From: AMMON, BETTE  
Sent: Tuesday, May 05, 2015 11:12 AM  
To: Glenda J. Pope  
Subject: "Of Mice and Men"

Hello Cda School District:

Please hold strong on keeping “Of Mice and Men” in the school curriculum. When great materials are banned, all students suffer. Steinbeck’s books withstand the test of time because they continue to offer profound messages about the human condition. Books such as “Of Mice and Men” allow the reader a realistic glimpse into a time period that shaped our culture and our country.

If you ever need help defending intellectual freedom and the right to read, please let us know. We stand beside our educators.

Bette Ammon, director  
Coeur d’Alene Public Library  
Coeur d’Alene ID 83814  
bammon@cdalibrary.org  
http://www.cdalibrary.org

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From: Kristin Pekoll  
Sent: Tuesday, May 05, 2015 12:35 PM  
To: Kirsten Pomerantz; Tom Hearn  
Subject: ALA Offer of Support

I am writing on behalf of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) to offer any resources or assistance that may be useful with the current upset over Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck in the Coeur d’Alene High School curriculum. OIF regularly consults, confidentially, with teachers, librarians, administrators, and others on controversies over materials in school curricula and library collections. We can offer a wealth of information and experience regarding past challenges to these materials in addition to any guidance or support that would be appropriate.

I understand from the news articles, that a parent is concerned about the book’s language and “negativity”. We’re happy to help support the books, your school, teachers and students with a letter if you think that would be useful. Please feel free to pass along my contact information and offer of assistance to any teachers or administrators who may find it helpful.

Let me know if OIF may be of assistance in this case. You may reach me at this email or by phone at 312-280-4221. Many thanks and best wishes,

Kristin

Kristin Pekoll, Assistant Director  
Office for Intellectual Freedom  
www.ala.org/oif

American Library Association l 50 E. Huron St. l Chicago, IL  60611  
(312) 280-4221 l (800) 545-2433 x4221 toll-free l (312) 280-4227 fax
From: Brian Petersen  
Sent: Tuesday, May 05, 2015 4:24 PM  
To: Glenda J. Pope  
Subject: Of Mice and Men  

CDA School Board,

I am writing this email to you to encourage you in the strongest terms that I can to vote against any proposal to limit and/or ban the use of John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men” in the curriculum of the District. The District’s students deserve the opportunity to read and consider the book which will serve to further the development of the critical thinking skills they’ll need to prosper and be productive and engaged citizens. The District’s opt-out policy for parents and/or students who have an issue with its language or themes is adequate and available. Again, please vote against any motion to limit the use of the book.

Regards,

Brian Petersen
Coeur d’Alene, Idaho

From: Elam McKnight  
Sent: Tuesday, May 05, 2015 7:58 PM  
To: Mike Nelson  
Subject: Greetings  

Mr. Nelson,

I read the following article: http://www.krem.com/story/news/local/kootenai-county/2015/05/05/idaho-school-may-ban-of-mice-and-men/26943609/  

I am a parent, an educator, and a recording artist. I was bothered that a district curriculum review committee has recommended that John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" be removed from classroom instruction. I hope, at your level as an administrator and with the obvious level of education you have achieved, you are not going to accept this recommendation and actually remove an American classic from being taught to children. I do not live in Idaho so I am not a stakeholder in your area or system. Yet I think that this type of censorship is damaging to the very fabric of the American experience.

This is a very important work of art and it deserves better. I can remember the first time I read this book in my own school's library at the age of 16. I literally read it in one sitting and was totally engaged, I was changed because of it from that day forward. It was a doorway into so many other great works of literature for me to experience all these years later.

"Of Mice and Men" is a complete novella which is powerful for so many reasons. One of the most important reasons, to me, is it is so very accessible to a young reader and has the ability to plant the seeds that can grow a lifelong reader. A reader who will yearn for great literature, with its themes, motifs, and passion for the power of this experience, for the rest of their lives. There is no substitute for great works of literature and "Of Mice and Men" is one of America's greatest examples of such.

I beg of you to not remove this very poignant work from the hands of those who will benefit from experiencing it. Thank you for your time and commitment to the education of our most valuable resource, our children.

