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ALA American Library Association

July 9, 2014

Cape Henlopen Board of Education
Cape Henlopen School District
1270 Kings Highway
Lewes, Delaware 19958

Via FAX and E-mail

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing on behalf of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom to express our concern about the recent decision to remove the critically praised young adult novel *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* from the list of independent summer reading choices for 9th grade students attending Cape Henlopen High School. Specifically, we are deeply troubled about reports that *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* was removed from the summer reading list without due consideration and without regard for Cape Henlopen's own policy and procedures concerning challenged or questioned materials contained in Cape Henlopen School Board Policy #110, *Instructional Methods, Materials, and Supplies*. Given these circumstances, we strongly recommend that the school board revisit its decision to remove *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* from the 9th grade summer reading list during its July 10th meeting and restore students' ability to read *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* as an independent summer reading choice.

Decisions about selecting instructional materials – including removing books from recommended reading lists – should be done pursuant to written selection and reconsideration policies. Such policies and procedures are vital to preserving due process, academic freedom, and free inquiry within the school. They establish a framework for registering a complaint and provide for a hearing so that all sides may be heard and offer important procedural and substantive protections for the student's right to access materials, the faculty's integrity and professional responsibilities, and the principles of free speech and freedom of information. Most importantly, written selection and reconsideration policies prevent anyone from subjectively blocking all students from access to materials simply because he or she does not like them.

Under the best professional standards, review policies ask the committee members charged with reconsidering a challenged book to set aside their personal beliefs and evaluate the work in light of the objective educational standards outlined in the district's materials selection policy. Passages or parts of the work are not to be considered out of context, and the work's value should

be weighed based on the reviewer's evaluation of the work as a whole. Challenged materials that have been duly selected and approved by the faculty and administration pursuant to policy should not be removed from classrooms or reading lists until there is a recommendation to do so from the reconsideration committee and that recommendation has been confirmed by formal action of the school board.

The policies maintained by the Cape Henlopen School District require any person challenging or questioning instructional materials to file a written complaint with the principal that includes all the information required by the Request for Reconsideration of Library and Instructional Materials form. The principal is then required to appoint and chair a committee comprised of three certified personnel that must include the librarian and two teachers. That committee is then charged to reevaluate the challenged materials and make recommendations.

Based on the accounts provided by your local newspaper, the *Cape Gazette*, it appears that these policies and procedures were not followed or used when the decision was made to remove *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* from the summer reading list for Cape Henlopen High School students. As a result, the faculty, students, and parents affected by the decision were never given the opportunity for a fair hearing or review of their concerns about the book's removal. Crucially, it appears that the decision to remove the book from the summer reading list was done without completing the required reconsideration process outlined in the district's materials selection policy or anyone reading the book as a whole.

Courts considering whether a school board has acted unconstitutionally in removing a book have stated that when a school board fails to follow its own policies and procedures for reviewing a challenged book, it raises a legal presumption that the school board's motivations in removing the book are unconstitutional. See *Case v. Unified School District No. 233*, 908 F. Supp. 864 (1995). We strongly encourage you to follow the guidance provided by the U.S. Supreme Court, which has held that public school officials may not remove books from school library shelves simply because of their disagreement with the views or ideas expressed in the books. In *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982), the Supreme Court states that "First Amendment rights, applied in light of the special characteristics of the school environment, are available to students," and should be vigorously enforced in the context of the school library and the realm of voluntary inquiry, where "students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate."

We recognize that *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* may not be right for every ninth grade student entering Cape Henlopen High School in the fall. Not every student will be ready for – or interested in – reading the book. But the school library and other independent reading opportunities such as the summer reading program should accommodate and serve the varied interests, abilities, and maturity levels of every pupil served by the Cape Henlopen School District. Some pupils will be interested in and mature enough for this book, and those students' right to choose and read *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* should not be denied due to the objections of other parents, board members, teachers, or administrators in the district.

