upset by the bad grammar used in the "Junie B. Jones" series. What should I tell her?

The "Junie B. Jones" series is easy to read and extremely funny—no wonder emerging readers love it. Explain to the parent that the dialogue simply reflects the age of the main character. Most five- and six-year-olds haven't mastered the rules of grammar—and neither has Junie B. You might encourage the parent and child to read aloud together one of the books. Then, suggest that the parent read aloud the same story, this time using proper grammar in place of the offending phrases: How do those changes affect the book's tone and humor? That's a great way for parents and children to see how language and dialogue are used in literature. Maybe that activity will help the parent see Junie B. through the eyes of a young reader.

Our public library has a large graphic novel collection. But lately, some of our staff have complained that many of the graphic novels are demeaning to women. How do I deal with that?

Remind them that graphic novels are selected using the same standards that apply to other library materials. Also remind them that before you order them, you consult reviews in established review resources, such as *School Library Journal* and *Booklist*.

Of course, some graphic novels are serials; so libraries may subscribe to them just as they do magazines. Just because a patron or staff member is offended by a particular article or ad in a specific issue of a magazine, that doesn't mean the library should cancel its subscription. I grew up reading Archie comic books, featuring Veronica and Betty, who were portrayed as being large busted and flirtatious. But I never saw this as demeaning. I simply looked forward to the next issue. The comic books of my youth have given birth to today's graphic novels, which have become a serious art form. In fact, one of them, Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (First Second, 2006), was the winner of the 2007 Printz Award, honoring excellence in young adult literature. Young readers have embraced graphic novels—it's time for librarians to do the same.

We've observed Banned Books Week for years, but our new principal wants us to discontinue the practice. She doesn't feel that Banned Book activities are curriculum based and fears they may actually lead to more challenges. How can I help her see the importance of this special week?

Many school administrators need to be convinced that Banned Books Week is important. Let your principal know that the purpose of the observance is to make Americans aware of their First Amendment rights. You'll also want to explain that although the titles featured in the American Library Association's Banned Books Week materials have been challenged, most of them have never been banned. That's largely due to the efforts of librarians, booksellers, and the national sponsors of Banned Books Week, who have defended our freedom to read.

Every school in our nation teaches its students about the United States Constitution—so Banned Books Week is applicable to your curriculum. Ask a social studies and language arts teacher to help you develop Banned Books Week activities. That type of teamwork may help change your principal's mind.

Our faculty doesn't understand the differences among a censored book, a banned book, and a challenged book. Can you please give me a simple explanation to share with them?

A book is censored when someone alters or blacks out its words or visual images because they disapprove of the message. For example, in some instances, markers have been used to "clothe" nude images in library art books. Those are blatant acts of censorship. A banned book is one that has been removed from a library or classroom because an individual or committee doesn't think that patrons should have access to it. A challenged book is one whose content has been questioned. Schools and libraries should have a policy that deals with challenged materials. In most cases, these titles remain in the library until the challenge has been resolved.

Pat Scales is a spokesperson for First Amendment issues and a former member of the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee. You can send your questions or comments on censorship to her at pscales@bellsouth.net.

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