

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

IN RE: THE PERKS OF BEING A
WALLFLOWER BY STEPHEN
CHBOSKY

**FINAL ORDER AND
OPINION REGARDING
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL**

No. 2025-0003

SUMMARY OF ACTION REQUIRED

This Order of the South Carolina State Board of Education (“State Board”) is the final agency decision regarding the following Instructional Material (the “Subject Material”).

**Title of Instructional Material:
Author:**

**The Perks of Being a Wallflower
Stephen Chbosky**

As explained more fully below, the Subject Material includes descriptions of “sexual conduct” as that term is defined in Regulation 43-170 and South Carolina Code Section 16-15-305(C)(1). Accordingly, the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate and must be removed from all public-school classrooms, libraries, media centers, programs, reading lists, and school-controlled extracurricular activities in South Carolina. **All public schools, public school districts, public-school employees, and district boards in this State shall take immediate action to comply with this Order by removing the Subject Material. Additionally, public schools, public school districts, and district boards shall not acquire, obtain, or purchase the Subject Material, nor shall any public-school employee acquire, obtain, or purchase the Subject Material for use in or with any public-school program, classroom, activity, or instruction.**

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This matter was addressed in the first instance by the State Board’s Instructional Material Review Committee (“IMRC”) and later by the full State Board. The Subject Material was reviewed by the IMRC “of its own volition and on its own initiative” to “make determinations regarding the educational suitability or the Age or Developmental Appropriateness of specific Instructional Materials pursuant to the criteria and requirements of” Regulation 43-170(VI)(B). The IMRC took this step because a Complainant filed the South Carolina Instructional Materials Uniform Parent Complaint Form with the Beaufort School District Board of Education (“District”) on December 13, 2024. (Exhibit A). The Chairman of the District’s board submitted a letter requesting that the State Board take these materials up for consideration because the District’s board had previously reviewed this material in 2023, prior to the enactment of Regulation 43-170. (Exhibit B). Accordingly, the IMRC and, later, the State Board, exercised its authority to review the Subject Material in the first instance consistent with the District’s request and the State Board’s authority.

On January 3, 2025, the South Carolina Department of Education (Department) notified the public of its upcoming review of the Subject Material by posting the IMRC hearing information and hearing agenda on its website. Consistent with governing requirements, the public was invited to sign up in advance of the hearing to provide comment regarding the Subject Material. At 1:00 PM on January 9, 2025, the IMRC's hearing of this matter occurred via Microsoft Teams and was conducted in accordance with Procedures for Review of Instructional Material, State Board Rule of Governance IFC, last revised October 1, 2024, and the South Carolina Administrative Procedures Act, S.C. Code Sec. 1-23-310, et seq. During this hearing, the IMRC received public comment regarding the Subject Material and the Department provided analysis and recommended removing the Subject Material entirely from South Carolina's public schools.

The IMRC reviewed and considered the Subject Material, excerpts from same, all public comments (written and in-person), and all documentation and testimony provided by the Department. Based on that review and consideration, the IMRC unanimously found that the Subject Material includes descriptions of "sexual conduct" as that term is defined by S.C. Code § 16-15-305(C)(1). Therefore, the IMRC found the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate as defined by S.C. Code Reg. 43-170 and recommended it be removed entirely from all public schools in South Carolina. On January 31, 2025, the IMRC issued a Report and Recommendation (attached as Exhibit C and incorporated by reference herein), which was provided to all members of the State Board and subsequently placed on State Board's website and made available to the public.

On January 28, 2025, the Department notified the public that this matter would come before the full State Board by posting the State Board's agenda and hearing information on its website. At 1:00 PM on February 4, 2025, the State Board held its regularly scheduled meeting, received public comment, and received reports from its various committees, including the IMRC. This matter is properly before the State Board pursuant to S.C. Code Reg. § 43-170.

Based on a review of all public comments (in person and written), the Subject Material, all documentation provided by the Department and interested parties, the IMRC's written Report and Recommendation, the IMRC Chair's Report, and the Department's report, we make the following findings of fact and conclusions of law.¹

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Subject Material was challenged by a parent or legal guardian of a student in the district. The Chairman of the District board submitted a letter requesting that the State Board take these materials up for consideration.
2. The Subject Material is available to students in public schools in South Carolina.

¹ Excerpts from and an explanation of the applicable sections and definitions of Regulation 43-170 are found in the IMRC's Report and Recommendation, which is attached as Exhibit C, and, for the sake of space, will not be duplicated herein.