Preserving the right to access diverse books like *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* is especially important in the context of independent reading. Independent reading is a vital part of the learning process that allows for choice and exploration beyond the curriculum. A broad range of

independent reading materials can introduce students to the joys of recreational reading, help encourage reluctant readers to improve their skills, and provide a safe place where students may further explore both classroom subjects and the real world issues that concern them. By preserving students' freedom to explore diverse ideas, we help them develop into thoughtful citizens who are individuals capable of independent thought.

Although we are often tempted to shield students as long as possible from the world's more difficult realities, limiting access to books does not protect young people from the complex and challenging world that confronts them. Rather, it can deprive them of information that is important to their learning and development as individuals. Once a book has been selected and approved by the district's librarians and faculty members pursuant to the standards outlined in the district's materials selection policy, any decision on whether to limit a student's access to materials is most appropriately made by a student's parents, who are best equipped to know and understand their child's intellectual and emotional development. But those parents should not be given the power to restrict other students' ability to read and learn from the book.

In closing, we strongly recommend that the Cape Henlopen School Board take advantage of the opportunity to reaffirm the importance and value of the freedom to read by reconsidering its decision to remove *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* as an independent summer reading choice for 9th grade students. By allowing students the ability to choose *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* as an independent reading choice, the school board will send a powerful message to its students – that, in this country, they have the right to read what they choose and the responsibility to think critically about what they read, rather than allowing others to think for them.

Sincerely,

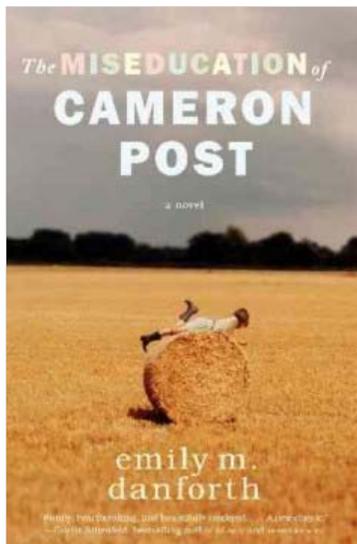


Barbara M. Jones
Director
American Library Association
Office for Intellectual Freedom

Attachment: Novelist Review Summary for *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*

Sent via email to Board Members Sgt. Spencer Brittingham, Dr. Roni Posner, Jennifer Burton, Andy Lewis, Sandi Minard, Noble W. Prettyman, and Alison Myers.

CC: Superintendent Robert S. Fulton, M.S.Ed.



The miseducation of **Cameron Post** (Feb 2012)

Author: [Danforth, Emily M.](#)

Teens Fiction



Description: In the early 1990s, when gay teenager **Cameron Post** rebels against her conservative Montana ranch town and her family decides she needs to change her ways, she is sent to a gay conversion therapy center.

Book Appeal Terms: [Definition of Appeal Terms](#)

Genre: GLBTQ fiction

Storyline: Character-driven; Issue-oriented

Tone: Angst-filled

Min/Max Grade level: 8 - 12

Lexile: 1120

Persistent link to this record (Permalink):

<http://gatekeeper.chipublib.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=noh&tg=UI&an=1006316>

Database:

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View Links:

BookList:

/ Starred Review */* Grades 9-12 It begins with a preadolescent kiss between protagonist Cameron and her friend, Irene. The very next day Cameron's parents die in an automobile accident, and the young girl is left riddled with guilt, feeling her forbidden kiss was somehow responsible for the accident. This is an old convention of GLBT literature, but freshly handled here and given sophisticated thematic weight. As Cameron grows into her teenage years, she recognizes that she is a lesbian. After several emotional misadventures, she meets and falls in love with the beautiful Coley, who appears to be bisexual. Both girls attend the same fundamentalist church, and when Cameron's conservative Aunt Ruth discovers the affair, she remands Cameron to God's Promise, a church camp that promises to "cure" young people of their homosexuality. Such "religious conversion therapy" is rooted in reality, and Cam's experiences at the camp are at the heart of this ambitious literary novel, a multidimensional coming-of-age reminiscent of Aidan Chambers' equally ambitious *This Is All* (2006). There is nothing superficial or simplistic here, and Danforth carefully and deliberately fleshes out Cam's character and those of her family and friends. Even the eastern Montana setting is vividly realized and provides a wonderfully apposite background for the story of Cam's miseducation and the challenges her stint in the church camp pose to her development as a mature teenager finding friendship and a plausible future. -- Cart, Michael (Reviewed 12-15-2011) (Booklist, vol 108, number 8, p49)

