



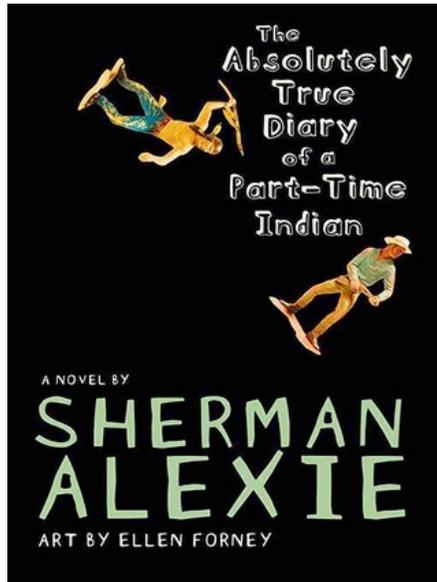
Controversial book to stay on reading list

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Some parents seek to ban 'The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian'

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By Lisa Black, Tribune staff reporter, and Ruth Fuller, special correspondent
4:09 PM CDT, June 22, 2009



Sherman Alexie's "The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian." (Handout)

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Antioch High School has agreed to form a committee that includes parents to review books after an assigned summer reading book drew protests because of its language and description of sexual acts.

Community High School District 117 Supt. Jay Sabatino said this afternoon that after reading the book, he and two school board members decided to keep it on the summer reading list.

"The consensus is we feel it is a valuable read, a good read... We will continue to offer an alternative if someone wants one," Sabatino said.

Earlier today, school board President Wayne Sobczak said he doubted the book -- "[The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian](#)" by Sherman Alexie -- would be pulled from shelves as some parents wanted.

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"I am sensing the book is going to stay because it is age-appropriate," said Sobczak, who said he had also received positive input from parents who read the book.

"I appreciate the parents who came and had concerns," he added. "But the tone and flavor of the book is positive for children this age, and shows someone trying to do the right thing."

He noted that the 400 incoming freshmen already have an alternate book that they may choose to read.

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The book is an award-winning story of a 14-year-old American Indian who leaves his school on the

Spokane Indian Reservation to attend an all-white high school. The main character faces many of the same challenges the incoming freshmen will face when they start school in the fall, said John Whitehurst, chairman of the English department at Antioch High School.

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Sobczak and two board members who read the book are scheduled to discuss their thoughts at a meeting tonight.

Sobczak said the committee being formed could issue warnings about future book assignments.

"If they believe a book needs a warning for parents, that it contains something that might be objectionable, they will have warning and an alternate book," Sobczak said. "Something like, 'We find the content and the theme of it is very appropriate for our children. However you may find some of the language inappropriate.'"

Jennifer Andersen said she was one of seven parents who attended a District 117 school board meeting Thursday to ask that

the book be banned from the curriculum, or at the very least be accompanied with a warning about the content.

"I can't imagine anyone finding this book appropriate for a 13- or 14-year-old," said Andersen, whose 14-year-old son will be a freshman this fall. "I have not met a single parent who is not shocked by this. This is not appropriate for our community."

Andersen said this afternoon she was pleased to learn that a committee would begin reviewing books and warning parents, if necessary.

"I think that's a great idea," said Andersen, who has a teaching degree.

"Ideally, I would love them to say, 'We don't condone this language in the schools and we feel this book ... does not meet our standards.'"

She said that she is not promoting censorship. While the book has a good storyline, she said, she questioned why the author felt it was necessary to include language that "would not be allowed in school hallways."

"It saddens me. I understand they think this is a great book about overcoming difficult situations in a child's life," she said. "How can we look past the vulgarity?"

Andersen said she read the book because she wanted to be able to help her son understand it.

"I began reading, and I started to cross out sections that I didn't want him to read," she said. "Soon I thought, 'Wait, this is not appropriate; he is not reading this.'"

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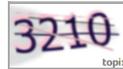
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