

MCPS has more issues than bedbugs

Wednesday, April 6, 2016 at 12:37 pm



Alexander Campbell

Editor's note: This guest column includes some graphic content that is not suitable for young readers.

Several weeks ago when the news of bed bugs hit the community children were immediately pulled from the Marion County High School. But, what if I was to tell you that the Marion County Public School system has a much more serious problem than mere bed bugs? What if I were to tell you that what the school system has allowed to be taught and read in the libraries and in the classroom equates to mental pornography!

In our society more and more things are becoming sex oriented. After all "sex sells." Simply look at some of the billboards in Louisville, the ads on our television, and the movies that are being aimed at children. There are all sorts of sexual innuendo! While these are things that big corporations are using to sell their product to the adult population these shouldn't be things that the local school system allows to be taught to our young people!

Let's just think about this according to the facts for the moment, which you won't get from your school system. The CDC reported in 2013 that, "47 percent [of high school students] had ever had sexual intercourse." That "34 percent had had sexual intercourse during the previous three months, and, of these 41 percent did not use a condom the last time they had sex." Also, the CDC notes that only "15 percent had had sex with four or more people during their life." Clearly, among the

teenage population there is no ignorance of what sex is, because this has already become an epidemic!

Thus, this is why I believe that the school system, the teachers involved, the principals and the superintendent need to be shamed. They should be the ones to make sure that books are screened of this garbage. And to show you just how bad some of this stuff is a book that high schoolers are reading (Looking For Alaska by John Green) talks about all types of sexual and graphic material! Not to mention that the students are reading this aloud. This isn't the only book available but it is one I want you to notice.

The "F" word is used 16 times, the "Sh" word is used 27 times. One scene on page 126 and 127 in the book goes like this, "Lara unbuttoned my pants and pulled down my boxers a little and pulled out my penis. 'Wow' she said." Then it proceeds to state that oral sex then was performed. All of this is in detail. Now let me ask you something, what do you think is going to go through the mind of a young man with hormones racing through his body as he sits in the middle of class?

Another scene in the book discusses the finding of a sex tape where it goes into detail of the event, take for example this quote, "We ran with it to the TV room, closed the blinds, locked the door, and watched the movie. It opened with a woman standing on a bridge with her legs spread while a guy knelt in front of her, giving her..." I won't post the rest of it, I'm sure reasonable adults know what is happening here. Is this really what schools are teaching our young people?

And we wonder why our teens are getting pregnant, why our young men can't keep their pants zipped? Sex is being glorified from the big corporations to the small town school system. The Marion County Public School system should be ashamed that they have allowed such a thing to go unnoticed.

Parents, faith leaders of Marion County, it is unacceptable that school officials have allowed sexually explicit books and materials to be allowed into the library and into the classroom. We wonder why our youth are troubled, maybe part of it is because the schools think parents are too dumb and stupid to know what's best. My warning to you, parents, you better rise up now, you better stand up for your child now and for the others in that classroom! Do you want your daughter to be in the mind of that young boy as he is reading about these scenes? And parents do you want your son thinking these things about that young lady sitting across the room as these things are read? Whatever we put into the heart and the mind will eventually come out. These are not things that need to be put into the hearts of our young people. I am ashamed of MCPS, and I am down right angry that these people have ignored the well being of our children! Will these untrustworthy, godless teachers lose their jobs? Probably not... but that's political correctness for you!

Editor's note: Alexander Campbell is a resident of the City of Lebanon.

Free people read freely

Wednesday, April 6, 2016 at 12:38 pm



Kim Hardin MCHS Media Specialist

Editor's note: This column was written in response to Alexander Campbell's guest column.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the preeminent Founding Fathers, once said, "Without freedom of thought, there can be no such thing as Wisdom; and no such thing as public Liberty, without Freedom of Speech." As a publisher and writer, Franklin was no stranger to controversy. Certainly, the ruling British authority of the time took much offense at Franklin's writings. Yet, Franklin believed so profoundly in the freedom to seek knowledge that he said, "If all printers were determined not to print anything until they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed." Franklin's younger fellow revolutionary, Thomas Jefferson, said that without the freedom to write and read as we please, liberty itself could be lost. A study of Jefferson's own book collection shows his voracious appetite for reading. He read widely, including from authors with whom he may have disagreed. Jefferson was certainly a fan of the classics including Socrates. Literature, both classic and modern, by its nature makes us uncomfortable. Socrates, one of the original classics, compared himself to a gadfly, making the people of Athens uncomfortable and forcing them to confront some of the ugly realities of their city. Unfortunately for Socrates, the First Amendment was a couple of thousand years in the future, and he was put to death. In the United States if someone disagrees with the written word or finds it uncomfortable to look at the messiness of the human condition, they don't force the author to drink hemlock, as Socrates was forced to do. They have the freedom to simply not read. The Founders would argue that intellectual

