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# Bridge Over Troubled Water: Intellectual Freedom is on Your Side

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# Minnesota librarians push to curb NSA snooping

Article by: KEVIN DIAZ , Star Tribune | Updated: December 28, 2013 - 10:34 PM

Hodgepodge of groups backs legislation that would limit authority to spy on Americans.

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In the supersecret world of the nation's spy agencies, an unassuming librarian like Kirsten Clark at the University of Minnesota might seem like an unlikely mark.

But recent revelations about National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance of phone and Internet traffic have raised concerns among librarians and put them in the front ranks of efforts to curb government bulk data collection operations.

In an alliance that stretches all the political clichés about "strange bedfellows," librarians and civil libertarians are on the same side as gun activists and Internet giants Facebook and Google in backing bipartisan legislation in Congress that would roll back the federal government's authority to snoop on Americans. In the past year, their agenda has taken on a global dimension with the revelations of fugitive NSA leaker Edward Snowden.

"When someone posts information to social media, they make the choice in the level of privacy they want to give to others," said Clark, the Intellectual Committee Chair of the Minnesota Library Association.

## related content



This June 6, 2013, file photo shows the sign outside the National Security Agency campus in Fort Meade, Md.

**Patrick Semansky,**  
Associated Press - Ap  
**more from local**

# South metro school district asked to pull book over 'r-word'

By Christopher Magan  
cmagan@pioneerpress.com

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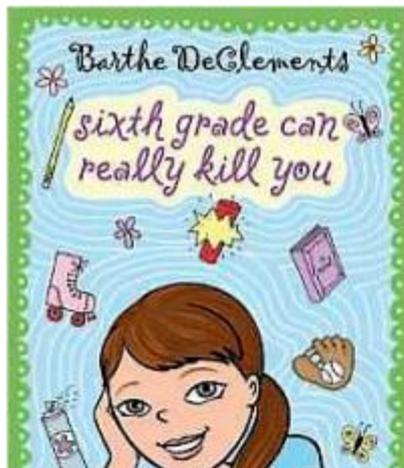
POSTED: 04/25/2014 12:01:00 AM CDT | UPDATED: ABOUT A MONTH AGO

A parent in Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan schools wants administrators to pull a book from nine elementary school libraries because it uses a term for people with cognitive disabilities that many say is derogatory.

Jenna Boutain, a Farmington resident and district employee, filed a request April 10 to have "Sixth Grade Can Really Kill You" removed from district elementary schools after it was given to her child as part of an accelerated-reader list.

A district committee will consider her request May 14.

Boutain's request states the book, by Barthe DeClements, uses the word "retarded" to refer to students with special needs. Her request calls the word a "disrespectful term."



"The book tells the story of Helen, a sixth-grader with a learning disability, and was first published in 1985.

"As a whole, I feel the book is outdated and uses language that is no longer acceptable," Boutain wrote in her request. "This book serves no educational purpose besides keeping words and behaviors in the minds of our students."

There is a national campaign to ban the "r-word" that is supported by the Special Olympics and other groups.

Julie Hertzog, director of the advocacy group PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, said what was once a clinical term



# *Of Mice and Men* Overcomes Attempted Ban in Minnesota

April 16, 2014

By Betsy Gomez

In a week that has brought us ALA's latest list of [the ten most banned books](#) (which inexplicably included Jeff Smith's *Bone!*), we're heartened to find that reason has ruled the day in Brainerd, Minnesota: The Brainerd school board voted to [keep John Steinbeck's \*Of Mice and Men\*](#) — a school stalwart and frequently challenged book itself — in the school's curriculum.

Parent Doug Kern filed a complaint against the book, citing profanity and racial slurs as the foundation for his argument against the book's inclusion in classrooms. In response, the district's Resource Selection Committee upheld the use of the book, but Kern appealed the decision to the school board, which met this week to decide the book's fate.

During the meeting, Kern provided a list of 108 profanities and 12 racial slurs in the book that he found offensive. But he was the only person in attendance who spoke against the book; three residents spoke in favor of the book during the meeting. Local parent Ed Shaw argued that "If we ban what offends someone, we won't have anything left in the curriculum, because everyone will inevitably be offended by something."

Interestingly, the only person who voted against keeping *Of Mice and Men* in school classrooms was Kern's Sue, who is a member of the school board. However, at least one board member — despite voting in favor of it — expressed a disturbing concern over Kern's out-of-context quotes. From the [Brainerd Dispatch](#):

*Board member Tom Haglin said although he hasn't read the book, reading over the quotes provided by Kern and some online notes, he wouldn't allow the book in his house.*

Regardless, the freedom to read scored a win this week, and the book remains in classrooms. If ALA's list ([and our own reporting](#)) are any indication, though, we still have a long way to go to defend the right to read.

*We need your help to keep fighting for the right to read! Help support CBLDF's important First Amendment work by [visiting the Rewards Zone](#), [making a donation](#), or [becoming a member of CBLDF](#)!*



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Book challenge at Anoka High prompts policy change: Parents will now be notified in advance if a book or other title includes provocative or questionable content.

Prather, Shannon. [Star Tribune](#) [Minneapolis, Minn] 27 Mar 2014: B.3.

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☐ **Abstract (summary)** [Translate](#)

Under the revisions, "In any case where materials selected may be of questionable fit for some students in the intended audience, educators should consult with a principal regarding parental notification and potential options for alternatives," Under state law, parents have the right to opt their child out of a program or assignment if they find content objectionable, VerDuin said.

☐ **Full Text** [Translate](#) | [Turn on search term navigation](#)

In the wake of a recent book challenge that evoked controversy, riled parents on both sides and sent teens flocking to the library to read the book in question, the Anoka-Hennepin School District has revised its policies on how classroom and library materials are selected and the process for parents to object.

