

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

Virtual Seminar

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LIBR 271A

What is the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund?

- Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the First Amendment rights of the comics medium.
- They provide legal aid, education, and advocacy throughout the United States.
- They seek to protect the rights of readers, creators, retailers, publishers and librarians of comics, manga, and graphic novels.
- “We are the first line of defense when authorities intimidate individuals or business about the comics they read, make, buy or sell” (CBLDF, 2013).



Legal Action and Advocacy

- Since 1986, the CBLDF has managed and paid for the legal defense of individuals and businesses whose 1st Amendment rights are threatened for making, selling, or reading comics.
- They also help creators who are being attacked in cases, and libraries with comic book challenges.
- CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education to cases related to the 1st Amendment right to read, create, publish, sell, and distribute comics.
- CBLDF also works with other coalitions to fight unconstitutional legislation that would affect how comics are made and distributed.



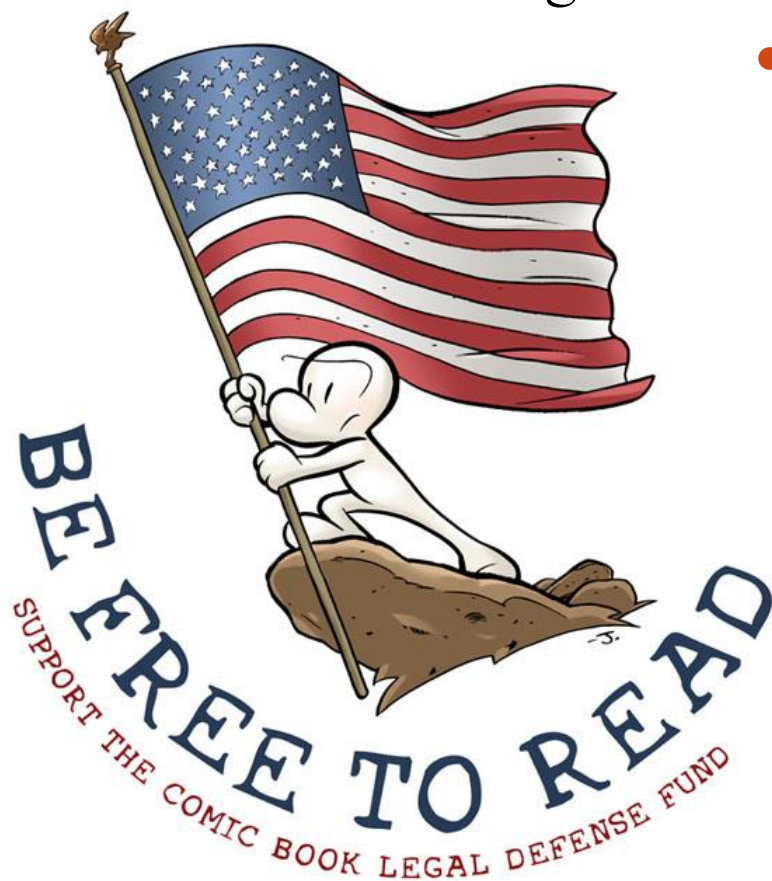
Education



- *Library support:* CBLDF (2013) helps libraries with comic challenges.
 - Provides letters of support
 - Access to resources
 - Resource guide co-authored w/ National Coalition Against Censorship
 - Tool kits to assist in collection development and defense of comics and graphic novels
- *Website:* CBLDF.org provides current news about 1st Amendment issues, resources, case files, documents on the history of comics censorships, toolkits for artists, readers, and librarians about their 1st Amendment rights.
- *Lectures & Panels:* CBLDF delivers presentations about the history of comics censorship and 1st Amendment rights issues facing the medium. Presents at comic and anime cons, library/book trade conferences, and schools. These presentations also offered to volunteers who want to present in their communities.
- *Banned Books Week:* CBLDF is a sponsor of Banned Books Week, works with libraries, retailers and individuals to promote right to read.

Why are comics banned?

- Comics are challenged for the same content reasons that other books are challenged (CBLDF, 2013a).
- Visual nature of comics made them uniquely vulnerable to attacks and challenges.



- Comics are frequently banned for the following reasons:
 - Adult content
 - Profanity or offensive language
 - Violence and horror
 - Sex or nudity
 - Drugs and alcohol
 - Politically/socially/racially offensive
 - Offensive to religious beliefs

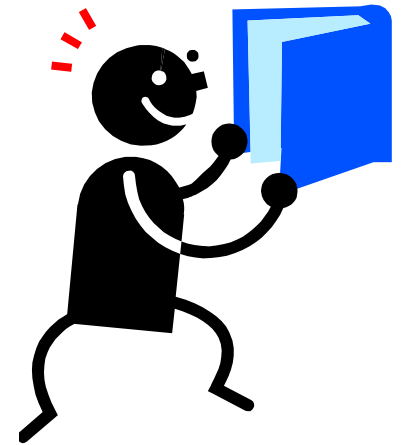
How Comics Are Banned

- Begins with a complaint (CBLDF, 2013a).
- Public libraries: book banning begins with a formal challenge by a patron. Outcome determined by library policies.
- Book challenge: An attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. Beyond expressing a P.O.V., but attempt for removal, which restricts access of others.
- School libraries: complaint by parent or teacher. Outcome determined by school administration policies.