Respectfully,
Elam McKnight
West Tennessee
www.bigblackhand.com
@elammcknight
Dear Ms. Seymour,

could you please advise me of when the next school board meeting will take place, which will address the issue of potentially removing, "Of Mice And Men," from the 9th grade curriculum? I would like to attend so that I can learn more about the decision makers and the decision-making process for such a recommendation. If appropriate, I would also like to register my objection to such a decision.

John Steinbeck is an American literary icon, and many of his works are masterpieces of Western literature. In teaching ninth-graders, it seems inconceivable to me that the attributes of this particular work would be dismissed merely because of the presence of some profanity or because of the book's dark theme.

Ninth-graders in any public school are going to be subject to equally profane language simply walking down the school hallway. I've heard high-school students speak casually and freely, and it can be colorful enough to make a rainbow seem gray.

Some people are no-doubt more offended by profanity that I am, and some parents may wish to attempt to shelter their children from it. (Personally, I feel any such attempt is futile - given the pervasiveness of foul language in our society.) But these parents are certainly welcome to review the reading list and have their children opt-out of reading a particular title on that basis if they so desire.

The tone of this short novel is undeniably dark. However, it is a story about a very dark time in our American history. There is no better way for modern students to truly appreciate the severity of the times, or for them to truly relate to the hopelessness that many people felt during the Depression, than by experiencing it from the perspective of the characters in books such as this.

More importantly, if the objective is to expose students to the art of literature, you will not find many examples that are as accessible to readers of any age, as the works of Steinbeck.

It seems, from what little information is available in the press, that the committee's primary objection is that the language and tone are too harsh for ninth-graders... or that ninth-graders are not mature enough to deal with these things.

As a parent, I respectfully disagree. I trust the ability of our teachers, to present this material within a constructive context and to actually use the foul language and dark theme as opportunities to get the students engaged in an intellectual discussion.

I do not agree with committee members attempting to assert their own personal sense of morality upon the community as a whole, and trying to tell our teachers how to teach. Hopefully our Board will act with greater wisdom and consider the experience and expertise of professional educators when it comes to these matters. As long as there is an avenue for parents who object to certain content, to have their kids opt-out of such material; we don't need to grant any committee the power of censorship.

Mark Patton
On May 7, 2015, at 1:00 PM, "Tony Kastella":

I strongly urge the use of any book a qualified, certified teacher wants to use for students is ok. I would use only one qualifier and that would be age, intellect appropriate books for any given class K - 12. Continuance of an opt out option is appropriate as well for any student whose values are threatened.

In the future your choices for a book reviewing (banning) committee should have to be public information as well as why each member voted the way they did. No closed door actions that are then forced on the student body!

Thank you for the comment period!

From: Paul Josephson  
Date: May 8, 2015 at 4:36:24 AM PDT

Subject: Keep Bad Books Out of Our Children's Hands

Dear Members of the School Board:
I strongly urge you to stick by plans to ban certain books because of their disgusting, amoral, and un-American content. Yes, some will point out that Steinbeck (not Steinberg by the way), who wrote "Of Mice and Men," and should be banned for his earthy vocabulary, won only one Nobel Prize. This does not excuse his use of swear words and description of disgusting and unnatural human relationships.

There are other things to remove from the shelves: Greek myths (what did Oedipus do with his mother)? And remember his explanation of the riddle of the sphinx (not Sphincter)? Or Shakespeare's "Hamlet" with its disgusting portrayal of base human passions? And Shakespeare was poor much of his life, likely on welfare, not an example for American traditional values.

And let's not forget the Bible. Fornication is mentioned 12 times in the New Testament. Burn it! Or Sodom and Gomorrah? Don’t even tell me you have read it.

Remember that Congress did more than you plan to do in the 1950s when it condemned the following people as un-American: lawyer Clarence Darrow, Albert Einstein (author of relativity), David Lilienthal, head of the TVA, Frank Llloyd Wright (most famous American architect), Ernest Hemingway (another Nobel Prize winner but he committed suicide in Idaho!), Aaron Copeland (author of the most loved piece of American music, "Appalachian Spring," but gay!), Pearl Buck (yet another Nobel laureate but who worried about the rights of women and minority groups, wrote on Asian cultures, and supported Asian and mixed-race adoption). We need only white traditional American family values. Our children must not know this this garbage, like Steinbeck.

