

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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May 17, 2022

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL:**

**board@nsd131.org**

Jeff Kirkman

Chair

Nampa School District Board of Trustees

619 S Canyon St.

Nampa, ID 83686

Re: Book Bans

Dear Chairman Kirkman and Board of Trustees:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your recent book banning decision, and to bring your attention to a more problematic book that was curiously omitted from your list of banned books. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 36,000 members across the country, including many members in Idaho. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that the Nampa School District Board of Trustees recently decided to ban more than 20 books from school libraries. The bans reportedly include Margaret Atwood's timely "The Handmaid's Tale," Khaled Hosseini's literary classic, "Kite Runner," Dashka Slater's "The 57 Bus," and Becky Albertalli's "Leah on the Offbeat."<sup>1</sup>

These books were reportedly brought to the district's attention because they allegedly contain "pornography," even though some of them have no sexual content whatsoever.<sup>2</sup> Rather than letting a review process continue, the Board reportedly stopped the process by banning all of the books.<sup>3</sup>

FFRF advocates, above all, for freedom of thought. We believe that there is no true freedom of thought, conscience, or even religion, unless our government and its

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<sup>1</sup> *Nampa school board votes to ban 22 books from libraries*, The Associated Press (May 11, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

public schools are free from religion. We are deeply familiar with the haunting history of censorship—from the Catholic Church’s Index Librorum Prohibitorum, to the Comstock laws, to the Nazi book burnings, the attacks on authors such as Charles Darwin and Salman Rushdie, and the murders of Bangladeshi bloggers such as Avijit Roy. Heinrich Heine famously observed, “Where they burn books, they will end in burning human beings.” History never looks kindly on book censors and burners.

The best solution is to leave a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, and allow students to explore disparate views themselves. However, if you are intent on banning books with the aim of protecting children, may we suggest that you are looking at the wrong books?

If you are looking to ban books with inappropriate sexual content as “pornography,” perhaps you should investigate books that you will find in almost every school library. In one, rape is not only described, but the victims are forced to marry their rapists.<sup>4</sup> Another tells the story of a prostitute who “lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses,” who “longed for the lewdness of your youth, when . . . [her] bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.”<sup>5</sup> This same book speaks about sex toys: you “took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.”<sup>6</sup> Another book has a character who prays, “may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.”<sup>7</sup> In yet another, a future husband purchases a wife by killing 200 of her fathers’ enemies, mutilating their corpses, and bringing back their foreskins as a dowry.<sup>8</sup> Another sordid and preposterous story that defames incest victims recounts the exploits of two daughters who, having just witnessed a genocide and the murder of their mother by a pyromaniacal god, supposedly got their father drunk and seduce him in order to bear his children.<sup>9</sup> Yet another book describes sperm, intercourse, menstruation, homosexuality, bestiality, adultery, and whores.<sup>10</sup> Another depicts a holy man impaling a woman through her belly and describes in loving detail how to steal and rape virgins as war booty.<sup>11</sup> Yet another

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 22:28–29.

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 23:20–21.

<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel 16:17.

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 5:19.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 18:27.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 19.

<sup>10</sup> Leviticus.

<sup>11</sup> Numbers.

tale tells how a woman has her hand cut off for touching a man's penis.<sup>12</sup> In another, women's skirts are lifted over their face so their nakedness and shame can be shown to all.<sup>13</sup> Another tale describes a man touching a woman's "hole of the door" and how her "bowels were moved for him."<sup>14</sup>

These and many more unpalatable and sexually explicit stories are found in none other than the various books of the bible. Our educational association has published a brochure, *An X-Rated Book: Sex & Obscenity In the Bible*, which exposes nearly 150 bible verses displaying a "pornographic view of sex and women, lewdness, depravity and sexual violence often ordered or countenanced by the biblical deity." It can be read for free on our website.<sup>15</sup>

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker has written an entire book on the evils of the bible, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*. Chapters document "divinely" ordered genocide, infanticide, and filicide, among many other atrocities, as well as the biblical deity's racism, sexism, slavemongering and sadomasochism. An interactive companion website details all of this and more.<sup>16</sup> These verses are one reason why FFRF makes available bible warning labels to place on hotel bibles saying, "Warning: Literal belief in this book may endanger your health and life."<sup>17</sup>

The bible is the single most weaponized piece of writing on the planet, responsible for unjust wars, genocide, anti-semitism, violent extremism, subjugation of women and pervasive racism. Throughout the Crusades, the Inquisition, the witch hunts, chattel slavery, the Holocaust, and the history of homophobia, the bible looms large. As author Ruth Hurmence Green eloquently put it, "There was a time when religion ruled the world. It is known as the Dark Ages."

If you are going to declare a war on writings that you find dangerous to young minds or potentially harmful to society, then you must reckon with the full legacy of the bible: its primitive teachings, inhumanity, violence and sexual immorality. The current crusade against "Critical Race Theory," against graphic novels about the Holocaust, and against anything related to LGBTQ individuals is simply the latest example of the bible's negative influence.

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<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 25:11–12.

<sup>13</sup> Nahum 3:5.

<sup>14</sup> Song of Solomon 5:4.

<sup>15</sup> Available at [ffrf.org/component/k2/item/23733-an-x-rated-book-sex-obscenity-in-the-bible](https://ffrf.org/component/k2/item/23733-an-x-rated-book-sex-obscenity-in-the-bible).

<sup>16</sup> Available at [unpleasant.ffrf.org/](https://unpleasant.ffrf.org/).

<sup>17</sup> Available at [ffrf.org/shop/accessories/bumper-stickers-15/bible-warning-labels-skull-crossbones-78-detail](https://ffrf.org/shop/accessories/bumper-stickers-15/bible-warning-labels-skull-crossbones-78-detail).

Unfortunately, the campaign to remove certain books seems concerned only with protecting children from broadening their understanding of the world. A proper education, which should expose students to diverse ideas and facts, and enlarge and develop their minds and understanding, is bound to occasionally make students or parents “uneasy.” Growth often is uncomfortable. The book banning in question seeks to limit students’ growth by discouraging them from reading books other than the so-called “holy” book, while hypocritically ignoring the bible’s abysmal moral and pedagogical failings.

The “inappropriate” sections of these books you’re debating are mainly minor parts of books that have much higher literary value. Reading takes time, and understanding books critically takes even more thought. Those who propose book bans target gullible audiences with selective material. They fear free inquiry and independence of thought. Much of the book banning impetus is manufactured, with pre-made list of books and quotes circulated by self-righteous grandstanders who are hostile to critical thinking. In short, the current wave of book banning is not about protecting children, it is about discouraging thought.

In fact, it seems clear from the choices above that it isn’t language, or graphic descriptions, that is instigating this book banning. It’s that these books might inspire the reader to engage in critical thinking about the Bronze Age morality in play when the bible itself was written.

We strongly urge you to reverse course and not to ban any books from your public school libraries. If you are hellbent on removing “inappropriate material,” however, we demand that you be even-handed about your purge and immediately remove the bible from classrooms, libraries, and any instructional materials.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-Presidents  
ALG:DB:rdj