

Reconsideration Scenario #2

Contra Costa County Library's Response

I am writing in response to your request for reconsideration of the book Echo by Francesca Lia Block. As I explained to you in my letter, the book was referred to a re-evaluation committee consisting of the Library's Collection Development Manager, Young Adult Specialist and two other librarians involved in the selection of books for young adults.

Echo, published in 2001, received favorable professional reviews recommending it for young adults. Reviews are enclosed from such major review sources for young adults as VOYA, School Library Journal, KLIATT, Booklist and The Horn Book and they all overlap around grades 10 - 12 as the recommended audience. KLIATT does recommend the book for adults as well. Bay Area public libraries which have Echo in their teen or young adult collections include: Alameda County, Solano County, Pleasanton, Oakland, San Leandro, Berkeley and San Francisco.

Books that our library locates in Young Adult are selected with the interests and concerns for youth in middle school through high school. That audience, spanning ages from 11-12 years through the teenage years, reflects a wide range of emotional maturity, physical development and differing backgrounds and experiences. Titles in the Young Adult location reflect that wide range; what is considered appropriate for an 18-year-old might certainly not be appropriate for a 13-year-old. Library staff is available to help younger teen readers and their parents select age-appropriate materials.

Echo is a dark tale of a young woman's struggle to make sense of her life as she enters adulthood. Her feelings of inadequacy and her lack of self-esteem compromise her efforts to go forward into the world intact and with confidence. She becomes further lost when she discovers that her father is dying and she observes her mother's efforts to deal with the uncertainty of a life ahead without him. Echo turns to the world around her to find a place, to find an identity, to find some direction out of the hollowness that she feels as she enters adulthood. It is a world fraught with the "lure of wrong choices" and we are brought into her dark and strange world as she navigates her way.

Using a short story format may contribute to a feeling of "rambling", but it allows the author to tell Echo's story from multiple perspectives. Echo features some mature content as the main character comes of age, but issues like drugs, experimental sex, and anorexia are not glamorized or gratuitous. The book does not condone that dark world, but rather, bears witness to it as Echo tries on different experiences as part of her journey to self-discovery. The focus of the book is more about a young girl's pain as she tries to make sense of her world and her life, clearly a theme that many young people can identify with.

Ms. Block is an award winning Young Adult author known for her magical realism and inventive language. In Echo she creates a world where the fantastical co-exists with the ordinary suggesting there is magic in everyday life. At the end of the novel, Block specifically refers to the magic of belief and describes how Echo is transformed by her belief in herself. Block's characters often seek healing, growth, and even salvation, however that search and the people they seek support from and the activities they engage in may be at odds with readers' beliefs and experiences. Echo's mother's spiritualism and “healing ritual” is an example.

Lyrical passages, another hallmark of the author, give the book a dreamy quality. One committee member found the story to be “heavily metaphorical, especially the scenes involving the vampires who “prey” on Echo. Although they are indeed portrayed as real vampires, they are also notably superficial, obsessed with physical beauty, and clearly not interested in Echo as anything other than an object of pleasure. In this sense, Block’s characterization of the couple as vampires is both appropriate and artful.”

Echo has a distinctive style that should appeal to fans of fantasy and magical realism. It is suitable for mature young adults and/or those in grades 10 – 12.

Thank you for your concern on this matter. It shows that you take a serious interest in the influences on our growing generations. I commend your interest in selecting appropriate reading material for your daughter. In light of the above information I have decided to retain the book Echo in the Young Adult location. If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,