3. The Subject Material contains the content listed and described in Exhibit A of the IMRC's Report and Recommendation.²

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Constitution, South Carolina law, and precedent uniformly permit the State Board to review and determine the appropriateness of books and other instructional materials for use or availability in public schools. *See* SBE Final Order and Opinion No. 2024-0001 (In re: *Damsel* by Elena Arnold) at page 3 (collecting and citing statutes and cases). That authority arises, at least in part, from the fact that the selection, curation, purchase, use, and management of public-school curricula and library materials is government speech that the Free Speech Clause does not regulate. *See id.* at 3-4 (citing cases). The state's authority in this context is particularly robust when, as here, the state seeks to shield minors from access to or use of inappropriate sexual content. *See id.* at 3-4 (citing *United States v. Am. Library Ass'n*, 539 U.S. 194 (2003)).

Under Regulation 43-170, "Instructional Material is not 'Age and Developmentally Appropriate' for any age or age group of children if it includes descriptions or visual depictions of 'sexual conduct,' as that term is defined by Section 16-15-305(C)(1)." S.C. Code Reg. 43-170(I)(A).

The IMRC's Report and Recommendation includes passages from the Subject Material. The excerpts from the Subject Material, which are included in Exhibit C, constitute clear violations of Regulation 43-170 by presenting plainly before the reader express, detailed descriptions of "sexual conduct" as specifically defined in Code sections 16-15-305 (C)(1).

Having carefully considered the Subject Material, all public comments (in person and written), all documentation provided by the Department and interested parties, the IMRC's written Report and Recommendation, the IMRC Chair's Report, and the Department's report, we find that the Subject Material includes descriptions of "sexual conduct" as that term is defined by S.C. Code § 16-15-305(C)(1). While our review of the Subject Material is not limited to the excerpts provided by the Department, those excerpts establish a clear violation of the regulation. Therefore, the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate as defined by S.C. Code Reg. 43-170 and must be removed immediately from all public-school classrooms, libraries, media centers, programs, reading lists, and school-controlled extracurricular activities in South Carolina.

s/Rita Allison

Rita Allison

Chair

South Carolina State Board of Education

April 3, 2025

² Exhibit A to the Report and Recommendation, which is attached to this Final Order and Opinion for ease of reference, contains excerpts which are representative of questionable or violative material contained in the Subject Material. The State Board's review and Order is not limited to the excerpts contained therein.



**South Carolina Instructional Materials
Uniform Parent Complaint Form**

Your Name: Ivie Szalai

Title & Author of Contested Material (one per form):

the perks of being a wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

School Where Contested Material is Located: Beaufort HS, Bluffton HS, May River HS

Location of Contested Material (library, classroom, etc...): Library, possibly classroom, curriculum, or disks

Contested Material is (select one): ☒ Printed ☐ Audio/Visual ☐ Online Resource

☐ Other (please describe): Both English and Spanish available

I request that this Contested Material be (choose one of the following):

- ☒ Removed from all schools/facilities in this District.
☐ Restricted to the following grade levels in this District: _____
☐ Restricted to a student whose parent/legal guardian provides consent and is enrolled in the following grade levels in this District: _____

Describe Your Reason for Contesting This Material (attach additional pages as needed):

This book is a clear violation of Regulation 43-170. This book contains descriptions of forced oral sex among other things defined in SC Code 16-15-305 (c)(1). I will include pictures of the excerpts to include chapter and page number.

August Book 2 of 5

I, Ivie Szalai (insert your name), hereby certify that:

- I am a parent or legal guardian of a student who attends a school within this District.
- I have read, watched, or otherwise reviewed the material I am contesting.
- I have made a good faith effort to address my concerns with School or District staff.
- I have not filed more than five (5) instructional material complaints (including this complaint) in this calendar month.
- I believe that this Contested Material is not suitable for use, availability, and/or unrestricted access in this District, pursuant to the requirements and definitions in Regulation 43-170, which are summarized on the following instruction page.

Signature: _____

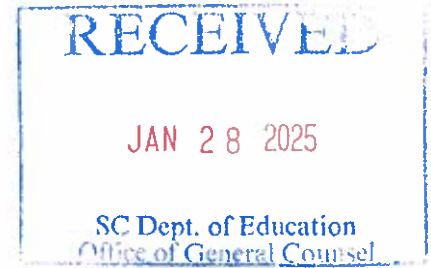
Date: 8/24/24

This form is produced by the South Carolina Department of Education in compliance with Regulation 43-170 and may not be altered by any other party. It is effective beginning August 1, 2024 until further notice.