The biggest change that parents may notice: The policies now include specific language about advance parental notification if a book, film or other selection includes provocative or questionable content. That means parents can expect a heads-up before something potentially controversial lands on their child's desk or comes home in a backpack.

That didn't happen when the district's high school librarians chose the acclaimed novel "Eleanor & Park" for last year's voluntary summer reading program.

"When you live through it, you realize there are things that can be done a little bit better," said Joel VerDuin, the district's chief technology and information officer, who oversaw the revisions. "The policy looked good on paper, but you find out there are holes or things you could do better."

VerDuin said these occurrences are "very few and far between."

"Eleanor & Park" is a young adult novel about first love, bullying, abuse and poverty. The parents of an Anoka High freshman, partnering with the Parents Action League, challenged the book's place in school libraries, calling it "vile profanity." They cited 227 instances of coarse language and sexuality and demanded it be pulled

## CHOOSE PRIVACY WEEK 2014: JUST ANOTHER HYSTERICAL LIBRARIAN FOR FREEDOM

Posted by *OIF staff* on May 6, 2014 in *Choose Privacy Week, FISA / PATRIOT Act, government surveillance* | [0 comments](#)

by Nancy Kranich

Rutgers School of Communication and Information  
Past President, American Library Association

Are librarians hysterical about protecting user privacy, as Attorney General John Ashcroft contended in 2003? That was the question asked when LIS students at Rutgers University heard from two librarians on the front lines defending and promoting intellectual freedom since the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. The colloquium entitled *Libraries, Privacy, and National Security* featured George Christian, the plaintiff in *John Doe v. Gonzales* who was served a National Security Letter (NSL) in 2005 that demanded patron records from the [Library Connection](#) in Connecticut, and Patrice McDermott, Executive Director of the coalition [OpenTheGovernment.org](#), an organization that shines a light on surveillance transparency.

Both colloquium speakers were instrumental in changing the discourse and moving public opinion and policy toward more openness and privacy protection. They not only shared their stories, but addressed the central question: where do you draw the line in a democratic society between safety and freedom?

Attendees learned first hand from a librarian who just said NO to an FBI fishing expedition that demanded records about thousands of innocent readers using his busy library system. They listened to another librarian, a policy negotiator in Washington, who explained why librarians and library users should care about national security issues. Stated one student, "I thought it was interesting that both Christian and McDermott brought up privacy and security as 'teachable

### RECENT BLOG POSTS

- > Choose Privacy Week 2014: Privacy Issues for Incarcerated Youth
- > Choose Privacy Week 2014: Just Another Hysterical Librarian for Freedom
- > Choose Privacy Week 2014: How to Host Programs about Online Privacy in Your Library
- > Choose Privacy Week 2014: Kids Deserve Privacy Too!
- > Choose Privacy Week 2014: Privacy All Year Long with the New ALA Privacy Tool Kit

### ARCHIVES

- > May 2014
- > April 2014
- > March 2014
- > February 2014
- > December 2013

# Definitions

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- Intellectual Freedom - the right to seek and receive information on all subjects from all points of view without restriction and without having the subject of one's interest examined or scrutinized by others.
  - Academic(Research) freedom - researcher's ability to gain access to information and to explore ideas and knowledge without fear of surveillance or interference
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# Definitions

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- **Censorship**

Deliberate selection and restriction of the information flow

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# Definitions

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**Privacy** is “a right to engage in open inquiry without having the subject of one’s interests examined or scrutinized by others” (Jones & ALA, 2009, p. 152).

**Confidentiality** is “a situation in which a library or campus library or office is in possession of personally identifiable information about library users [or other campus constituents] and keeps that information private on their behalf” (Jones & ALA, 2009, p. 152-153).

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Is intellectual freedom a  
luxury or a right?

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A society that recognises the right to opinions, information and expression provides conditions in which thinking individuals can emerge and thrive.

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# Society's right to know

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- Importance of participation
  - Holding governments (organizations) accountable
  - Openness and transparency that fosters learning
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# Economics of Information

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- Levels of access to information
  - Print vs. Digital
  - Paywalls and licensing agreements
  - Lack of funds
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# Economics of information

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- Information overflow and self-censorship
  - Marketing of censorship - limiting access to information and ideas and presenting a simple alternative message
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# What then academic freedom?

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- Who owns your research?
  - Who has the right to disseminate your research?
  - Who should know your research process?
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# What then open access?

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- Promotion of scholarly communication
  - HathiTrust digitization
  - Google Scholar
-

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- What shouldn't you have access to?
  - Where do you draw the line?
  - Who gets to decide where that line is?
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# What to do if the government comes

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- Subpoenas
  - FISA orders
  - National Security Letters
  - FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act)
  - Understand the Children's Internet Protection Act
-

# Intellectual Freedom Resources

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## Books

American Library Association. (2010). Intellectual freedom manual. Chicago: American Library Association.

Jones, B. M., & American Library Association. (2009). Protecting intellectual freedom in your academic library: Scenarios from the front lines. Chicago: American Library Association.

Pinnell-Stephens, J., & American Library Association. (2012). Protecting intellectual freedom in your public library: Scenarios from the front lines. Chicago: American Library Association.

Scales, P., & American Library Association. (2009). Protecting intellectual freedom in your school library: Scenarios from the front lines. Chicago: American Library Association.

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## Websites

ALA Intellectual Freedom page

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom>

MLA's Intellectual Freedom page

<http://www.mnlibraryassociation.org/?page=IFC>

Choose Privacy Week

<http://chooseprivacyweek.org>

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# Questions?

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Website featuring our slides and contact information: <http://z.umn.edu/mb6>

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