I believe that Russia under Putin is the example to follow. They're doing many of the things you'd like to do to people and books. Ultimately, the question arises, Why books at all in school? Our children have television and the internet for culture where they will never encounter cussing and filth, only family values and traditions such as those in the Bible.

Burning books is the best way. I attach a photo of the Nazi book burning in 1933 for you. You could arrange this at school with the books you don’t like, bake cookies over the flames, and raise funds in a bake sale for better things for schools than books.

Sincerely, Paul Josephson  
Center for Incineration of Unhealthy Thoughts  
666 Gomorrah Court  
Steinberg, Maine 04901
May 5, 2015
Coeur d’Alene School Board
Dear Trustees:

Based on both our discussion during yesterday’s cross-district ELA collaboration, as well as the newspaper articles in the Spokesman Review and CDA Press on 5/4 and 5/5 and the Board meeting on 5/4, we feel it is necessary to explain and respond to some issues.

First, our understanding of the Novel Reallocation process and associated ad hoc committee is just that. We are reallocating novels based on Idaho Core text complexity levels. Books like Of Mice and Men have already gone through the process of being approved for full classroom use. The purpose of this process is to verify, or move when necessary, novels whose level of complexity does not match the Idaho Core. Based on typical quantitative lexile levels, many novels might move down (9th grade to 7th grade, for example), not up. However, the rationales provided by teachers typically show the qualitative complexity, such as themes, show that most novels should remain where they are because those issues are too advanced for lower grade levels. This is not the procedure, according to Board policy, for approving novels that have already gone through this process. If so, we are opening up every single novel for a second attempt to ban them. The only time this would be the case are for new novels being recommended that have not gone through this approval process for curriculum.

As with all of the novels on the list, teachers have provided rationales as to why a particular novel, in this case, Of Mice and Men, should remain at the freshman level. It is our understanding that the ad hoc committee is not referring to these rationales during their meetings. There are also no teachers on the ad hoc committee, even in a non-voting capacity, to answer questions and explain processes. We see this as a serious oversight. For example, according to the Spokesman article, Judge Marano said, “I thought it was too dark for ninth graders . . . It needs to be in a small group to explain away the dark part of it.” Moving it to small group only would not allow it to be explained. Based on previous directions for books placed on small group only restrictions, teachers are not allowed to give any instruction on them. Students may read them individually or be part of a literature circle, but they do not get instruction from the teacher as they do in whole class instruction. This is something that could have been clarified by a teacher during the ad hoc meetings. Additionally, Trustee Eubanks said, “We do want our kids to read Steinbeck . . . It was just decided that that particular book probably should not be required reading of ninth graders as it is right now.” Keeping Of Mice and Men on the approved list does not mean it is required; it just keeps it as an option. This is another area that could have been explained by a teacher.

As both Trustee Hamilton and teacher Kirsten Pomerantz mentioned at last night’s Board meeting, students find this book relevant and compelling. The “negative” and “dark” aspects of the Great Depression, the racial slurs, as well as the mental health issues presented provide valuable discussions for historical context and repercussions of actions. Although Grapes of Wrath was listed as a viable alternative, students have a much more difficult time accessing some of these themes because of the length. The novella provides a good introduction to these issues. Although there may have been an exception in the past, teachers, as a rule, are not having students read profanity aloud.

Finally, we echo Trustee Hazel’s comments about the process of the opt-out policy. Teachers of freshman English rarely get requests for a student to opt-out of this novella. For example though, one teacher mentioned that a student requested to opt-out of it based on the racial slurs. After going home and having a conversation with his family, they decided that it would be valuable to be part of these discussions, both for him and for the rest of the class to hear his perspectives. These are the types of conversations that we should be promoting.

We appreciate the comments by Trustees Hazel and Hearn that “they would prefer to defer to the professional judgment of teachers in deciding when to assign certain books.” We support this process as long as we actually are following it. We hope that the Board will vote to affirm this and other novels that have already been approved, as well as those recommended to be added.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Lauritzen—CHS ELA Department Chair
Eric Brewer, Jill Carlson, Kelly Diamond, Linda Donnelly, Janna Higbie, Royce Johnson, Rachel Karns, Dave McCaw, Dan O’Connor, Bryan Smidt—CHS ELA Faculty
She was stunned after reading the article in the Press. This shows a level of ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding literature. Students need to learn this. She is shocked and dismayed by a decision made by people she thought were educated.