freedom, even when uncomfortable, is far better than the alternative. Jefferson would argue to read well is to read broadly. Don't take my word for it, look at his bookshelf.

Engaging in literature that makes us uncomfortable does not mean we condone the actions we are reading about. Reading about a murder in *The Lebanon Enterprise* does not force us to murder. However, reading about a murder in Shakespeare forces us to confront the sometimes dark reality of the human condition. Because Mark Twain used the language of his day in *Huckleberry Finn*, doesn't mean he was an advocate for racism. To the contrary, he was shining a light on its ugly realities. Because Harper Lee described in blistering detail the injustices of the pre-civil rights south, doesn't mean she condoned those injustices. In fact, she was abhorred by them. George Orwell, in painting a picture of a totalitarian government wasn't glorifying totalitarianism, he was warning us of its dangers. *The Scarlett Letter* does not force us to engage in adultery. The book raises questions about who should throw the first stone.

Looking for Alaska, the book in question, is a young adult novel about grief, loss, and coming of age in a difficult, confusing world. John Green, the author, describes an awkward sex scene, not to encourage our teenagers to have sex, but rather, to caution against the hollowness of physicality without emotional connection and maturity. Like Mark Twain and Harper Lee, John Green presents us with a realistic portrayal of our times. Also, like Mark Twain and Harper Lee, he presents us with characters who are intelligent, thoughtful, brave, confused, and completely human. The teenagers in *Looking for Alaska* make bad decisions and suffer heart-breaking consequences. However, they are on a journey toward the wisdom of which Benjamin Franklin speaks so eloquently. Pudge, the main character, is challenged by his religion teacher to answer for himself "What is the nature of being a person? What is the best way to be a person? How did we come to be and what will become of us when we are no longer?" These are not the questions of vapid teenagers. These are the questions of the collective human experience we all grapple with and that give meaning to our lives. Our teenagers, like the teenagers in *Looking for Alaska*, are capable of participating in this pursuit for a meaningful life.

Looking for Alaska won the Printz Award for excellence in young adult literature. *Looking for Alaska* was also in the 2006 Top Ten Books for Young Adults. The book is critically acclaimed, widely read, and is in the process of being made into a major motion picture. Having said all that, a student at Marion County High School, does NOT have to read the book. Students can opt out and read a book of their choosing. We trust our young adults and their parents to decide for themselves to read or not to read the book. Laurie Followell, MCHS English teacher of 26 years, tells her students, "There is a book for everyone. If it's not your book, put it down." Really, it's that simple.

Supreme Court Justice and wounded Civil War veteran Oliver Wendell Holmes said that, "If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other, it is the principle of free thought — not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate." Our Founders decided in 1776 that allowing one man to think for the rest of us was a concept whose time was gone. Monarchies and dictatorships don't trust their citizens to choose what they want to read or what they don't want to read. Thomas Jefferson ended our ties with a monarchy with a piece of controversial writing, *The Declaration of Independence*. I'm sure when George III read it he was a bit uncomfortable. After 240 years of free speaking, free writing, and free reading, Americans have proven Jefferson right. In short, "free people read freely."

Editor's note: Kim Hardin is the media specialist at Marion County High School.

Author John Green supports local teacher

Wednesday, April 6, 2016 at 12:39 pm

Editor's Note: John Green wrote this post on Facebook on Friday, April 1

I'm always thrilled to hear about schools that use my books in their classrooms and so I was delighted that a teacher at Marion County High School chose to teach *Looking for Alaska* to her senior English class. The teacher sent a permission form home to parents and this semester a parent opted out for their student, so that teacher provided a different reading assignment for that student.

