



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LEE COUNTY

Ad Hoc Challenge Materials Committee Meeting

January 24, 2022

8:00 AM

ZOOM

AGENDA

- Review of Challenge to Instructional and/or Media Materials Process
- Challenged Materials
 - From the Desk of Zoe Washington
- Good of the Order



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LEE COUNTY

**Committee Response
Challenge to Instructional and/or Media Materials**

Committee Meeting Date: January 24, 2022

Date Challenge to Instruction and/or Media Materials Form Received: November 16, 2021

Submitted by: [REDACTED]

Challenged Material: From the Desk of Zoe Washington by Janae Marks

Complainant: Book is being challenged due to racial slurs, animosity toward police, bias, and systematic racism and bias.

NOTE: To be in compliance with Board Policies, the complainant submitted a Challenge Form. See pages 5-13 of this response document.

Decision:

- Recommend continued use of challenged material as instructional materials and for media circulation
- Recommend continued use for media circulation only
- Recommend continued use for instructional purposes only
- Recommend continued use of challenged material with the following guidelines:

- Recommend to discontinue use of challenged material during instruction and remove from media circulation





THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LEE COUNTY

Additional Comments and/or Notes:

While this book is in media circulation, it is not included in current district curriculum or coursework. This book is included on the Sunshine State list and is one of the books included in Lee County's Elementary Book Battle. If a student is part of an elementary school's book battle team, the parent/guardian may request this book not be required for their individual child. Parents may exercise their parental rights within the Parent Bill of Rights and submit an individual request to their child's school for an alert to be placed on the child's Destiny account, identifying the book as prohibited for media checkout.



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LEE COUNTY

Voting Committee Members in Attendance:

Director of Elementary School Curriculum & Instruction

Director of Middle School Curriculum & Instruction

Elementary Coordinator of English Language Arts

Diversity & Inclusion Representative

School-based Media Representative

Curriculum Advisory Representative

Non-Voting Committee Members in Attendance:

Coordinator for Instructional Technology and Instructional Materials - Facilitator



Challenge to Instructional and/or Media Material

School or District: Pine Island Elementary - Lee County Schools Date: 11/16/21

Please check type of instructional material:

Book: _____ () AV (Video, CD, etc.): _____ Other (Identify): _____

Title: From the Desk of Zoe Washington

Author: Janeé Marks

Publisher or Producer: Katherine Tegen Books / Harper Collins Publishers

Request initiated by name: _____

Student Name: _____

Telephone Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

It is expected that the material in question has been read, viewed, or listened to in its entirety. Please complete the following questions. If insufficient space is provided, attach additional sheets.

(Please sign your name to each additional attachment)

1. What brought this material to your attention? Sunshine State Book - Book Club

2. Did you examine the entire material? yes If not, what parts did you examine? _____

3. To what in the material do you object? (Please be specific. Cite pages, film sequence, etc.) racial slurs, animosity toward police, bias, systemic racism. See attached

4. What do you believe is the theme or purpose of this material? I believe this book will create divisiveness and teach children to not judge others by their

5. What do you feel might be the result of a student using this material? questioning and using words not known to them that are derogatory and believing they

6. For what age group would you recommend this material? 10-13 can continue to be to adults.

7. In your opinion, is there anything of value in this material? no

8. Have you read any critical reviews of this material? If so, what? Please be specific. yes One review stated author had prejudiced viewpoints. Others pointed out the lies the main character told

9. What would you like the school or district to do about this material? Check your choice. main character told

Do not assign it to my child

Other (Please explain) Remove from Sunshine State List. It is not appropriate for all students.

Signature of Objector _____

Date (M/D/Y) 11/16/21

Please submit to the school principal for review.

Objections to From the Desk of Zoe Washington by Janae Marks:

Page 102

"Of course. I knew about Black Lives Matter movement, how Black people all over the country were getting shot by police for no good reason."

Page 107

"...because I'm Black, I have to be extra careful around the police."

Page 129

"Grandma exhaled. "He got paid either way, so I'm not sure it mattered. He seemed completely biased against Marcus. He wanted him to plead guilty, and take a deal, but Marcus refused."

"What do you mean by 'biased'? I asked.

"I think he saw a Black man being charged with murder, and saw no reason to believe he was actually innocent,"

Page 131

"...who was white, called him the N-word...."

Page 132

"Racist people used it. And sometimes other Black people called each other that, which wasn't racist...."

"With all the racism around Boston, people weren't about to take a Black Kid's word over a White kid's."

"...the look"

'...Black people as thieves...."

Page 133

"Black people steal."