From: Myron Recob  
Sent: Sunday, May 10, 2015 6:24 PM  
To: Lynn M. Towne  
Subject: "Of men and mice"

Relative to this book being considered to be removed from required reading we think that this book should remain required reading. It reflects the times in a period of US history and written with realism and honesty. As far as language the students of today are exposed to bad language on television, internet, school bus and halls in school. Again, we oppose removing this book from required reading.

Respectfully submitted,

Myron & Linda Recob  
CDA 83815

Sent: Tuesday, May 19, 2015 3:57 PM  
To: Mike Nelson  
Subject: Cd'A curriculum review input

Thank you for encouraging members of the community to comment on books under consideration. As a parent of three children who graduated from CHS, an English teacher at NIC for 30 years, and a resident of Kootenai County for fifty years, I think I have a good sense of what is appropriate and educational for students to read at certain grade levels.

My thoughts on Of Mice and Men are that it would provide opportunities to discuss treatment of others, particularly bullying and how people deal with mentally and physically disabled, as well as attitudes toward African Americans. The book is well written, full of good descriptions and detailed character development, both of which could be analyzed. I did not find anything I thought should not be presented and discussed in a ninth grade English class. I feel that it is appropriate for a ninth grade student to be exposed to different lives, times, and conditions.

Sincerely,
Jeanne Emerson
Dear Board Members,

I have read and contemplated the appropriateness of *Of Men and Mice*.

I believe it is a good book to examine in regard to standards for high school literature. There is a considerable amount of profanity (particularly in reference to God), it has controversial themes, and is dependent on a student’s maturity to digest its implications. It is also by a famous author, known for his classics, has been on reading lists for a considerable number of years, and for years has been the subject of controversy in school communities.

I would love to see all board members read the book and use it as part of a discussion about standards.

The stereotype of Lennie, the big mentally challenged character did bother me. It seemed based on attitudes of an earlier and less enlightened generation. Lennie is portrayed as a danger no matter how caring a heart he might have. His low I.Q made him predisposed to violence and therefore inherently dangerous. This attitude led to people believing the lives of such people were less valuable. I remember the days when downs syndrome children were sent to state homes. Experts pushed families to commit their children for the better good of society and their family. There was an era in the USA when the thought of eliminating those deemed unfit was gaining popularity. There was sympathy for the actions of Hitler in this regard. Executing Lennie like the puppies was very symbolic. **George was implementing euthanasia. Is this an appropriate discussion for 9th graders and left to the teachers address this subject?** This will be for you to decide. I personally, would not want my child’s teacher to have latitude in the discussion of euthanasia. This is a discussion I believe is best handled at home.

The above being said, I ask myself for what age group is this book appropriate. I believe many 9th graders are not ready to view this book on the maturity level required. I would find it more acceptable for a junior or senior. Just as was discussed with the films, there is a big difference between a 14 year old and an 18 year old. I believe books should not get a thumb up or down based on such a large age range. Perhaps 9th and 10th grade literature should be viewed separately from 11th and 12th.

As for the controversial language, this book is a good starting point for board discussion of appropriate language. Some words do not fall under the category of “profane”, but are objectionable to many Christians. Should “dirty words” and cursing of God and Jesus be put in the same category? Should we ask if blasphemy of Mohammed would be treated the same way?

The community looks you for leadership, wisdom and guidance.

Obviously compromise of small group is not acceptable to some and even this suggestion has the intolerant, who claim to be tolerant calling board members “book burners.” Having a policy would help shield individual board members from targeted hate mail, as decisions could be based on well established policy agreed upon by the board. The stress of such severe pressure from local and national groups needs to be mitigated.

I have included some attachment to support my statements. Finally, it is my hope that the decision on *Of Mice and Men* is delayed and used in the discussion of literature guidelines and policy.

I would greatly appreciate a response and/or your thoughts if you care to share them.

Respectfully,
Ann Seddon
1940s - Nazi Use of Involuntary Euthanasia Changes Public Perception of Euthanasia in the US

Urns containing the remains of children euthanised by the Nazis at Spiegelgrund Children's Hospital in Vienna during World War II (The burial took place in Apr. 2002)
Source: news.bbc.co.uk (accessed May 5, 2009)
"When the 1940s dawned, many in the euthanasia movement believed it was only a matter of time before euthanasia became legal in the United States...