School Library Journal:

/ Starred Review */* Gr 10 Up — When 12-year-old Cam learns that her parents have died in a car accident, her first reaction is relief that they will never know that just hours before she was kissing her best friend, Irene. Shortly after the funeral, her conservative aunt moves to Miles City, MN, to help Cam's grandmother with the caregiving, but all the churchgoing and discipline they can marshal throughout Cam's teen years can't prevent her from exploring her sexuality further, finally falling for Coley Taylor, a "straight" girl who wants to experiment. When they eventually get caught, Coley tells all, blaming everything on Cam, and Aunt Ruth sends her niece off to God's Promise, a conversion therapy school and camp. It is here that Cam meets gay teens like herself, and she begins to deal with the guilt and trauma of her adolescence, not through the pious teachings of the camp but through the love of her friends. This finely crafted, sophisticated coming-of-age debut novel is multilayered, finessing such issues as loss, first love, and friendship. An excellent read for both teens and adults.—Betty S. Evans, Missouri State University, Springfield --Betty S. Evans (Reviewed March 1, 2012) (School Library Journal, vol 58, issue 03, p154)

Publishers Weekly:

/ Starred Review */* In Danforth's impressive debut, a teenage girl processes her sexual awakening as a lesbian against the backdrop of her parents' sudden death in a car accident. Cam's reckoning with her sexuality develops through a series of vignette-like early chapters that focus on the girls that come and go in Cam's life—and there are several of them—creating narrative moments that will have teens rereading the sexy bits like an earlier generation did with Judy Blume's *Forever*. The story is riveting, beautiful, and full of the kind of detail that brings to life a place (rural Montana), a time (the early 1990s), and a questioning teenage girl. Halfway through, the novel makes an abrupt turn when Cam's secret is revealed, and her evangelical Aunt Ruth sends her off to God's Promise, a residential school designed to help teens "break free from... sexual sin and confusion by welcoming Jesus Christ into their lives." Danforth's story gains even more complexity and dimension from this shift, further developing the political, religious, and coming-of-age themes introduced in the first half. Ages 14–up. Agent: Jessica Regel, Jean V. Naggar Literary Agency. (Feb.) — --Staff (Reviewed January 9, 2012) (Publishers Weekly, vol 259, issue 02, p)

Kirkus:

/ Starred Review */* Set in rural Montana in the early 1990s, this lesbian coming-of-age story runs the gamut from heart-rending to triumphant, epic to mundane. The story opens just after Cameron's first kiss with a girl and just before the life-changing news that Cameron's parents have died in a car accident. Cam is 12 when readers first meet her, but several years pass over the course of the book's nearly 500 pages. Carefully crafted symbols--a dollhouse into which Cam puts stolen trinkets and mementos, the lake where her mother once escaped disaster only to die there 30 years later--provide a backbone for the story's ever-shifting array of characters and episodes, each rendered in vibrant, almost memoirlike detail. The tense relationship between Cam's sexuality and her family and community's religious beliefs is handled with particular nuance, as are her romantic and sexual entanglements, from a summer fling with an out, proud and smug Seattlite to an all-encompassing love for a seemingly straight female friend. Even when events take a dark and gut-punchingly inevitable turn, the novel remains at its heart a story of survival and of carving out space even in a world that wants one's annihilation. Rich with detail and emotion, a sophisticated read for teens and adults alike. (Fiction. 14 & up)(Kirkus Reviews, December 15, 2011)

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