



Mockingbird in peril

Pulitzer Prize-winning book faces chop at Toronto schools

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To Kill A Mockingbird could be on the curriculum chopping block for all Toronto public schools.

A parent of a Malvern Collegiate student has asked the Toronto District School Board to remove the classic American novel from Canada's largest school board, the Sun has learned.

Published in 1960, the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Harper Lee chronicles a southern lawyer's struggle against racial injustice in a fictional Alabama town.

Trustees received a note last week from the education director informing them of a complaint about Mockingbird.

"I would argue that it is one of the most celebrated books ever written," trustee Josh Matlow said yesterday. "It is an incredibly important piece of literature and does reflect a history that is admittedly shameful but one we all need to learn about and that students should have an opportunity to discuss."

If the complaint proceeds under the board's policy for learning resource complaints, a review committee would issue a written report recommending whether the book is appropriate.

Ultimately, the education director has the final say but that decision could still be appealed to trustees.

Earlier this year, Margaret Atwood's novel The Handmaid's Tale survived a review spawned by a parental complaint.

Mockingbird is no stranger to controversy in the GTA.

In August, a Brampton principal scrapped the book from a Grade 10 English course after a parent complained. Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board officials said the parent had objected to the use of the N-word in the book.

Matlow said parents may object to some of the words used in Mockingbird or some of the experiences the book's characters endure, Matlow said.

"But I don't think we should dilute the severity of what people went through in our history just to be politically correct," he said.

"It is incumbent upon teachers to include books of a contentious nature into the curriculum in a very sensible and sensitive way.

"There should be opportunities for students to discuss why it is so controversial and why some of the words are so coarse."

Board chairman John Campbell said TDSB schools have shown "openness and receptiveness" to the classics and "language that some may find offensive."

"I think we have to be careful when drawing the line between what's acceptable," he said.

"Teenagers can be the harshest critics ... let teenagers develop their critical thinking skills on their own."

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