Now those parents have been going to community members and school board members and reading only certain excerpts from the book claiming that it is "pornographic" and "erotic" without reading the whole book. The school board is facing pressure to remove the book from the classroom and the school. A letter will appear in the next edition of the local paper that says that the teacher responsible for teaching this "garbage" is "godless", "shameful", and "untrustworthy" and says that the teacher should lose her job.

This is not the first time *Looking for Alaska* has been challenged, nor will it be the last. ([youtube.com/fHMPtYvZ8tM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHMPtYvZ8tM) and [fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com/post/79459303763/paper-towns-and-looking-for-alaska-challenged](https://www.fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com/post/79459303763/paper-towns-and-looking-for-alaska-challenged) are just two examples.)

Please join me in emailing letters of support of the teacher at Marion County High School who has stood by the inclusion of *Looking for Alaska* in her curriculum. It's important to keep your letter as civil as possible, even if this kind of thing turns you into a giant squid of anger. To add your voice of support, please write a letter addressed to [the board of education or The Lebanon Enterprise].

I am so grateful to those at Marion County High School who have supported *Looking for Alaska* and understand that I am not out to corrupt teenagers, and who further understand the importance of reading books critically and thoughtfully as a whole, rather than focusing on individual scenes ripped from their context.

Thanks for supporting *Looking for Alaska* and thanks for being awesome.

Letters to the Editor - April 13, 2016

Wednesday, April 13, 2016 at 5:00 am (Updated: April 13, 5:03 am)

The other side of the story

First and foremost, I believe that the people of Lebanon are only hearing one side of the story when it comes to the actions that are currently being discussed in the English department at Marion County High School. I believe it's time to hear from a student. As a Marion County High School graduate and valedictorian of the 2013 class, I am blown away by the backlash towards the English department by some in our community. Every college student is busy, but I believe it is more important for me to address these concerns.

From walking into a seminar class my first semester at the University of Louisville, I was shocked by how many students were not prepared for a writing intensive and analytical course. The skills that were instilled in me by the English department prepared me to succeed. Every teacher at MCHS cares about his or her students and the community's future. The audacity to question whether or not the school had the best interest of the students is absurd. We are not children, nor are we naïve in what is constantly portrayed around us in media. To simply try to hide us from reality is to deprive us of the ability to mature and become adults in the community.

It is easy to pick out things to support one's own argument and ignore those that refute it. However, to clearly only provide one side of the story does the community injustice. Just recently in my developmental psychology course we learned that research actually also shows that teens who are the most susceptible to contract a sexually transmitted diseases have parents who tell their children about sex but tell them to avoid it! There are many facts and misconceptions when it comes to sexual education. To attempt to hide a subject or to pretend like it does not exist is something that would only promote fascination.

However, the true essence of this argument is based on censorship. To simply avoid reading a book that has language that society has deemed inappropriate is equivalent to having students walk down the hallway of the school with ear-plugs to avoid hearing these words. Some of the greatest novels ever to be written were controversial and spoke about contentious subjects. These books did not encourage behavior instead teaches students about human emotions, motivations, and consequences. Finding novels that students actually will read are challenges in themselves. To a high-school student choosing between the difficult language and syntax of Hamlet or a novel like Looking for Alaska written by the author who also authored The Fault in Our Stars is an easy choice.

Parents, do not think that we are incapable of understanding the meaning behind a book such as Looking for Alaska. To pick out scenes that do not capture the true essence of a novel is to take things out of context. The real political correctness is not censoring our students from subjects on the basis that we are offended but instead is to offer environments that foster critical thinking, discussion, and creativity. I stand with MCPS and the choices that they make for their students!

*Charles Shofner
Lebanon*

Support local teacher's choice

I thought Kim Hardin did a good job responding to the guest columnist re: choice of books students can read. I am not familiar with the book in question, but if Laurie Followell (whose name was in the article) is the teacher in question, I support her choice. I have known Laurie since she was a teenager and I trust her integrity and dedication as a teacher to reach her students. It doesn't sound like students were forced to read the book and that parents were given a choice to opt out for their child.

