

Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to the [IFC committee](#).



Banned Books Week & Oregon Battle of the Books

As we celebrate [Banned Books Week](#) (Sept. 23-29), some Oregon school districts are debating one specific book.

George, by Alex Gino, is on the grade 3-5 list for Oregon Battle of the Books, a voluntary statewide reading competition. Everyone thinks the main character, a fourth grader, is a boy -- but George identifies as a girl, and wants to be called Melissa. The main character dreams of playing Charlotte in the school production of *Charlotte's Web*, even though it's a "girl's part" and not everyone is supportive. In Oregon, some school districts are not supportive, either, as they object to using *George* with elementary OBOB participants. The debate about whether *George* is appropriate for elementary school students and should have been selected for OBOB was the subject of an article in [The New York Times](#) in May.

It's unfortunate that a few school districts are deciding not to include the book in their OBOB reading list. This presents an opportunity to have a statewide conversation about intellectual freedom, diverse books, and why we support the freedom to read in our libraries.

Latest Updates

- Over the summer, [Canby School District](#) decided to exclude the book from its Battle of the Books competition. Canby joins the Hermiston and Cascade school districts in ruling against *George*.
- Public libraries may now sponsor an OBOB team as part of a one-year trial program. Registration prices for public libraries is the same as for schools, and the responsibilities are the same. Public libraries that would like to participate can sign up through the OBOB website.
- There was a webinar for school administrators on August 9 that includes information on *George*, but focused on book challenges and intellectual freedom as larger issues. It was developed by Jen Maurer, Oregon's School Library Consultant, who worked with ALA's Intellectual Freedom Office. The recording for the webinar, "When Books Spark Controversy => Best Practices for Administrators," and other resources related to intellectual freedom are available at bit.ly/IF-Webinar-Resources.
- The Oregon Association of School Libraries also has a new intellectual freedom website for administrators: [Controversial Materials & School Libraries](#).

- The Oregon Department of Education has been very helpful in providing information about [Oregon's health education standards](#), which include teaching about gender identity in elementary schools, and about equity and diversity in schools and libraries.
- There will be at least one session on intellectual freedom and book challenges, including information about OBOB and *George*, at the [Oregon Association of School Libraries fall conference](#) in Wilsonville on Oct. 12-13.

If You Face a Challenge

If your school or public library receives questions about *George* and OBOB, you may want to be familiar with the points below.

- Emphasize that OBOB is a voluntary program. No student is required to participate, and OBOB team members do not need to read all of the books. Many teams divide up the 16 books on the list. The books are not part of the official school curriculum.
- Direct patrons to the [OBOB website](#), which explains the [book selection process](#). The site also makes it clear that, once selected, books will not be removed from the OBOB list.
- Encourage patrons to read the whole book rather than relying on what they've seen on social media or heard from others. Many objections to *George* cite brief passages or references in the book as the issue, not the fact that it features a transgender protagonist. For example, in one scene, Melissa searches online for information and then clears her browser history, as her older brother has shown her how to do. Some parents say this encourages children to be deceptive. However, there are examples of children lying to their parents in several other OBOB books this year, and these books have not been removed from the reading list.
- As with any book challenge conversation, remain calm, ask questions, listen, thank the person for their concern and interest, and if needed, explain the library's reconsideration policy. Most people just want to express themselves and feel heard, but don't want to initiate a formal challenge process.
- Please [report intellectual freedom challenges](#) to the State Library's [Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse](#). No identifying information is published in their annual report, as you can see from the [2018 report](#) that was just released.

Contact Information

If you have questions, concerns, or need support on a library materials challenge, please contact Miranda Doyle, Intellectual Freedom Chair for OASL, at doylem@loswego.k12.or.us.

For questions about OBOB, contact OBOB Administrative Chair Linda Fukasawa at oboblsta@gmail.com or Korie Buerkle, OBOB Finance Chair, obobfinancechair@gmail.com.

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