

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. John Smith, Principal High School USA

FROM: Erin Michaud

DATE: July 1, 2020

SUBJECT: Challenged Book: *The Hate U Give*

I am writing in regards to the parental challenge of the young adult novel *The Hate U Give* due to its explicit language and drug use. The book is offered as a choice for our students to read, and is not mandated by any class or curriculum. *The Hate U Give* should remain in our library collection for students to choose to read as it provides a mirror and a window into the racial discrimination and struggles in our society, allowing for a solid foundation to begin important conversations.

Summary:

The Hate U Give tells the story of Starr Carter, a black sixteen-year-old, as she witnesses and handles the aftermath of one of her friends being shot and killed at the hands of a white police officer during a traffic stop. The book delves into the racial injustices that Starr faces as she struggles to balance what happened to her friend and the two different worlds she lives in: her white, wealthy school and her poor, black home.

Other Challengers:

In 2017 in Katy, Texas, *The Hate U Give* was banned after a parent expressed concern over the explicit language and drug use (2017). He quoted from the beginning of the text: "A haze lingers over the room, smelling like weed..." (Thomas, 3) and "White kids love popping pills" (Thomas, 9). He felt that by reading about drugs, in particular, students in junior high would be led in that direction. The school board president pulled the book from shelves, receiving outcry in response from people regarding this as "a missed opportunity for our students to be able to have an open discussion about something that is a reality" (Rosenfield, 2017). Ultimately, the book returned to shelves, but with parental consent (Yorio, 2018).

In 2019 in Springfield, Missouri, *The Hate U Give* was challenged for its placement in a middle school. Police in the region were concerned about the book because it is "almost an indoctrination of distrust of police and we've got to put a stop to that." (Titus, 2020). The title remained on shelves.

Reviews:

In addition to receiving numerous American Library Association awards, including the Corretta Scott King Award, the William C. Morris Award, and the Michael L. Printz Award, *The Hate U Give* has also received very positive reviews from many sources (2018). Mahnaz Dar of the

School Library Journal recommended the book for students in grades eight and up, suggesting it as a place “to start a conversation on racism, police brutality, and the Black Lives Matter movement” (2017). By reading this story, our students are able to recognize their reality and the actions that people are taking. Rather than viewing this as “anti-cop,” this novel should be taken as a way to begin the conversation about why these events continue to happen and what can be done to prevent it in the future.

Eboni Njoki a children’s librarian, writing for *The Horn Book*, noted in her review, “The story, with so many issues addressed, can feel overwhelming at times, but then again, so can the life of an African American teen” (2017). She recommends the book for high school aged children. It is essential that we discuss these issues instead of pretending that they do not exist or they are not our problem. Our Black students are facing systemic racism, and restricting access to *The Hate U Give* simply plays into that narrative rather than working to change it.

Context:

It is important that we continue to allow our students the opportunity to choose to read *The Hate U Give* by leaving it on our library shelves. It provides an excellent starting point for us to have conversations about racism and violence in our country with our students. As Anna Diamond, a professional editorial fellow for the *Atlantic*, notes in her review: “*The Hate U Give* allows some readers to see the complexity of their lives mirrored in literature; for others who may be removed from Starr’s experience or haven’t lived through similar tragedies, it can help generate deeper understanding” (2017). While the language can be intense at times, it is also incredibly realistic and represents the language of the young adults in our building. Suggesting that reading this sort of text will result in vulgar and drug addicted students is a stretch. It is important that we recognize the issues and discuss them, rather than pretend that they do not exist by removing valuable texts from our shelves.

References

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