

# Ludwig Creative, Inc.

Making a Difference in Kids' Lives, One Book at a Time®

January 31, 2024

ATTN: Matt Cross, Chair, and Members of the School Board  
Rockingham County Public Schools  
100 Mount Clinton pk.  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

Dear Matt Cross and Members of the School Board:

I am the author of *THE INVISIBLE BOY*, an award-winning picture book that helps children connect with their peers in kind, caring ways. I was recently notified by parents and educators in Rockingham County Public Schools that your Board has included my story among your list of 57 books you recently decided to temporarily remove from school libraries. Neither they nor I can understand your rationale for deeming *THE INVISIBLE BOY*, a story that addresses social exclusion and promotes empathy and kindness, unfit for your school libraries.

We humans are social beings. We all have a fundamental need to belong and feel connected and valued by our peers. Yet social exclusion is, unfortunately, something that most of us experience at some point in our lives. Who hasn't felt invisible at school, at work, or at some social gathering they've attended? And this feeling of isolation can be highly distressing and problematic -- especially for children who are deliberately excluded from a particular group, teased or taunted, or maligned by malicious rumors.

Researchers report that social ostracism can have a negative impact on a person's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. UCLA Neuroscientist Matt Lieberman, author of *Social: Why Our Brains are Wired to Connect*, and fellow researcher Naomi Eisenberger have even found amazing evidence that the pain of social rejection is similar to the pain of a physical injury!

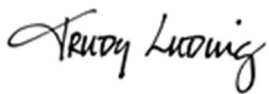
Social exclusion is a topic that I've personally thought a lot about and researched before writing *THE INVISIBLE BOY*. It's a fact of life we're not all going to be on the "A" list. Some of us will be more popular and have more friends than others. But what concerns me is how hurtful social ostracism can be for young children: not playing with certain kids because someone labels them as having cooties; kids laughing or making fun of others for being weird or different; shy, quiet, or sensitive children who, for whatever reason, have been overlooked or cast aside by peers and adults in their world.

The reality is that we adults are not going to get rid of all the hurt in our children's world. What we can do, however, is focus on raising more emotionally resilient kids to help them get through the hurt -- with their dignity, safety, and well-being intact. We can also teach empathy and compassion to our kids.

And books, neuroscientists report, are a wonderful supplemental tool to build empathy. And the more empathetic a child is, the more academically successful and emotionally resilient that child will be. What parent wouldn't want that for their child? All my stories let my young readers know that they have the power to be real superheroes in small, safe, and easy ways by getting them to reach out to others and making them feel valued and appreciated. How can such a message be "dangerous" for young readers?

I sincerely urge you to reconsider your decision to ban books including THE INVISIBLE BOY, as your decision needs to be based on objective criteria which focuses on the needs of all students to help them thrive in their learning world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trudy Ludwig". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Trudy" and last name "Ludwig" clearly legible.

Trudy Ludwig  
Children's Author & Advocate

Cc: Larry Shifflett, Ed.D., Superintendent, Rockingham County Public Schools

P.O. Box 25505 Portland, OR 97298-0505

Email: [trudy@trudyludwig.com](mailto:trudy@trudyludwig.com) Website: [www.trudyludwig.com](http://www.trudyludwig.com)