"People look at someone like Marcus-a tall, strong, dark-skinned boy-and they make assumptions about him. Even if it isn't right. The jury, the judge, the public, even his own lawyer-they all assumed Marcus must be guilty because he is Black. It's all part of systemic racism."

FROM THE DESK
— OF —

Zoe
Washington!

PINE ISLAND ELEM. MEDIA CENTER



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From the desk of Zoe



JANAE MARKS



Katherine Tegen Books is an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

From the Desk of Zoe Washington

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www.harpercollinschildrens.com

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◆
First Edition

*For my mom and my daughter,
my biggest inspirations*

the Innocence Project took on their cases and helped them get out. Now they were all free.

There was a page in the book with graphs and numbers. It showed how many people the Innocence Project helped get out of prison, which was in the hundreds. I couldn't believe that many innocent people were convicted. I stared at another chart that showed the different races of the people the Innocence Project helped. Most of them were Black.

Of course, I knew about the Black Lives Matter movement, how Black people all over the country were getting shot by police for no good reason. If those police officers weren't going to jail, then it made sense that the whole prison system was messed up. I never thought about whether prisons had the wrong people before. I assumed that if you committed a crime, you got the punishment you deserved, and innocent people would always be proven innocent. Apparently not.

I opened my journal and wrote down the name of the book. I couldn't take it home; I didn't want one more thing to hide from my parents. But I had to be able to look it up again later. Underneath the book's title, I wrote down "the Innocence Project." I needed to research them more.

I was about to get up to use a computer when somebody sat down at the table across from me. It must have

been one of the other grown-ups on the floor, and I kept my head down as I figured out how to explain what I was doing there. But when I looked up, it wasn't a grown-up staring at me.

It was Trevor.

I looked at him and realized what I'd just done. "I shouldn't have told you all that." Panic started to balloon in my chest. "You can't tell anyone what I said. Promise."

"Yeah. Okay."

"You didn't promise," I said. "I mean it. You can't tell anyone. It's really important."

Trevor's face became serious. "I promise." And then he looked at me funny. "Since when are you a rebel?"

"I'm not," I said, though when I thought about it, it was sort of true. It was so unlike me—lying to my parents, sneaking around doing something they wouldn't approve of. I never lied to them this much about anything, and I felt a little guilty.

But now that I knew Marcus might be innocent, there was no way I could stop.

Maybe I could track down Marcus's lawyer and ask him questions about the case. Or I could find his alibi witness and listen to their side of the story. If that person really did see Marcus when the crime was happening, then I would know for sure whether he was telling the truth.

If I could prove that Marcus didn't commit his crime, then Mom would have to let me have a relationship with him. Then the lying could stop for good.

"If he's innocent, then how come he's been in prison this whole time?" Trevor asked.

I hesitated, not sure if I should trust Trevor with anything else. Would he really keep my secret?

"What?" Trevor asked, as if my thoughts were written all over my face. "I'm not going to tell anybody."

"Okay," I finally said. "Marcus said he had an alibi—like, he was somewhere else when the crime happened."

"Wait, for real?" Trevor asked.

I nodded and put my hand on the book. "Then I found this—it has all these stories about innocent people who went to prison. I didn't think that happened."

"I guess I knew that," Trevor said. "My parents have all of these talks with me—like, because I'm Black, I have to be extra careful around the police. Stuff like that."

"My mom had that talk with me, too," I said. "I hadn't made the connection."

I told Trevor about the Innocence Project and filled him in on the case I read about. I still couldn't believe how unfair it was. What was the point of a legal system if it didn't work a lot of the time? And what about all the people who didn't know to ask for the Innocence Project's help?

"That's messed up," Trevor said.

"I know," I said. "I'm going to go use a computer and see what I can find about Marcus's case."

"Cool, let's go," Trevor said as he pushed his chair back.



Chapter Seventeen

"After Marcus was arrested," Grandma began once she was back and settled on the couch with a mug of green ginger tea, "I visited him at the prison a couple of times before he went on trial. Your mom didn't want to see him, but I had to. I had to look him in the eyes and hear what happened in his own words. That's when he told me about his alibi."

"What was it?" I asked.

"He was at a tag sale," Grandma said.

"For real? Like at somebody's house?"

Grandma nodded. "He said he saw some ad online and emailed the lady before going over there."

"Why wasn't she part of the trial?" I asked. "None of the articles I found talked about her."

"Marcus's lawyer never brought her to court."

I scrunched my eyebrows. "Why not?"

"The lawyer never even looked for her." Grandma sipped her tea.

In the letter, Marcus only said his lawyer couldn't prove his innocence, not that he never looked for the alibi witness. It didn't make any sense. "Why not? She could've told everyone that Marcus was somewhere else when the crime took place."