But euthanasia advocates were in for a surprise... World War II broke out, and as Hitler's war machine Marched eastward across Europe...news of Nazi atrocities against mental patients and handicapped children filtered back to America... As word spread in the late 1940s, the euthanasia movement found itself increasingly on the defensive, scrambling to deny that the form of euthanasia it supported was the same as Nazi murder."

Ian Dowbiggin, PhD ★★★★ A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America, 2003

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Pro Euthanasia in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

The Ultimate Gift-Euthanasia
Defend or challenge the notion that George's act of killing Lennie was one of kindness
In John Steinbeck's classic novella, Of Mice and Men, George makes the decision of killing Lennie because he knows it is in Lennie's best interest. His act of killing Lennie is not considered criminal. George has good intentions in killing his companion. George is trying to prevent Lennie from being tortured and from his constant desire to please George and not cause trouble. Additionally, Lennie repeatedly places himself in difficult situations, and as a result, brings George into the circumstances. There is a close friendship between George and Lennie, and George had carefully thought out whether or not he should destroy his life. George is faced with witnessing the death of Candy's beloved, old dog and Candy's reaction to his death, which helps George to finalize his resolution. After several years of looking after Lennie, George knows what is best for Lennie, as well as the people around him.
George's act of shooting Lennie can be looked upon as a more peaceful, pleasant death. By examining George's notion to kill Lennie, it is valid to say that his act was one of thoughtfulness and benevolence. Due to Lennie's retardation, it is difficult for him to be independent. Lennie is able to escape being tortured, taken advantage of, and being so hard on himself just for George's acceptance. George learns from Candy's mistake of not killing his dog himself, and George takes the initiative to do it the right way. Euthanasia was a gracious way of George letting Lennie go.
From: Jim & Cary Miller  
Sent: Tuesday, May 26, 2015 5:03 PM  
To: Mike Nelson  
Subject: Re: Time for Board Meeting on Monday, June 1st

had an interesting conversation abt Mice w/ a friend last weekend who attended Catholic schs; she read Mice in 8th or 9th grade and said the language wasn’t a factor and how powerful the book was for her because it was her first exposure to a person w/ disabilities

Are there AP classes in 9th gr? If so, I wld have no prob recommending the book for whole class use. Another thought: every class has its own personality, and a tchr shd be able to use the novel for an entire class if he/she thinks that group cld handle it. So, I’m saying I wld not have a prob w/ the Board’s apparent opinion that the book shd be available for whole class use.

Since I cannot be at the mtg, you may share my thoughts if you feel they are germane.

Cary Miller

NOTE: Cary Miller is a member of the current AdHoc Curriculum Committee.

From: Cathy and Jon Allsup  
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2015 11:30 AM  
To: Mike Nelson; Lynn M. Towne  
Subject: Public Review - Novels

I have finished reading or rereading all the novels on the sixth through tenth grade reading list. Four of the five novels are complex, compelling reads which offer many discussion points. "Z for Zachariah", "Of Mice and Men", and "To Kill a Mockingbird" offer difficult situations which students can ponder in the safety of the classroom. Life frequently presents difficult choices, and it is beneficial for the individual to consider actions he or she might make when confronted with such choices.

The exception is "The House on Mango Street". It is a collection of snippets, most no longer than one page. In this age of Facebook and Twitter, students need practice reading long works that must be read and interpreted over days, not minutes. I kept waiting for an overall story to emerge, but it never did. Being so short, most of the characterizations did not go beyond stereotypes. Any or many "chapters" could be removed or rearrange without effecting the novel. I had to force myself to keep reading as there was no compulsion to find out what would happen next. I know I was supposed to be left with a deep knowledge of life on Mango Street. Instead, I was left feeling that the Emperor had no clothes.

I strongly suggest that "Of Mice and Men" be recommended for whole group discussions and "The House on Mango Street" be an option for small group discussions.

Thank you,
Catherine Allsup
Hayden, ID  83835
Of Mice and Men: Exploring the Context with Primary Sources

While some of George and Lennie's experiences in John Steinbeck's novel Of Mice and Men are universal like the dream of a place to call home and the need for friendships, others are directly related to the novel's setting.

This service is provided by the Library of Congress at www.LOC.gov.