**BEAUFORT COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Exhibit B



January 20, 2025

Dear Honorable Rita Allison,

The Beaufort County Board of Education has expended significant funds and resources in addressing the 96 book challenges we received over the course of one and a half years. The Beaufort County School District followed the State Department of Education's model policy process in reviewing these titles. (Please note that we even added an additional community member to each book review committee to provide for greater public input.)

We went to significant lengths to ensure that the complaints were heard and that the process was followed. Appeals to book decisions were heard by the Beaufort Board of Education and decided upon thru Board vote. We believe that we have done our due diligence and provided the appropriate due process.

We are requesting that the State Board of Education make determinations of its own volition regarding challenges on any of the 96 titles that we have already reviewed as they arise. We will review any changes to new titles that may arise here in Beaufort County.

Regards,


Col. Richard Geier

Board Chairman

Beaufort County School District

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL
REVIEW COMMITTEE

IN RE: THE PERKS OF BEING A
WALLFLOWER BY
STEPHEN CHBOSKY

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This is a matter in which Instructional Material is being addressed by the Instructional Material Review Committee (“IMRC”) of the S.C. State Board of Education (“State Board”) pursuant to S.C. Code Reg. 43-170. The hearing of this matter occurred via Microsoft Teams on January 9th, 2025 at 1:00 PM.

Title of Instructional Material:
Author:

The Perks of Being a Wallflower
Stephen Chbosky

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The “Subject Material” listed above has been reviewed by the IMRC pursuant to the criteria established in Regulation 43-170. As further described below, this Regulation authorizes the STATE BOARD to take certain actions related to Instructional Material. The Complainant requested that the State Board remove the Subject Material entirely from South Carolina’s public schools.

The Department notified the public of this matter via posting hearing information and the hearing agenda on its website on January 3rd, 2025. Consistent with governing requirements, the public was invited to sign up in advance of the hearing in order to provide comment regarding the Subject Material. The Hearing was conducted in accordance with Procedures for Review of Instructional Material, State Board Rule of Governance IFC, last revised October 1, 2024, and the South Carolina Administrative Procedures Act, S. C. Code Section 1-23-310 et. seq. The State Board’s Rule of Governance was designed and adopted to provide a full and fair process for Instructional Material reviews under Reg. 43-170.

Based on a review of all public comments (in person and written), the Subject Material, all documentation provided by the Complainant and interested parties, the IMRC makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law.

APPEARANCES

Complainant providing testimony in favor of removing the Subject Material:

Report and Recommendation
The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Elizabeth “Ivie” Szalai

Providing public comment in favor of removing the Subject Material:
David Cook

Providing public comment in favor of retaining the Subject Material:
Rachel Wheelon
Rebecca Ervin
Will Gunter

On Behalf of South Carolina Department of Education:
Robert D. Cathcart, III, Esq., Policy and Legal Advisor

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Subject Material was challenged by the Complainant in the Beaufort County School District on August 26th, 2024.
2. On August 30th, 2024, Beaufort County School District Officials informed Complainant that the Board had previously considered the Subject Material and returned the material to its shelves. The Officials asked that the Complainant submit an appeal to the State Board of Education.
3. The Complainant reiterated her request that the Beaufort School Board hear her complaint pursuant to the standards outlined in Regulation 43-170. The Complainant continued to request additional information from the District, asking whether the statements given by the District constituted the Board’s final decision. The Complainant did not receive the information until December 6th, after the 90-day period of review elapsed.
4. The Complainant submitted an appeal to the State Board of Education on November 24th, 2024, 90 days after the complaint was first submitted to the Beaufort County School District.
5. After the 90-day period of review elapsed, Complainant submitted an appeal to the State Board of Education on November 24th, 2024.
6. The Subject Material is available to students in the Beaufort County School District.
7. The Subject Material contains the content listed and described in Exhibit A¹.

APPLICABLE LAW

1. Regulation 43-170 authorizes the State Board to take certain actions related to Instructional Material. The State Board can (1) remove the Subject Material entirely, (2) discontinue use of the Subject Material for any grade level or age group for which such use is inappropriate or unsuitable, (3) limit the Subject Material’s availability to a student where the school district has received the consent of the student’s parent, or (4) permit the continued use of the Subject Material for all grade levels or age groups.
2. Regulation 43-170 defines “Instructional Material(s)”:

¹ Exhibit A contains excerpts which are representative of questionable or violative material contained in the Subject Material. The IMRC’s review, report, and recommendation is not limited to the excerpts listed on Exhibit A.