*Angie Mattingly
Loretto*

Books should broaden minds intellectually, not pornographically

As a parent/grandparent I am grateful for people who will stand in opposition of books in the school systems that subject our youth to profanity and pornography. I am appalled to learn this type of literature is being read aloud, discussed, and treated as normal classroom activity. These same behaviors, profanity, sexually explicit language and gestures are not allowed in the hallways and lunchroom, why are they allowed in the classroom? Parents need to trust that our youth are being exposed to books that broaden their minds intellectually, not

pornographically.

*Sherry Brady
Lebanon*

Censorship infringes on our freedom

Wednesday, April 20, 2016 at 5:00 am (Updated: April 20, 5:02 am)

By Brittany S. Greenwell
Guest columnist



Brittany Greenwell

As Americans, we champion the idea of freedom, yet we must ask ourselves, to what extent are we actually free? I am writing this article in response to two articles published in The Lebanon Enterprise last week concerned with banning the book *Looking for Alaska* from MCHS because I believe the perspective of a student is crucial to the complete understanding of this controversy. As a dual-credit early college program student who has attended Washington County High School and Saint Catharine College, I have recently explored the very subject of literary censorship in one of my college-level English courses, and it is an issue that is very close to my heart, because not only am I a frequent reader, I have aspirations to pursue a career in law. To return to my previous question, I would like to state that any people who are restricted from knowledge are inherently unfree and restricting access to texts does not adhere to democratic principles. Therefore, literary censorship and the banning of books is an infringement upon our freedom. An attempt to restrict knowledge from students is unjust and assumes that those students are not capable of independent thinking or forming their own opinions. The explicit content discussed in *Looking for Alaska* is not a factor that should determine its literary merit, yet the explicit content is relevant to the outstanding thematic idea of the book, and that is why it has been included. However, one who has never read this book may fail to realize the explicit content's relevance. The point has been made that students' exposure to the sexual content within *Looking for Alaska* could influence them to partake in similar sexual activities; however, there exists no proof of this correlation. Just because a student is exposed to information about an activity does not mean that they are more likely to participate in that activity. It is actually the case that once an individual is exposed to such an idea, that they will further educate themselves upon it, meaning that exposure to sex may actually increase the amount of students who are knowledgeable about a very natural facet of many teen and adult relationships, while parents and other adults are sending the message that sex is unmentionable. This ignorance of sex is unhealthy. According to the Center for Disease Control, 44 percent of young women and 47 percent of young men ages 15-19 were sexually active last year. Such a high percentage of an age group is participating in an activity that parents believe should not be discussed in school. When information about sex is banned, students will

learn misleading, inaccurate information about sex in informal ways. We should be educating students rather than shielding them because ignorance is not an effective deterrent. *Looking for Alaska*, or any other book for that matter, is not responsible for any of our society's issues concerning sex, but lack of education is at the root of this problem, a problem that will only be furthered by the banning of *Looking for Alaska*.

We expect students to know exactly what they want to do with their lives when they graduate from high school, yet we do not see them as mature enough to be exposed to explicit literary content, so we attempt to censor what they can and cannot read based upon the beliefs of only certain individuals. Although it is human nature to try to attempt to make others conform to your own beliefs, we cannot allow conformity of ideas in a place of academic endeavor. It would be impossible to completely censor all books that include explicit content from students; therefore, it is of utmost importance that we allow students the freedom to read, explore, and think for themselves. The publisher of the poem *Howl*, by Allen Ginsburg was tried in court on the basis of obscenity for its inclusion of explicit sexual content. The defense attorney in the film about this censorship trial states that by opposing censorship, "you can add to educated thinking, or you can add fuel to the fire of ignorance... let there be light. Let there be honest understanding." The fact of the matter is that the teacher who decided to teach *Looking for Alaska* in her classroom sent home permission slips to the parents of the students in her class to ensure mutual understanding of the book's content. Therefore, this controversy exists not because a parent believes that their child should not read this book, but because an outside individual believes that no student in Marion County should be able to read this book, which is a clear infringement upon the freedom of others. The students reading *Looking for Alaska* have been granted permission by their guardians, and no other outside source should be capable of restricting what another person's child can/cannot read. In banning *Looking for Alaska*, we can choose to impede students in their pursuit of further knowledge, or we can allow them the freedom of thinking for themselves.

Editor's note: Brittany Greenwell is a sophomore at St. Catharine College.