Of Mice and Men: Exploring the Context with Primary Sources

May 12, 2015 by Danna Bell

This post is by Rebecca Newland, the current Library of Congress Teacher in Residence.

While some of George and Lennie's experiences in John Steinbeck's classic novella Of Mice and Men are universal, such as the dream of a place to call home and the need for friendships, others are directly related to the book's setting.

One significant element of the novella's context is George and Lennie's nomadic life as migrant farm laborers. At the beginning of the book, they have traveled from Weed, California in Siskiyou County to Soledad in Monterey County. Offer students this map of California created in 1888.

Use the Primary Source Analysis Tool with selected questions from the Teacher's Guide to Analyzing Maps to encourage students to take a close look at the map. Deepen the conversation by asking:
What can be learned about George and Lennie's experiences from the map?
What information about California can be gathered from the map?
How does the map further your understanding of migrant labor in California?

Napa Valley, California. More than twenty-five years a bindle-stiff.

Ask students to define “bindle-stiff.” Next offer this photograph: “Napa Valley, California. More than twenty-five years a bindle-stiff. Walks from the mines to the lumber camps to the farms. The type that formed the backbone of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in California before the war. Subject of Carleton Parker's ‘Studies on IWW’.”

Ask:

- In what way does the photograph fit the students’ definition of “bindle-stiff?” In what ways is it different?
- What additional insights into George and Lennie’s lives does the photograph offer?
Good morning, Ann - I hope you had a relaxing Memorial Day weekend. Thanks for being patient with my reply.

I am currently reading Of Mice and Men. I did not feel it was appropriate to have a conversation about a book that I have not read since I attended CHS. It was important to me to read this novella with the topic of appropriateness in mind instead of basing my thoughts on what I may or may not remember from the late 80’s/early 90’s. I would like to address some of your points to give you an idea on my thoughts.

First, I do believe the committee is reading books with age ranges and specific grades in mind. It is my understanding that a book that might have been approved for one grade isn’t automatically shifted into a different grade. A book would need to be re-examined for appropriateness at the grade level it is targeting. The shift in state standards has required us to review for good measure these questions of age appropriate materials.

Next, I’m not inclined to delay a decision, however, I am one of five. I also believe that our current policies address the concerns you have. In many ways, I believe we agree. I completely agree that not every child is mature enough to handle controversial issues appropriately. Many families also choose to honor personal values and beliefs differently than other families. I strongly believe that cookie cutter education does not work but rather there needs to be room to individualize a student’s education that is appropriate for their ability, maturity, and family values. That said, I believe our policies provide an excellent way to meet all of the points you have addressed. CdA School policies reiterate often the ability for a parent to opt their child out of controversial material for a very wide range of reasons. Certainly there may be families that will want to opt their student out of this book. I am grateful there are policies that give an avenue for a family to tailor their student’s learning experience with material that is consistent with their beliefs.

I am attaching a few policies to this email that I believe apply to the topic:

Policy 2340 Controversial Issues  
Policy 2520 Curricular Materials  
Policy 2530 Instructional Review  
2530P provides procedures for implementing Policy 2530  
2530F2 is the form to opt out of whole group novel instruction

Additionally, we will be hearing information on Monday evening regarding Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee guidelines for future committees. I agree that we need to take the political heat away from those tireless volunteers that are reading materials on our behalf. It is my hope we can avoid a future issue like what we have encountered recently. I prefer that the committee punt the controversial political questions like Of Mice & Men to those that deserve to withstand the public scrutiny — the elected school board members. Again, that is only my view and I don’t know where the others stand on this issue. The board will begin considering committee By-Laws like what the Long Range Planning Committee is using to direct their activities/recommendations.

Thanks for emailing. I appreciate it. This format is easier for me to respond because we can have an actual dialogue. Your comments have been added to the compilation of comments and will be included in our board packet. Let me know if you have other thoughts or questions.
Christa,

I truly appreciate the response from you and knowing you read my letter concerning literature. The policy attachments were informative. The following is my question. By what criteria is a piece of literature or a film considered controversial and would warrant parent notification. I personally have never heard of such a notification going home to parents except for sex education. The following is a quote from Policy 2430 that your kindly attached.