“Instructional Material(s)” means materials used in a South Carolina K-12 public school classroom, made available in a public school library/media center, or included on a public school’s reading list, whether adopted and/or purchased from the state-adopted instructional materials list, adopted and/or purchased through a district instructional materials program, or otherwise purchased, donated to the school, or made available to students through other means, including but not limited to digital platforms. See S.C. Code Ann. Section 59–19–10. The term “Instructional Materials” as used herein includes any collection of books or materials purchased, acquired, or kept on public school grounds by any teacher or other public-school employee and made available to students, regardless of how or by whom such materials are acquired or purchased.

Reg. 43-170(I)(A).

3. Regulation 43-170 defines “Age and Developmentally Appropriate”:

“Age and Developmentally Appropriate” means topics, messages, materials, and teaching methods suitable to particular ages or age groups of children and adolescents, based on developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the age or age group. Instructional Material is not “Age and Developmentally Appropriate” for any age or age group of children if it includes descriptions or visual depictions of “sexual conduct,” as that term is defined by Section 16–15–305(C)(1).

4. Regulation 43-170 authorizes the State Board to establish “a committee comprised of at least five of the State Board’s members... [and to] conduct a public meeting” consistent with the Regulation’s requirements. Reg. 43-170(IV)(E). Furthermore, it requires the committee to “provide a report and recommendation to the full State Board to be considered and either adopted or rejected by the State Board at its next regularly scheduled meeting.” *Id.*
5. Regulation 43-170 authorizes the State Board to review material “of its own volition and on its own initiative” in order to “make determinations regarding the educational suitability or the Age or Developmental Appropriateness of specific Instructional Materials pursuant to the criteria and requirements of” Reg. 43-170(VI)(B).

RECOMMENDATION

Having carefully considered all public comments (in person and written), the Subject Material and/or excerpts in question from the Subject Material, all documentation provided by the Department, and all comments made by those appearing before the IMRC, we unanimously find that the Subject Material includes descriptions of “sexual conduct” as that term is defined by S.C. Code § 16-15-305(C)(1). While the IMRC’s review of the Subject Material is not limited to Exhibit A, the excerpts contained therein establish a clear violation of the regulation. Therefore, the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate as defined by S.C. Code Reg. 43-170 and must be removed entirely from all public schools in South Carolina.

The IMRC recommends that, considering all the circumstances Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky be removed entirely from all public schools in South Carolina, beginning on the date of the signing of the Suspension Order by the South Carolina State Board of Education.

Report and Recommendation
The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Christian T. Hanley, Jr.
Chairman
Instructional Material Review
Committee January 31, 2025

SC CODE OF LAWS

CHAPTER 15

Offenses Against Morality and Decency

ARTICLE 3

Obscenity, Material Harmful to Minors, Child Exploitation, and Child Prostitution

SECTION 16-15-305(C)(1)

(C) As used in this article:

(1) "sexual conduct" means:

(a) vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse, whether actual or simulated, normal or perverted, whether between human beings, animals, or a combination thereof;

(b) masturbation, excretory functions, or lewd exhibition, actual or simulated, of the genitals, pubic hair, anus, vulva, or female breast nipples including male or female genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal or covered male genitals in a discernably turgid state;

(c) an act or condition that depicts actual or simulated bestiality, sado-masochistic abuse, meaning flagellation or torture by or upon a person who is nude or clad in undergarments or in a costume which reveals the pubic hair, anus, vulva, genitals, or female breast nipples, or the condition of being fettered, bound, or otherwise physically restrained on the part of the one so clothed;

(d) an act or condition that depicts actual or simulated touching, caressing, or fondling of, or other similar physical contact with, the covered or exposed genitals, pubic or anal regions, or female breast nipple, whether alone or between humans, animals, or a human and an animal, of the same or opposite sex, in an act of actual or apparent sexual stimulation or gratification; or

(e) an act or condition that depicts the insertion of any part of a person's body, other than the male sexual organ, or of any object into another person's anus or vagina, except when done as part of a recognized medical procedure.