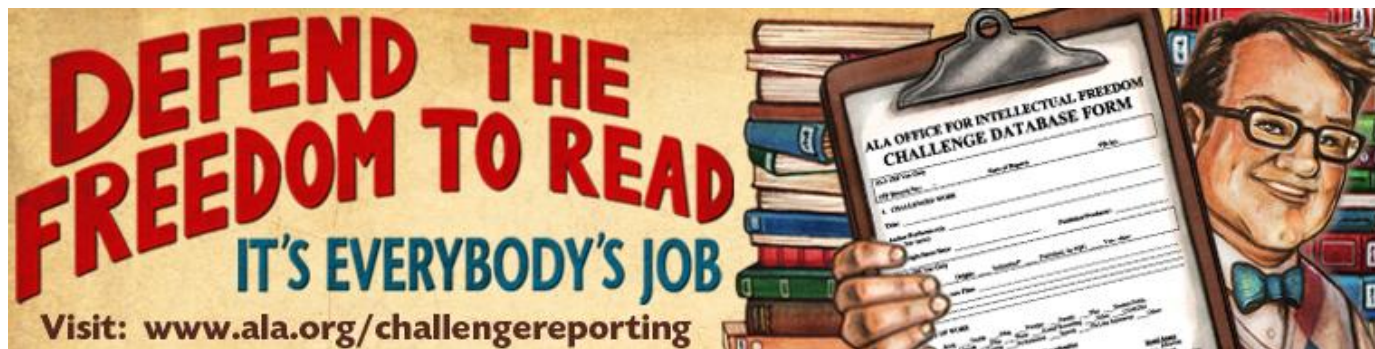
ALA Challenge Terminology Definitions

- The ALA (2013) has developed a list of definitions for terminology associated with challenges:
 - **Expression of Concern.** An inquiry that has judgmental overtones.
 - **Oral Complaint.** An oral challenge to the presence and/or appropriateness of the material in question.
 - **Written Complaint.** A formal, written complaint filed with the institution (library, school, etc.), challenging the presence and/or appropriateness of specific material.
 - **Public Attack.** A publicly disseminated statement challenging the value of the material, presented to the media and/or others outside the institutional organization in order to gain public support for further action.
 - **Censorship.** A change in the access status of material, based on the content of the work and made by a governing authority or its representatives. Such changes include exclusion, restriction, removal, or age/grade level changes.



How to Manage Comic Challenges

- Make strong policies. These help to protect access of all library materials, including comics (CBLDF, 2013a).
- Reach out for help! Contact the CBLDF for assistance on review resources, writing letters of support, and facilitating access to experts and other resources.
- Report the challenge to CBLDF and ALA
- Visit CBLDF website for documents and resources.



Contact CBLDF

- When to contact CBLDF:
 - When you need help with a First amendment attack in relation to comics or graphic novels.
 - When you want to report a comic book challenge.
 - When you need legal assistance about book challenges or about 1st amendment attacks related to the sale, reading or creating of comics and graphic novels.
 - When you have any questions about anything related to these topics!

CBLDF Emergency Hotline: 1-800-99-CBLDF

E-mail: info@cbldf.org

Example of Letter Campaign

- CBLDF has recently become aware of a book challenge regarding *Persepolis* in Chicago. Here is the letter sent by CBLDF with the support of other free speech organizations such as the Kids Right to Read Project and the National Coalition Against Censorship (Gomez, 2013):

National
Coalition
Against
Censorship

19 Fulton Street, Suite 407
New York, NY 10038
tel: (212) 807-6222
fax: (212) 807-6245
e-mail: ncac@ncac.org
web: www.ncac.org

March 15, 2013

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, CEO
Members of the Board of Education
Chicago Public Schools
125 South Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60603

Dear Ms. Byrd-Bennett and School Board Members,

On behalf of the Kids' Right to Read Project, we strongly urge you to reconsider the recent decision to remove the award-winning and critically acclaimed graphic novel *Persepolis* from 7th to 10th grade classrooms in Chicago Public Schools.

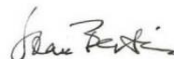
Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi's unique and affecting memoir of her childhood in Iran during the Islamic Revolution, has been taught in many classes in the Chicago Public School district and across the country. A work of great acclaim, *School Library Journal* called the book "a graphic novel of immense power and importance for Westerners of all ages."

While we are relieved that the book will remain available to older students, the restriction on access for junior high school students is extremely troubling. The title character of Satrapi's book is herself the age of junior high school students, and her description of her real-life experiences might well have special relevance to them. The explanation that the book is "inappropriate" for this age group is unpersuasive. The vast majority of Chicago middle school students are surely aware of the reality of violence and its devastating effects on people of all ages. Most have witnessed it on the news, if not in their own neighborhoods.

To remove this book because of objections to its content is impermissible under the First Amendment. As the Supreme Court has said, the constitution does not permit "officially prescribed orthodoxy" which limits what people may read, think, speak or say. The fact that we are confronted with images and not words does not make a difference—the courts have ruled that images, like words, are fully protected by the First Amendment.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Joan Bertin
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship



Charles Brownstein
Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



How Can I Help?



- Donate! CBLDF relies on donations from individuals and businesses to help fund the important work that they do.
- Memberships! There are different donation levels, each with different incentives and perks. Basic membership starts at only \$25.
- Buy cool merchandise! CBLDF sells signed books, posters, prints, and art generously donated by artists such as Neil Gaiman, Frank Miller, Jeff Smith, Alan Moore, Craig Thompson and more.
- So whatcha' waiting for? Visit [CBLDF](#) and support the right for everyone to freely read, create and sell comics!

References

American Library Association. (2013). Challenges to library materials. *American Library Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/banned/challengeslibrarymaterials>

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Gomez, B. (2013, March 15). CBLDF rises to defense of Persepolis. *Comic Book Legal Defense Fund*. Retrieved from <http://cblddf.org/2013/03/cblddf-joins-krrp-and-ncac-in-defense-of-persepolis/>