

December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023

To Dr. Bub, Superindendant of West Ada School District;

RE: The Removal of Allen Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* from West Ada School District Libraries

My first encounter with the poetry of Allen Ginsberg was with the school library copy of *Howl* at the Bishop Kelly High School. These poems expressed a profound spirit of defiance and self-determination in the face of a world gone mad. I was a sophomore in 2003, and my world (with war in Iraq and hysteria over flagging patriotism) felt as cynically deranged as the one Ginsberg recorded in lyric. He, too, endured as a non-conformist in a nation grown vicious with conformity. I credit much of the trajectory of my life to Allen Ginsberg, and it was by my own choice (not by class assignment) that I picked up his poetry and found myself.

Your decision to remove *Collected Poems* by Allen Ginsberg does a severe disservice to the students of the West Ada School District. Ginsberg was a uniquely American poet who traced a vital legacy from the early settlers to Walt Whitman through to our poetic culture today. His lyricism was masterful even from his early works, and there is little question among academics, practicing poets, and the public at large that his poetry is of lasting artistic merit. As a target of censorship, his poetry is also an important artifact of historical and political merit. Our students deserve the chance to read the poetry of this important author, and removing this book from our libraries deprives our students of an important educational opportunity.

There is a notion circulating in West Ada that retaining items like Allen Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* in our libraries would open the district to liability for "distributing materials harmful to minors" – this is a complete miscalculation. The works in our school libraries all meet the requirements which exempt them from this questionable distinction. The politically motivated minority pursuing these challenges know that they will not succeed unless the district voluntarily removes books through administrative processes. The notion that preemptively removing controversial works will somehow protect the district is as baseless as it is cowardly. Removing these works puts the district at much greater professional and moral hazard than retaining them.

Books in the school library are categorically different from learning materials in the classroom by every professional measure: students are not assigned these books; students are not compelled to discuss them; students are not assessed on their learning from them. When students take a book from the library, they are exercising their God-given autonomy and taking an active role in their own education. The administrative decision to control books in the library like classroom materials is a transparent effort to undermine the transformative potential of students' elective reading. This is bad pedagogy and speaks very poorly to the direction the West Ada School District is headed.

In response to this needless decision, I'm requesting you take the following actions. First, restore Allen Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* and other banned books to our schools immediately so that the copies currently held will not be withdrawn or require repurchasing. Second, cease the use of the poorly conceived and badly bungled administrative review process in **0602.21-AR(1)** until it can be remade through a collaborative process with actual school librarian input. Third, I would ask that you and the other administrators involved in this book banning process stop and reflect on your role in harming the education of our students and the livelihoods of our librarians. Give our students the chance to choose their own path.

Respectfully,  
Jonathan Schoenfelder, MLS

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Renaissance High School