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

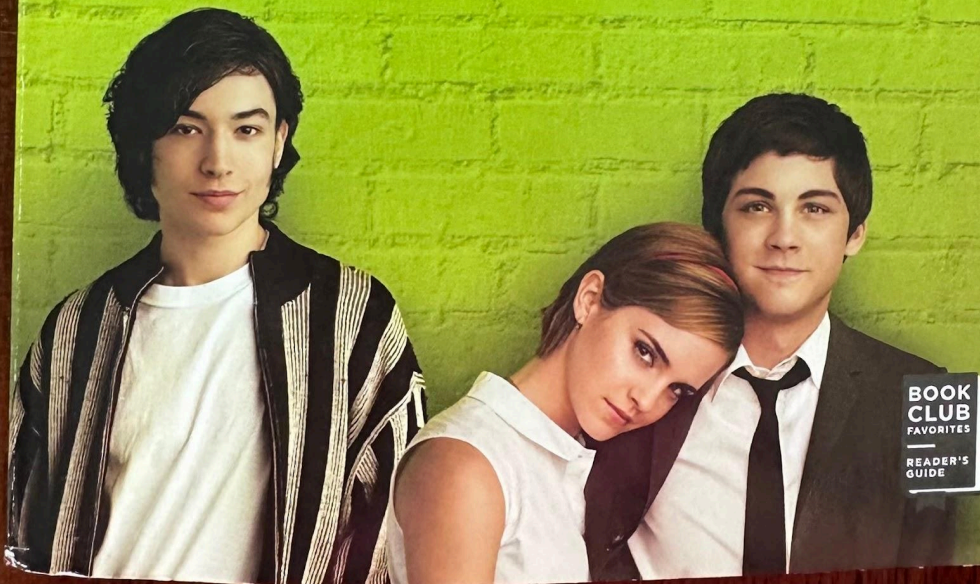
NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

the
perks of being a
wallflower

STEPHEN CHBOSKY

20th
anniversary
edition

with a new letter
from charlie



Chapter 1

Page 12

stephen chbosky

was reading my new book, but my brain got tired, so I decided to watch some television instead. And I opened the door to the basement, and my sister and this boy were naked.

He was on top of her, and her legs were draped over either side of the couch. And she screamed at me in a whisper.

"Get out. You pervert."

So, I left. The next day, we all watched my brother play football. And my sister invited this boy over. I am not sure when he left the previous night. They held hands and acted like everything was happy. And this boy said something about how the football team hasn't been the same since my brother graduated, and my dad thanked him. And when the boy left, my dad said that this boy was becoming a fine young man who could carry himself. And my mom was quiet. And my sister looked at me to make sure I wouldn't say anything. And that was that.

"Yes. He is." That's all my sister could say. And I could see this boy at home doing his homework and thinking about my sister naked. And I could see them holding hands at football games that they do not watch. And I could see this boy throwing up in the bushes at a party house. And I could see my sister putting up with it.

And I felt very bad for both of them.

Love always,
Charlie

September 18, 1991

Dear friend,

I never told you that I am in shop class, did I? Well, I am in

the perks of being a wallflower

happy to know that because I would really like to ask Sam on a date someday. I really would. She is so nice.

I feel ashamed, though, because that night, I had a weird dream. I was with Sam. And we were both naked. And her legs were spread over the sides of the couch. And I woke up. And I had never felt that good in my life. But I also felt bad because I saw her naked without her permission. I think that I should tell Sam about this, and I really hope it does not prevent us from maybe making up inside jokes of our own. It would be very nice to have a friend again. I would like that even more than a date.