"The teacher shall notify parents or guardians when controversial issues may be discussed and that they may have their child excused if family religious or moral values so dictate. Controversial subject matter will be reviewed by the principal prior to classroom presentation. If the principal determines that the subject matter, methodology, or materials are possibly controversial and/or lack educational value, he or she may instruct the teacher to modify, or to refrain from teaching the proposed lesson. If the principal determines that the subject matter, methodology, or materials are possibly controversial, but effectively address some aspect of the curriculum, the teacher and principal will determine what notification, if any should be provided to the parent/guardian. If the teacher and principal disagree regarding the controversial nature of a subject matter, methodology, or materials, the matter may be reviewed by the Superintendent. The Superintendent will make the final decision in the matter. " Without guidelines I do not understand how a teacher or administration can reliably know when to notify parents.

I believe "Of Mice and Men" is a good basis for beginning a process of setting literature standards or, at minimum, provides a vehicle to set guidelines for parental warnings. I believe the subject of euthanasia is truly controversial in this community. This combined with an abundance of profanity makes it a good book to examine for policy standards.

Please note that if we do not have some sort of guidelines on excessive vulgarity, sexually explicit material and controversial material, then "anything goes" is the policy. Is there anything that is not acceptable to be used in schools? When will it be known when the line is crossed or even if there is a line?

Perhaps a true description about the content of school literature and films would be a satisfactory move in the right direction. Being transparent to parents would give parents freedom of an educated choice. It would be very simple to place next to a book on a list such things as euthanasia and high degree of profanity. Then the parents can make the decision with full knowledge.

With the high degree of slander against people who want literature standards, I believe the board needs to address the situation or nobody is safe being on a committee and expressing their opinions.

I appreciate your taking time to read my comments and I request that my response to you go in the packet for the board.

Sincerely,

Ann Seddon
Dear Ms. Hazel and Coeur d’Alene Board of Trustees,
I am writing on behalf of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom to express our concern regarding the recent committee recommendation to restrict Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck in the 9th grade at Coeur d’Alene School District.
We understand the school board will be voting on whether to remove Of Mice and Men from the Whole Group Reading list and limit it to the list for “small group instruction only” or to retain this award winning classic novel as part of the curriculum.
With its very appealing elements of innocence, humor, and bleakness, Of Mice and Men is Steinbeck’s representation of the oppressed in post-Depression US society. It has strong imagery, decisive action, authentic dialogue, and cinematic tension. Of Mice and Men reflects a different time in an exceptionally tangible approach that cannot be learned from modern culture. While the short novel has strong themes, it is a great tool for teaching about our country’s past and its struggles with class and poverty. Every community is home to a variety of opinions on what constitutes an appropriate curriculum for high school students. For every person who objects to an assigned book there will be others who favor it. For this reason, the school district has a responsibility to represent a broad range of viewpoints in its curriculum that reflects the multiplicity of opinion in the community and not just the views of the most vocal, the most powerful, or even the majority.
Moreover, the district should respect and support the judgments of educators in their selection of material for the English curriculum based on professional expertise and educational standards, as well as students’ constitutional right to obtain access to a broad range of materials and ideas, including material that some may find controversial or objectionable. Once a book has been selected and approved by faculty members pursuant to the standards outlined in the district’s materials selection policy, any decision on whether to limit a student’s access to materials is most appropriately made by a student’s parents, who are best equipped to know and understand their child’s intellectual and emotional development. But those parents should not be given the power to restrict other students’ ability to read and learn from the book. According to the Coeur d’Alene School District website, “An Opt-Out/Alternative Novel Request form will be available for parents and students that for any reason do not approve of a required novel selection. Parents and teachers would then work together to determine a suitable alternative.” This process – that allows those families that object to Of Mice and Men to request an alternative assignment – is a fair and effective solution that avoids stigmatizing a classic of American literature and preserves every student’s right to access the material.
We extend our support to the capable teachers and administrators of Coeur d’Alene School District, who work to select material for the curriculum without shying away from potentially controversial subjects. We strongly urge the review committee and school board to reaffirm the importance and value of the freedom to read by retaining Of Mice and Men in the Whole Group Reading List for 9th graders. By doing so, the Coeur d’Alene School District will send a powerful message to students that, in this country, they have the responsibility and the right to think critically about what they read, rather than allowing others to think for them.
Sincerely,
Barbara M. Jones
Director
American Library Association
Office for Intellectual Freedom

Eric Suess
Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair
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