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SECTION 5

May 13, 1992

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## Debate hits libraries over controversial books

### Parents seek rating system

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Sandra Slovacek believes her two young sons should be free to read whatever books they choose. But thumbing through "Little Red Riding Hood" in the children's section of the Dundee Township Public Library, Slovacek wasn't sure she wanted Matthew, 8, or Timothy, 4, to read that particular edition of the classic children's tale.

This 28-page Grimms brothers edition, illustrations by Trina Schart Hyman, not only depicts a wolf swallowing Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, but also shows the girl bringing her grandmother a basket of goodies and a bottle of wine during her trip through the woods.

"As teetotalers and Baptists, we wouldn't be bringing wine to Grandma," the East Dundee resident said. "I also prefer versions of the book where the grandma and Little Red Riding Hood don't get eaten."

Slovacek is not the only one concerned that what her children could read at the library might not reflect values she and her husband try to teach them.

Joani Heavey could barely conceal her shock when she read the book that a friend of her 12-year-old son had checked out of the children's section of the Des



Sandra Slovacek of East Dundee reads a story to her sons, Timothy, 4, (left) and Matthew, 8.

Daily Herald photos/John Konstantaras

Plaines Public Library.

When she paged through the book, "Slim Down Camp" by Stephen Manes, Heavey saw enough sexual references and what she considers foul language to earn

the story about a boy's trip to a weight loss camp an R rating in her eyes.

But Heavey was not disconcerted by the book's mere existence on the library's shelves — she realized the library reflected the variety of its patrons' tastes and opinions, including some that might conflict with her own.

It was the lack of any sign or rating system that would have alerted her that the book in the library's section for fourth- to eighth-grade readers contained potentially offensive scenes, dialogue and double entendres that goaded her.

"This book is inappropriate for the age level that it is targeted for in the library," said Heavey, who has banded together with at least 50 other Des Plaines residents to press the library to establish a system to single out books that some children and parents may find offensive.

"I would want to know, if my kids take a book out of the li-

brary, what that book is about," said Heavey, a 39-year-old former elementary school teacher who also has a 9-year-old son.

However, library administrators, who have made a concerted effort to respond to Heavey's and other parents' concerns and who may conduct a public hearing on the issue, said such a system not only would be impractical but also tantamount to censorship and could make the 157-page book more alluring to some young readers.

Furthermore, some librarians said, the recent outrage over "Slim Down Camp" and other books is another example of some parents' increased efforts to censor what children see, hear and read in school and public libraries.

In the last year, some school districts in the Northwest suburbs have engaged in sporadic, but bitter, debates over the Impressions textbook series that



Librarians defend keeping some controversial books, like these at the Dundee Township Public Library, on the shelves.

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