Love always,
Charlie

October 14, 1991

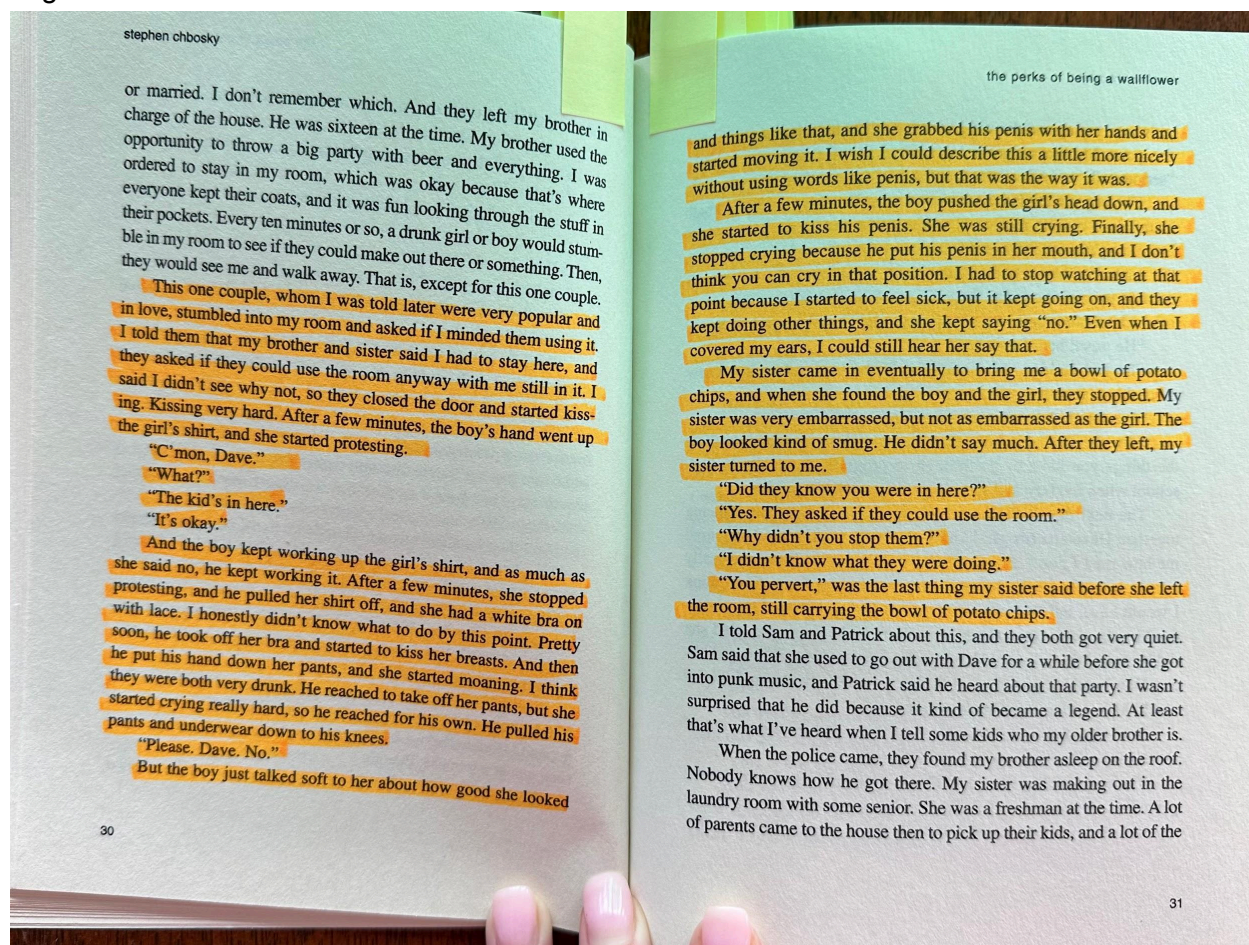
Dear friend,

Do you know what "masturbation" is? I think you probably do because you are older than me. But just in case, I will tell you. Masturbation is when you rub your genitals until you have an orgasm. Wow!

I thought that in those movies and television shows when they talk about having a coffee break that they should have a masturbation break. But then again, I think this would decrease productivity.

I'm only being cute here. I don't really mean it. I just wanted to make you smile. I meant the "wow" though.

I told Sam that I dreamt that she and I were naked on the sofa, and I started crying because I felt bad, and do you know what she



Chapter 2

But Monday in school, Brad kept saying the same thing. "Man, I was so wasted. I don't remember a thing." He said it to everyone who was at the party. He said it a few times to the same people. He even said it to Patrick. Nobody saw Patrick and Brad fool around, but Brad kept saying it anyway. That Friday, there was another party. And this time, Patrick and Brad got stoned although Patrick said that Brad was pretending to be a lot more stoned than he really was. And they ended up fooling around again. And Monday in school, Brad did the same thing.

"Man, I was so wasted. I don't remember a thing."

This went on for seven months.

It got to a point where Brad was getting stoned or drunk before school. It's not like he and Patrick were fooling around in school. They only fooled around at parties on Fridays, but Patrick said Brad couldn't even look at him in the hall, let alone speak with him. And it was hard, too, because Patrick really liked Brad.

When summer came, Brad didn't have to worry about school or anything, so his drinking and smoking got a lot worse. There was a big party at Patrick and Sam's house with the less than popular crowd. Brad showed up, which caused quite a stir because he was popular, but Patrick kept a secret as to why Brad came to the party. When most people left, Brad and Patrick went into Patrick's room.

They had sex for the first time that night.

I don't want to go into detail about it because it's pretty private stuff, but I will say that Brad assumed the role of the girl in terms of where you put things. I think that's pretty important to tell you.

