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Judging a Book:

Virginia High School Yearbook Stirs Controversy

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What Happened:

Books often are intended to provoke thought, discussion ... even controversy. However, those guidelines usually don't pertain to high school yearbooks, which are supposed to be filled with pictures of classmates, highlights from the school year and signatures from your friends.

Maybe that's why this year's annual from Massaponax (Va.) High School has caused such a stir.

Throughout the school year, students who worked on the yearbook encouraged their classmates to submit anonymous "Ponax Confessions" —confessions the staff promised would be published in the yearbook.

Many of the so-called confessions were just dumb or silly; but others were shocking, disturbing and downright sad. Some examples: "I have sex with people just to feel wanted"; "I had an abortion, and my mom doesn't know"; "I once did so much pot that I woke up high"; "I'm pregnant with my best friend's boyfriend's kid."

There's no way of telling which "confessions" are true; but that didn't matter to many parents, who noted the yearbook had other problems, too, such as student quotes that were filled with sexual allusions and double entendres. They were already on edge after the 2009 yearbook featured depictions of an "unclad" woman and someone who seemed to be smoking crack.

"I was appalled, and I'm not a prude," one mother told [Fredricksburg.com](#), regarding this year's annual. "I know what kids do. There's no pictures of the football team or of JV field hockey, but there's plenty of sex and drugs."

"When I looked through the book, I was livid," said another. "A lot of us thought there should have been a discussion last year; and now this."

Massaponax Principal Joe Rodkey is trying to recall the yearbooks and have the entire run reprinted. "It's totally inappropriate for a high school yearbook," he said. "The students, the school and this community deserve a better yearbook than what I have."

Talk About It:

Rodkey said the yearbook had the potential to be “an award-winning book; but then you see the sexual innuendo and double entendres—it puts the focus on something negative.” What is the role of a yearbook? Is it like a trophy case, where the school’s presented in the best possible light? Or should it be more like a diary, where anything and everything goes?

The Massaponax yearbook, like most yearbooks, is a student-run publication with a teacher/advisor. For the most part, the students decide the content. Do you think there should’ve been more adult oversight? Is this an experience for the students to learn from their mistakes? Or did the principal make a mistake by recalling the books?

Do you believe that most of Massaponax’s “confessions” were true? What were students trying to achieve by sharing them in the yearbook—to shock people? Get something off their chests? Get help?

Do you have secrets? Do you share them with anyone? When you “confess” something, how does it make you feel?

What the Bible Says:

“Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

“... confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (Prov. 11:13).