

## CONTROVERSIAL TEXTS

Teachers of English language arts are sometimes challenged regarding the texts they and/or their students select for study. Challenges may be based on the ideas in the text, the maturity required for understanding them or the language used to express those ideas. Resources used to support the English language arts curriculum represent various points of view and allow students to explore those points of view that are within their understanding.

Teachers should exercise particular care in selecting or recommending texts for classroom study and discussion, considering such factors as

- the differing instructional needs of their students
- the contribution which the text may make to each student's education
- the artistry and literary value of the text
- the readability and appeal of the text for the particular group of students
- the role the text plays in influencing students' cultural/social/personal experiences outside the classroom
- the purpose(s) for which the text will be used
- the sensitivities of the students
- community sensitivities

When the teacher's selection of a text is challenged by a parent, the teacher must acknowledge every parent's right to restrict his/her own child's reading/viewing/listening. However, the rights of other parents to have the selected resource available to their children should also be respected.

If a text assigned to a class is considered unsuitable by a student and/or his/her parent or guardian, an alternative text should be identified and obtained as an acceptable replacement.

Teachers may find it helpful to consider the following arguments for using texts which address issues and themes or contain content that may be sensitive or controversial in some Atlantic communities.

- The text may demonstrate that society has evolved in understanding and tolerance over the years since it was written/produced.
- Attitudes and opinions that were both current and socially acceptable in the writer/producer's day may now be unacceptable and vice versa.
- Opinions expressed by a character are not necessarily those of the text as a whole and therefore do not necessarily detract from the moral acceptability of the text. Some objectionable opinions are intended to illustrate the character's unsympathetic nature or lack of understanding and are not intended to elicit support or approval from the reader/viewer/listener.

- It is important that students understand the value systems of their own culture and time and of other cultures and other times. Different value systems that may now seem deplorable were nonetheless facts of life in different times and places and are legitimate subjects for study and discussion, as are alternative readings of present culture.
- Given the diverse nature and maturity of students, it is important to confront important issues and bring them into the open for discussion. It is also important for students to recognize that they have accumulated a variety of experiences and opinions shaped by family, community, economics, politics and the media.

Despite all these arguments, respect for the students and concern for their feelings are paramount in text selection. The teacher's own abilities, growing awareness and sensitivity should shape the presentation of controversial material so that it will promote critical awareness, further understanding and empathy rather than give or cause offence.