When they were finished, Brad started to cry really hard. He had been drinking a lot. And getting really really stoned.

No matter what Patrick did, Brad kept crying. Brad wouldn't

even let Patrick hold him, which seems rather sad to me because if I have sex with someone, I would want to hold them.

Finally, Patrick just pulled up Brad's pants, and said to him, "Just pretend you're passed out."

Then, Patrick got dressed and walked around the house to go into the party from a different direction than his bedroom. He was also crying pretty bad, and he decided if anyone asked him, he would say his eyes were red from smoking pot. Finally, he shook himself out of it and walked into the main party room. He acted really drunk. He went to Sam. "Have you seen Brad?" Sam saw the look in Patrick's eyes. Then, she spoke up to the party.

"Hey, has anyone seen Brad?"

Nobody at the party had, so a few people went to search for him. They finally found him in Patrick's room . . . asleep.

Finally, Patrick called Brad's parents because he was really worried about him. He didn't tell them why, but he said that Brad was really sick at this party and needed to be taken home. Brad's parents did come, and Brad's father, along with some of the other boys including Patrick, carried Brad to the car.

Patrick doesn't know if Brad was really asleep or not at that point, but if he wasn't, it was a good acting job. Brad's parents sent him to rehabilitation because Brad's father didn't want him to miss his chance at a football scholarship. Patrick didn't see Brad for the rest of the summer.

Brad's parents never did figure out why their son was getting stoned and drunk all the time. Neither did anybody else. Except the people who knew.

When the school year started, Brad avoided Patrick a lot. He never went to the same parties as Patrick or anything until a little over a month ago. That was the night he threw rocks at Patrick's window

I shook my head no. It was so quiet.

"Not even when you were little?"

I shook my head no again. And she looked very sad.

She told me about the first time she was kissed. She told me that it was with one of her dad's friends. She was seven. And she told nobody about it except for Mary Elizabeth and then Patrick a year ago. And she started to cry. And she said something that I won't forget. Ever.

"I know that you know that I like Craig. And I know that I told you not to think of me that way. And I know that we can't be together like that. But I want to forget all those things for a minute. Okay?"

"Okay."

"I want to make sure that the first person you kiss loves you. Okay?"

"Okay." She was crying harder now. And I was, too, because when I hear something like that I just can't help it.

"I just want to make sure of that. Okay?"

"Okay."

And she kissed me. It was the kind of kiss that I could never tell my friends about out loud. It was the kind of kiss that made me know that I was never so happy in my whole life.

*Once on a yellow piece of paper with green lines
he wrote a poem*

And he called it "Chops"

