

From: Sandstrom, Dane <dane.sandstrom@sno.wednet.edu>

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Sent time: 12/14/2020 11:57:01 AM

To: [REDACTED]; Appelgate, Holly <holly.appelgate@sno.wednet.edu>; Larson, Jeff <jeffrey.larson@sno.wednet.edu>

Subject: RE: Book pick up

[REDACTED] - Again, thank you for sharing your concerns. You can contact my administrator, Asst. Principal, Holly Appelgate at holly.appelgate@sno.wednet.edu. I have also cc'ed our Principal, Jeff Larson (jeff.larson@sno.wednet.edu), as well.

Thank you and Take Care,
Dane Sandstrom

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From: [REDACTED] >

Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 11:06 AM

To: Sandstrom, Dane <dane.sandstrom@sno.wednet.edu>

Subject: RE: Book pick up

[External Email]

So you want us to pretend this novella as being in a vacuum, simply text on paper to read and contemplate. I can't find this book in any high school top 50 or top 100 required reading lists anywhere. It doesn't seem a reasonable choice when so many other works are available.

I still don't understand what you want kids to learn from this particular book.

Your reply does not console us.

Why was this chosen? How was it originally proposed? Maybe you could direct us to who could answer these questions.

[REDACTED]

From: Sandstrom, Dane [mailto:dane.sandstrom@sno.wednet.edu]

Sent: Sunday, December 13, 2020 9:23 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Book pick up

[REDACTED] - Thank you for sharing your perspective. Again, I'm available to talk via zoom, if you would like. If you'd prefer, we can also include my administrators to hear your concerns.

Please know that our goal in English is not to promote anything except critical thinking skills. I fully agree with you that many authors throughout history have made comments that are controversial; even more so when looked at through the lens of where we are, as a society, in 2020. I want to reassure you that we are not 'Pro-Ayn Rand.' Many students have already read dystopian future books like *The Giver*, *Hunger Games*, *Maze Runner*, etc. *Anthem* is a quick read that also serves as a bridge to even deeper-thinking dystopian novels with similar societal warnings such as *1984*, *A Brave New World*, and *Fahrenheit 451* that students may read later in either high school or college.

I have taught this novella before and I am aware of Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. That is not the focus of this unit. The way I approach *Anthem* without getting into politics is by focusing on the 'coming-of-age' story or the point at which an individual establishes their own identity and breaks away from conformity. We want our students to start thinking for themselves too! Discussions about the pros and cons of BOTH Individualism and Collectivism do come up in class, but I would be doing a disservice to all my students if I allowed them to only see one side (Ayn Rand's) of a much bigger concept.

Also, talking about Ayn Rand's own personal experiences of being a 12-year old girl when the Russian Revolution occurred, and

how it impacted her thinking (Which I am not defending, and I make it clear to students that they can whole-heartedly disagree with it, if they choose to) is important in allowing students to see how their own life experiences impact their thoughts and beliefs.

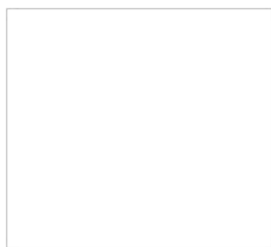
You made the point that "... it is important to read books that don't align with all your personal ideals, [but 14 & 15 year-olds] do not have the knowledge and life experience to put these books into context and understand why they are reading them." I completely agree, and I understand where you are coming from. From one parent to another, please know that I am that adult who will help students navigate the context and wrestle with these ideas. My job is to present and question the info, allow students to ask questions and engage in discussion, and ultimately let them decide for themselves how that info affects them and the world around them.

The fact that you have already begun this work with [REDACTED] is great. I encourage my students to always question what we are reading and why. That is our job as parents and teachers. I want students to have differing opinions! I look forward to [REDACTED] sharing her ideas on these topics in class.

Thanks again and Take Care!

Dane Sandstrom

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From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday, December 11, 2020 2:47 PM
To: Sandstrom, Dane <dane.sandstrom@sno.wednet.edu>
Subject: RE: Book pick up

[External Email]

My husband and I didn't have a chance to contact you during your office hours with [REDACTED] today. You may not have had a chance to read the other email I sent you regarding this as it is quite lengthy. This book is about a socioeconomic and political philosophy, Ayn Rand's personal philosophy. Her philosophy has been preached by her as a political theory and adopted by political parties. This book is an introduction to this philosophy, not simply just a sci-fi dystopian story. Your class may not be political and neither may you, but this book and author have been highly politicized. So I don't understand how it can be taught without being political? What is the purpose of teaching this book, and what are you trying to teach them from this text? As far as [REDACTED] bringing this up during class, she was truly just questioning like, "Who is this author?" Once we learned that this was the book to pick up from the school, she wanted to know "What's the book about, and who wrote it?" We started to discuss it with her, and she read those two articles that she sent out in the chat today. She told us after she'd read the articles that she thought the other kids in class had a right to know about this author and her beliefs, because she was really upset by what she had read in the articles especially about Ayn Rand's views on indigenous people and slavery. She literally said "They want me to read a book written by a racist?" She didn't know what to say to you when you asked her about the articles in her breakout room because she is very shy. I'm not sure where to go from here?

From: Sandstrom, Dane [<mailto:dane.sandstrom@sno.wednet.edu>]
Sent: Friday, December 11, 2020 9:45 AM

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Book pick up

Hey [REDACTED] - I was planning on getting back to you today after school. However, after [REDACTED] posted some links in the chat during class today, I wanted to check in immediately. I tried to talk to her in an individual breakout room but she didn't want to.

We read Anthem as an example of a sci-fi dystopian future story. When we start the book, we discuss Ayn Rand's experiences during the Russian Revolution growing up. We do not get into politics and I have always remained politically neutral in my classroom.

It is part of the required Freshman English curriculum in the Snohomish School District.

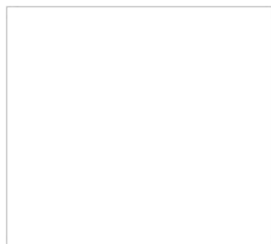
If you and [REDACTED] would like to continue the conversation, I am more than happy to.

My office hours are from 12:30-1:30 today.

<https://snohomishsd.zoom.us/j/97596890833>

Thank You!

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From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: Thursday, December 10, 2020 3:12 PM
To: Sandstrom, Dane <dane.sandstrom@sno.wednet.edu>
Subject: Book pick up

[External Email]

I got the email about picking up the Ayn Rand book. I'm wondering, in what context is this book going to be taught? Also, is this book required reading set by the school district?

[REDACTED]