

Book banning law may stem from memoir

By Ryan Brown

*Gender Queer: a Memoir*, by Maia Kobabe, is a graphic memoir that portrays the author’s exploration of gender identity and sexuality.

Ever since the release of the memoir in 2019, controversy has surrounded the book and may be one reason why the Iowa Legislature, as part of Senate File 496, recently banned school library books that are not age-appropriate and depict sex acts.

According to Pen America, *Gender Queer* was one of the most banned titles in the first half of the 2022-2023 school year, being removed 15 times, and more than a quarter of titles banned in schools have LGBTQ+ characters or themes.

The book does contain some explicit images, and Moms for Liberty, a conservative political organization, included those images when it released a list of questionable books that the *Chronicles* reviewed last spring.

The books were rated on a scale of one to five, with five meaning it contains the most “aberrant content” and should be read by adults only.

*Gender Queer* is the first book noted on the list and is rated a four, which means that it contains adult content, and no child under 18 should be reading it.

When I did a story on the list, my journalism adviser, Mr. Steve Sands, printed the list out instead of sending it to me by email because he was worried about the consequences of sending those images digitally to a student.

However, the West Des Moines School District refused to ban the book from a school library in 2022, and that decision was upheld by the Iowa Board of Education later that year.

Hall pass

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that “it has gotten way out of hand.”

Iossi assumes the administration put in the new pass system to solve problems, such as students lingering in the bathroom.

“But for them to punish the whole school because of maybe ten people is just outrageous,” said Iossi.

He feels the school should instead keep an eye on those students and put the school surveillance cameras to use.

“For them to time how long we are in the bathroom, it seems almost barbaric or as if we are in prison rather than school,”

So what is the story behind that unsuccessful challenge?

According to reports by *The Des Moines Register*, the book was challenged by Teri Patrick of Clive. *Gender Queer* was available in the library at Valley Southwoods, a freshman high school located in the West Des Moines school district.

Two review committees considered the book before Patrick appealed her challenge to the school board, which voted 6-1 to keep the book at the school.

According to the *Register*, the review committees stated that the book “has artistic merit meant to be an autobiographical coming-of-age story, not pornography.”

It was determined by the committees that select images “were being taken out of context, and the book could allow LGBTQ students to find support and a sense of belonging.”

A member of the school board, Fannette Elliot, stated that she reviewed the parts of *Gender Queer* that Patrick had challenged, and if the words had not been read, understood how the images could be seen as inappropriate, according to the *Register*.

“But when I sat down and I actually read the book - to not take the pictures out of context - this is really a coming-of-age book,” she said.

Patrick then appealed the West Des Moines school board's decision to the Iowa Board of Education, where the appeal was denied because Patrick had lacked standing to bring the case since her child was a sophomore at another school.

An attorney for the school district said that the book was only made available in the school’s library, and parents were free to tell the school they didn’t want their children to have access to the book, according to

a report from the *Iowa Capital Dispatch*.

During the hearing, the president of the Iowa Board of Education, John Robbins, stated the board would be “treading on thin ice” if it were to say it had jurisdiction in such cases, the *Iowa Capital Dispatch* reported.

With the recent passing of Senate File 496 this year, the *Wildcat Chronicles* reached out to Robbins in hopes of getting a better understanding of how the Iowa Board of Education feels about the law and how it will proceed as it seems the Iowa Department of Education or its board may have the final say in book challenges.

Mr. Robbins stated that he was “not able to accommodate this request as State Board members will not comment on topics or hypothetical cases that may come before it in a contested case.”

Some have questioned whether books such as *Gender Queer* are truly being challenged for their depictions of sex acts or because they are books that portray the LGBTQ community.

The Supreme Court of the United States has weighed in on the issue of book banning in a 1982 court case.

According to an article from Middle Tennessee State University, in the case of the Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico, the Supreme Court reviewed a constitutional challenge regarding a school board’s decision to remove several books from the district’s school libraries.

The local school board had ordered that certain books that were seen as “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Sem[i]tic, and just plain filthy” needed to be removed, according to the article.

Some students brought a lawsuit



against the school board, insisting that the board's actions violated the rights given to all Americans in the First Amendment.

Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan Jr., who wrote the principal opinion of the court, stated that school officials may not choose to remove books from a school library based on “narrowly partisan or political” grounds, as doing so would be an “official suppression of ideas,” according to the article.

In light of this Supreme Court decision, *Gender Queer* presents a tough scenario. Granted the book contains sexually explicit pictures; however, is the portrayal of the LGBTQ character the driving force behind removing the book?

Overall, I can understand why parents would not want books containing graphic sex depictions on the shelves of school libraries. However, other measures could be taken to satisfy unhappy parents without banning a book outright. Parents can be given the discretion on what their child has access to in a school library, so the First Amendment rights of other students do not need to be violated.

he said. The last problem Iossi has with the new system is that students must leave their phones in the classroom when they leave on a pass.

“How can this really be for safety?” he said. “Say we are on lockdown, and I am in the bathroom. If I were to leave my phone in the classroom, I would have no way to contact anybody that I was in the bathroom, or if I needed help.”

Another student, junior Leah Feuerbach, thinks the new pass system is inconvenient and confusing. When she went to use the new system, she experienced some

complications and claims it hasn’t worked every time she has tried to use it.

“Everyone I’ve talked to about the pass system has agreed with my stance,” she said. “Not only is it confusing for the students, but it’s also confusing for the teachers.”

Sophomore Annabelle Diffenderfer feels the pass system is getting easier the more she uses it. Diffenderfer also thinks the new system takes longer because sometimes the teacher won't see that students sent in a pass request, making them wait to use the bathroom.

Sophomore Ben Wethington thinks the new system is inconvenient because the teacher must approve of the pass and then end it when the student returns to class.

If a teacher does not see that a student was back in class, the teacher will forget to end the pass. This would lead to the administration looking for students because, according to the hall pass, the students weren't in class even though they were.

Bond

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Another Durant junior, Emma Meincke, hopes passing this bond will bring more people to the school and community.

“If the bonds just keep failing, our town and school will never improve,” said Meincke. “Our school needs this bond to pass, so we can provide a better education for the future Wildcats.”

History

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passed on November 21, 1973, for \$1.7 million. This bond referendum led to the current layout of the Durant school with its three different wings.

The construction was completed in 1976 and financed the present-day high school, gymnasium, auditorium, an addition to the industrial arts building, and an elementary music room.

It also remodeled the existing senior high to become the present day junior high.

Printed on the fliers advertising the 1973 bond referendum were the words “INVEST IN OUR YOUTH AND COMMUNITY.”

In 1999, the school district passed a \$2.95 million bond that financed the addition of the superintendent’s office, preschool area, library, a computer lab, several classrooms, and the current cafeteria, which was originally an elementary gym.



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*The Wildcat Chronicles* staff believes a school newspaper is uniquely qualified to inform, entertain, and represent our peers. We strive to present accurate stories and thought-provoking commentary and are responsible for the content of each issue.

**Barks & Bubbles Dog of the Month**



**Jen Orr**  
Professional dog groomer

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“Rugger”




**PAPER'S LUMBER & SUPPLY**

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**Liberty Trust & Savings Bank's club member of the month**



Senior Landon Marth is making his third appearance on the Durant Mechanics robotics team. Landon has a creative passion and love for solving problems, and the robotics team has made a huge impact on him. He's learned many things from it that he will use in life.



**Marth**