because that was the name of his dog

And that's what it was all about

And his teacher gave him an A

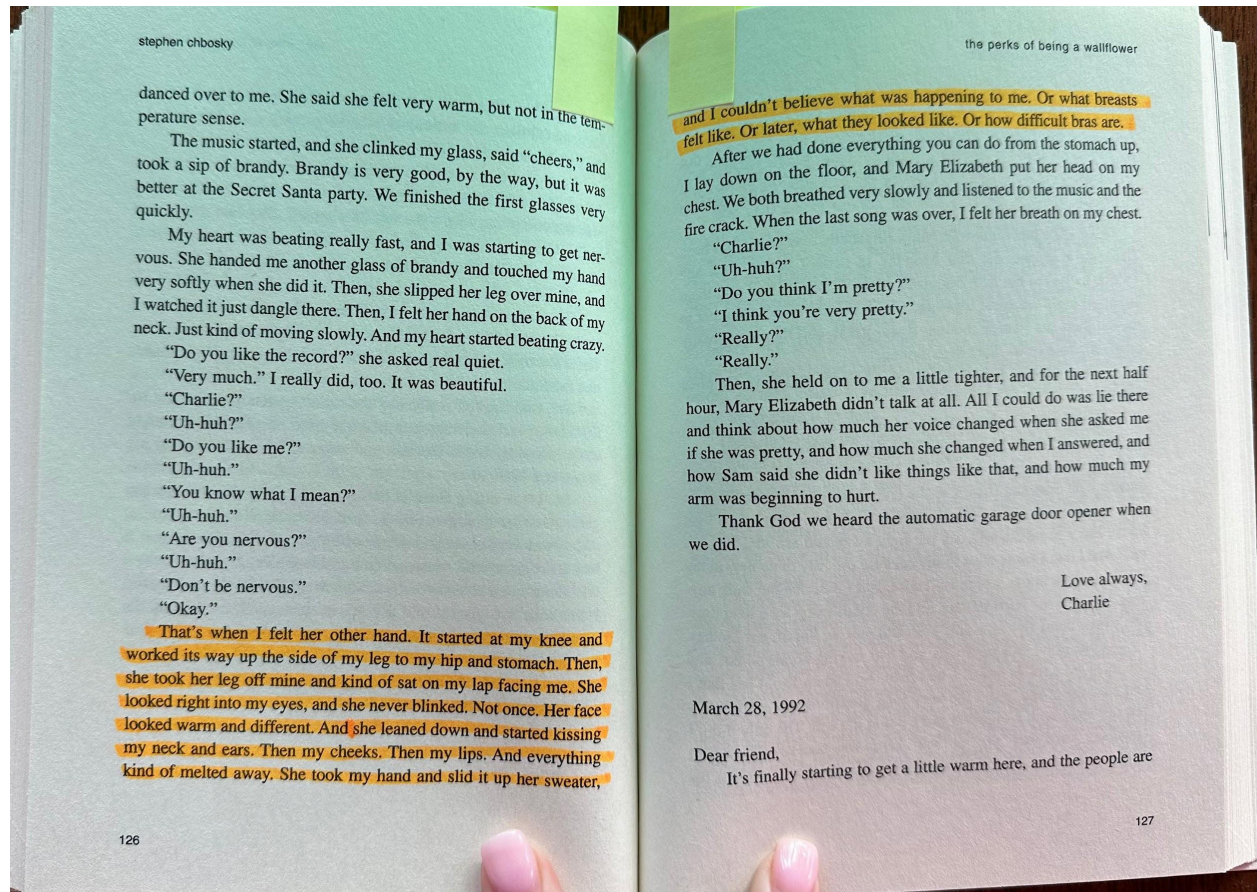
and a gold star

And his mother hung it on the kitchen door

and read it to his aunts

Chapter 3

Page 126-127



Chapter 4

Page 158

"Right, Parker. How did you know?"

"My sister had a crush on him."

"Perfect!" We were getting pretty drunk. "So, Parker and Lily come up here one night. And they are so in love! He even gave her his thespian pin or something."

At this point, Patrick is spitting out wine between sentences, he's laughing so hard.

"They even had a song. Something like *Broken Wings* by that band, Mr. Mister. I don't even know, but I hope it was *Broken Wings* because it would make the story perfect."

"Keep going," I encouraged.

"Okay. Okay." He swallowed. "So, they've been going out for a long time, and I think they've even had sex before, but this was going to be a special night. She packed a little picnic, and he brought a boom box to play *Broken Wings*."

Patrick just couldn't get over that song. He laughed for ten minutes.

"Okay. Okay. I'm sorry. So, they have this picnic with sandwiches and everything. They start to make out. The stereo's playing, and they're just about to 'do it' when Parker realizes he forgot the condoms. They're both naked on this putting green. They both want each other. There's no condom. So, what do you think happened?"

"I don't know."

"They did it doggie-style with one of the sandwich bags!"

"NO!" was all I could really say.

"YES!" was Patrick's rebuttal.

"GOD!" was my counter.

"YES!" was Patrick's conclusion.

After we shook off the giggles and wasted most of the wine with spit takes, he turned to me.

I looked up at her. She had stopped crying.

"So, tomorrow, I'm leaving. And I'm not going to let that happen again with anyone else. I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to be who I really am. And I'm going to figure out what that is. But right now I'm here with you. And I want to know where you are, what you need, and what you want to do."

She waited patiently for my answer. But after everything she said, I figured that I should just do what I wanted to do. Not think about it. Not say it out loud. And if she didn't like it, then she could just say so. And we could go back to packing.

So, I kissed her. And she kissed me back. And we lay down on the floor and kept kissing. And it was soft. And we made quiet noises. And kept silent. And still. We went over to the bed and lay down on all the things that weren't put in suitcases. And we touched each other from the waist up over our clothes. And then under our clothes. And then without clothes. And it was so beautiful. She was so beautiful. She took my hand and slid it under her pants. And I touched her. And I just couldn't believe it. It was like everything made sense. Until she moved her hand under my pants, and she touched me.

That's when I stopped her.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Did that hurt?"

I shook my head. It felt good actually. I didn't know what was wrong.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"No. Don't be sorry," I said.

"But, I feel bad," she said.

"Please don't feel bad. It was very nice," I said. I was starting to get really upset.

"You're not ready?" she asked.

I nodded. But that wasn't it. I didn't know what it was.