"Exactly," Grandma said. "She could've really helped Marcus's case. But, you know, he didn't have the money to pay for a big-shot lawyer after he was arrested. He had to use the defense lawyer assigned to him for free. And this lawyer . . ." She shook her head. "To me, it was like he didn't care one bit about what happened to Marcus."

"Why not?" I asked. "Didn't he want to win the case?"

Grandma exhaled. "He got paid either way, so I'm not sure it mattered. He seemed completely biased against Marcus. He wanted him to plead guilty, and take a deal, but Marcus refused."

"What do you mean by 'biased'?" I asked.

"I think he saw a Black man being charged with murder, and saw no reason to believe he was actually innocent."

Grandma explained. "He went through the motions of defending him in court without putting in any real work."

"That's terrible!" I huffed.

Grandma nodded.

I thought of my email to Mr. Miller, and wondered what he'd say when he replied. If he replied at all.

"Do you think Marcus is really innocent?" I asked.

Grandma put her mug down on the coffee table. "Yes. I do."

I blinked at her, surprised by how confident she sounded. "You do?"

"Yes," Grandma repeated. "Marcus dated your mom for two years, and I got to know him pretty well. He never seemed like a violent person. He was always so polite and respectful. And such a gentleman to your mom. You could tell he really respected her." She laughed. "Your mom would take forever to get ready for dates. She'd be in that bathroom singing along to some song, putting on makeup or whatever. Anyway, instead of waiting outside in the car, Marcus would come inside and talk to your granddad and me. He talked about college. Said he wanted to travel. One time he helped your granddad fix the leaky pipe under the sink while he waited for Natalie to get ready. He got his shirt all dirty, so he had to run back home and get a new one."

"Wow," I said.

"There's this quote from Maya Angelou," Grandma said. "'When someone shows you who they are, believe them.' That quote usually refers to when someone shows you their bad side, but I think it's also true when someone shows you how good they are. I really do think Marcus is a good person. I don't see how he was capable of killing someone. I always trust my gut, and my gut has always said to believe him."

I nodded, feeling a little more hopeful.

"Then I don't get it," I said. "Why did the court think he could've killed somebody?"

"The prosecutor told this one story about Marcus . . .," Grandma began, but then shook her head. "Never mind."

"What? You have to tell me."

Grandma exhaled again. "There was one time when Marcus was a senior. He got into a fistfight with another player at a basketball game."

"What happened?" I asked.

"The other player provoked Marcus—got him mad enough to fight. Your granddad wasn't too happy when he heard about this, so the next time he saw Marcus, he asked him for an explanation. Marcus said that the other player, who was ~~white~~ called him the N-word while

they were playing. Under his breath, when nobody else could hear him."

I knew exactly what word she meant. Mom and Grandma had talked to me about it. Racist people used it. And sometimes other Black people called each other that, which wasn't racist but wasn't great. My parents had told me that I should never use that word, and to tell them if anyone ever called me that. I'd never heard anyone say it about me.

"When the white kid called Marcus that," Grandma said, "Marcus got really mad. Of course he did. So that's what started the fight. A lot of people were at the game, and they all saw it. The white kid, he was the star player of the other team, so a lot of people took his side. With all the racism around Boston, people weren't about to take a Black kid's word over a white kid's."

Every once in a while, I'd overhear my parents talk about how racist Boston was. I noticed it myself, too. Like all the times people gave Dad and me "the look." Once, I went to a fancy clothing store on Newbury Street with Mom, and a saleslady started following us around the store, looking at us like she didn't trust us with the merchandise. As soon as Mom noticed what was going on, she pulled me out of the store. "I'm not giving them my business," she'd told me.

I had no idea where the idea of Black people as thieves

came from, but it wasn't the first time something like that had happened. In fourth grade, a girl told me that I wasn't invited to her birthday party because her parents said Black people steal. I'd said her parents didn't know what they were talking about. After I told my mom, she stopped herself from cursing out loud, and said she didn't want me going to that racist family's house anyway.

"Did Marcus say what the other kid called him?" I asked Grandma.

"Nobody else heard it. But I believed him, and your granddad did too." She paused and then said, "Anyway, when Marcus was later accused of the crime, the prosecutors told that story, used it against him. They said he had a violent past."

"But getting into a fight isn't the same thing as killing someone!" I squeezed a corner of a pillow between my fingers. "And the other kid called him the N-word!"

"I know. But it was up to the jury, and they decided that Marcus was capable of all kinds of violence, even the worst kind." She sighed. "People look at someone like Marcus—a tall, strong, dark-skinned boy—and they make assumptions about him. Even if it isn't right. The jury, the judge, the public, even his own lawyer—they all assumed Marcus must be guilty because he's Black. It's all part of systemic racism."