

LibraryCrunch

Service for the Next Generation Library: A Library 2.0 Perspective by Michael Casey

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Tales of a Fourth Grade Book Banning

From the [Sunday NY Times](#) comes this sad story.

The word "scrotum" does not often appear in polite conversation. Or children's literature, for that matter.

Yet there it is on the first page of "[The Higher Power of Lucky](#)," by Susan Patron, this year's winner of the Newbery Medal, the most prestigious award in children's literature.

The inclusion of the word has shocked some school librarians, who have pledged to ban the book from elementary schools, and reopened the debate over what constitutes acceptable content in children's books.

It's always sad to see librarians wanting to "ban" anything, but it's especially sad when it's a Newbery winner that uses not slang or vulgarity but an accurate word representing a part of the human male anatomy. But hey, really, fourth graders shouldn't and don't know anything about gender differences or body parts or sex or... (EDIT: and if you think I'm serious then I have this bridge for real cheap...).

And then the writer goes on to say:

If it were any other novel, it probably would have gone unnoticed, unordered and unread. But in the world of children's books, winning a Newbery is the rough equivalent of being selected as an Oprah's Book Club title.

Umm, I'm not so sure that fifty years from now people will be saying that some book was an Oprah book the same way we say books are Newbery or Caldecott winners. Perhaps the writer is overestimating Oprah's depth here?

Posted by Michael on February 17, 2007 09:48 PM | [Permalink](#)

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It's too bad that this is such an issue, scrotum is a body part and nothing more. We the adults are the ones who make such a huge deal and make the word offensive. Leave the book alone kids will not be the worse for it, only when we ban books are children deprived of something.

Posted by: Patty Langley | [February 18, 2007 09:01 AM](#)

Give me a break - these days children know more than adults about the difference between the male and female anatomy. I see nothing wrong with "the word" as it is a correct term. Would you rather the author had written, "bitten in the balls" because that is what a 10 year old would probably actually say. Trying to ban it is actually going to cause more kids to want to read it. They aren't naive.

Posted by: Gail | [February 18, 2007 09:05 AM](#)

I agree with Gail. Better to teach children the correct terms for body parts, in a nonthreatening way. OR, I guess they can continue to learn them in the locker room....nuts, balls, sack; and be embarrassed about something that is completely normal. Heaven forbid that a teacher would not want to teach "that vocabulary lesson"! Thank heaven my daughter is not being taught by these repressed individuals.

Posted by: Susan Stearns | [February 18, 2007 09:38 AM](#)

" a 10 year old shouldnt know the difference between genders " thats whats wrong with our children today we keep them in the dark until its to late then when they find out on there own and

experiment and get pregnant at 12 yrs old and then we wonder why? would you rather the child learn the slang and vulgar terms of the human anatomy and believe me they will hear it in school or on the street, I'd rather have them learn the medical terms and to let them know to not be ashamed of their bodies or not to know the differences between boys & girls is assinine at 10 years old, and to ban a book on 1 word that was used in a true scenario not just put in there to get shock value as 1 person suggested and to compare this writer as a Howard Stern-esque shock if I was the writer of the book I'd bring a suit for slander and defamation of character this person needs to look before they leap when they compare a person to a excuse my language but a jackass like Howard Stern my opinion. This sounds like another great classic called Fahrenheit 451 where all books are blamed for the world's woes so all books are burned wake up people this is 2007 not the dark ages. This country was based on freedoms to express beliefs and points of view but this country is losing more of its freedoms every day it's even gotten worse since 9/11, what ever happened to majority rules now its minorities rule every freak or outter frindge lunatic can dictate what we can and can't talk about like religion or how we raise our children, Thomas Jefferson said we should have a peaceful revolution every 20 years its long overdue for another one, time to put these politicians and these minority groups in their place once and for all and bring back this country by the people and for the people not for the politicians or the lunatic frindge. And that's my opinion you don't like it that's your choice and I'll die fighting for your right to disagree will the lunatic frindge.

Posted by: paul moholland | [February 18, 2007 09:50 AM](#)

My 6 year old knows the proper terms for his own genitalia, and certainly by 10 years old they should know the names for both male and female and the difference. In fact, my 2 year old uses the word penis! I refuse to have my kids making up assinine words for things, when there are perfectly good, CLEAN, clinical, English words for them. I can understand teachers/librarians/educators squirming at having to explain what the scrotum is to those unfortunate kids whose parents chose to misinform their children, but that's why you explain to the child asking that he/she should ask their parents and let them squirm for their own mistakes! OR better yet, point the child to a dictionary! Not enough kids know how to use one these days, and "scrotum" is in there! Are people going to ban the dictionary too?!?!? Get a life people. Kids have to learn somewhere... shouldn't it be from people who love them enough to tell them the truth?

Posted by: Kitty | [February 18, 2007 11:03 AM](#)

Paul, I'm afraid I'm a part of your lunatic fringe! I was being sarcastic when I said "But hey, really, fourth graders shouldn't and don't know anything about gender differences or body parts or sex or...". For what it's worth, I agree that we're losing far too many liberties today.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [February 18, 2007 04:58 PM](#)

If the book wasn't appropriate for children, it would not have been awarded the Newberry in the first place. The people who gave the award obviously didn't set out to cause problems or make children more ornery than usual (aren't the people on the Newberry committee all children's librarians who deal with kids every day?) Silly. Scrotum, scrotum, scrotum.

One more thing--I did a paper in library school on Oprah's Book Club, and I have to say, I don't think the author is overestimating the cultural significance of OBC. I'm not particularly a fan of it, but after studying the club, I do recognize the impact it has had on reading society.

Posted by: Melissa | [February 18, 2007 08:52 PM](#)

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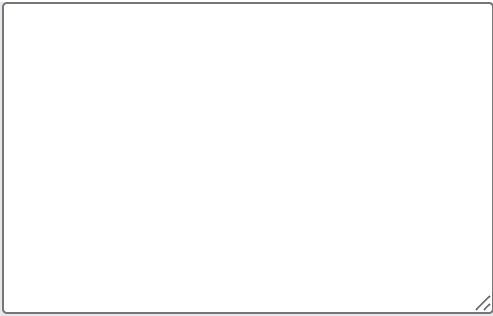
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