

## **Looking for Alaska Reconsideration of Instructional Materials Meeting**

I would like to begin by listing some things that *Looking for Alaska* IS and IS NOT.

*Looking for Alaska* is an award winning young adult novel.

*Looking for Alaska* is meant for teenagers to read.

*Looking for Alaska* is a thought provoking, highly thematic novel.

*Looking for Alaska* is about friendship, grief, loss, forgiveness, acceptance, and above all, it's about figuring out where you fit into this world. Something that I am sure everyone in this room can relate to on some level.

*Looking for Alaska* is NOT pornography.

*Looking for Alaska* is NOT erotic.

*Looking for Alaska* is NOT filth, trash, or garbage.

To claim that this beautiful piece of young adult literature is responsible for encouraging students to experiment with sex, drugs, and alcohol is misguided. To claim that our students are not mature enough to discuss grief, forgiveness, and their place in the world is doing them a disservice. Look at the situation in Washington County right now—their students are dealing with the tragic loss of a classmate; *Looking for Alaska* could be the exact place to begin the healing that is needed in that school. It could spark conversations that would help students' grieve and work their way through this tragedy. Literature has the power to help people deal with situations in their own lives. *Looking for Alaska* allows students to connect with and read about characters who they relate to on a very personal level. The problems that the characters in *Looking for Alaska* face reflect the problems and struggles of our own students.

When I taught *Looking for Alaska* with my seniors last semester and part of this semester, I saw reactions that every teacher hopes to see. I saw students who had previously claimed that they “hate to read” come into class asking “Do we GET to read today?” instead of, “Do we HAVE to read today?” I saw students who struggled to stay awake in class become more alert and engaged. I witnessed students asking to take books home so they could read ahead—and after finishing *Looking for Alaska* ahead of their classmates, picked up more John Green books to read on their own time. The class discussions became lively, interesting, and full of insight. Students were discussing how to make it through this “labyrinth” of life. They were contemplating their own purpose in this world, and learning how to work through grief. The couple of pages that have been taken out of context fuel discussions about the importance of emotional intimacy before physical.

I did not choose *Looking for Alaska* because I wished to expose my students to inappropriate material. I chose an award winning novel that I knew would engage and inspire my students. As a teacher of seniors, it is my job to prepare my students to enter the real world very soon; giving them a novel that will help that transition was my goal. In three short weeks they will be thrust into the real world. The time for permission slips will be over.

In the over 500 emails that I received in support of this book, more than half were from teenagers. Consider that for a moment. Teenagers, from around the world, took a break from Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat to send a letter to me supporting my choice of *Looking for Alaska* in my curriculum. These letters discussed the ways that the book helped them through a struggle in their lives. To think that teens do not have HUGE problems of their own is naïve. *Looking for Alaska* has changed so many people's lives—those emails proved to me that I had made the right choice for my students. The letters also reflected the desire that their teachers would have included this novel in their curriculum. The letters from educators, librarians, and parents expressed support that I was helping students discuss difficult topics and allowing them the chance to do so in a safe environment. Parents thanked me for using a novel that allowed their child to start conversations at home with them; they also thanked me for the opportunity to show their children how to stand up for what is right.

I respect each parent's right to be involved in their child's education—hence, why I sent the permission forms home. I respect a parent's right to choose what is appropriate for their child—hence, the alternate reading assignment. However, I refuse to believe that one parent should be allowed to supersede the decision of 46 other parents who chose to allow their children to read this novel. If we allow this book to be taken from the curriculum, we send a message that any material that anyone has a problem with can be removed from the classroom. We open a door to a dangerous place where parents are not given the right to choose what is best for their child; instead, a minority opinion rules. We also send the message that a teacher is incapable of choosing appropriate material for his/her classroom.

Please do not keep this beautiful novel from my students any longer.

**-Emily Veatch, Marion County High School English Teacher**