

Banning books

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I was never a big reader when I was a kid, but I did manage to get through a few books over the years.

Some were required reading at school, others were books I had heard about and thought would be interesting.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and the follow-up with Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain were two of my favourites. I also watched several movie versions of the books dating back to the 1930s.

The books were filled with adventure and colourful characters. You have to admire a kid who could convince his friends that whitewashing a fence was actually fun and have them pay you to do your chores for you. You also have to love a kid who built a raft and floated down the Mississippi River.

Those books have become literary classics, especially in the U.S. However, they are now controversial due to the use of certain words that are no longer acceptable.

Those words were acceptable in 1840s Missouri and in the 1870s when Twain penned his novels.

There are two schools of thought on this, apparently. One is to ban the books altogether, and the other is to explain to children why those words were used and the context.

Words can be a powerful tool. For some reason, people believe what they read. One of the best ways to convince a population of your ideas is to print a newspaper or some other type of newsletter filled with lies and misinformation.

This is why so many corrupt regimes around the world control the media in their own country. It also explains why publications like The National Inquirer are so popular.

The U.S. State of Florida is now going through an entire process where books available in schools must be approved and meet certain guidelines and standards. The new legislation has a dangerous twist to it, in that teachers could be held liable for banned books in their classrooms or library.

Not only can they be held accountable, teachers could face serious consequences like losing their teaching license or even being charged with some kind of criminal 'felony' charge if they are found to have the offending books made available to students.

As a result, in the interest of self-preservation, and I don't blame them, some teachers and schools have cleaned out their libraries of all volumes until they wait for official approval of each book.

It is understandable that those who create the school curriculum and standards want age appropriate books in their libraries. After all, you don't put a set of Encyclopedia Britannica designed for university-level students in an elementary school.

Most schools have been in communities for years. When there is a need, or a new subdivision, you build a school to accommodate the children and families who are living nearby.

Libraries aren't filled with books overnight. It's a process that can take years.

If there are indeed inappropriate books on the shelves, why hasn't this already been noted?

It should be simple common sense for any teacher or librarian to look at a book and realize it is not appropriate for children in Grade 3, and for many reasons. Children develop reading and comprehension skills as they develop. That's why you don't teach Grade 12 Euclidean math to a classroom of first graders.

Much of the focus of the Florida book ban is centred around books that promote an ideology or agenda.

This is understandable. If a school puts a book in its library promoting a single religion as superior to all other beliefs and lifestyles, there would undoubtedly be a huge backlash.

Most parents probably don't want their children being taught ideologies in school that go against what a parent is trying to teach them at home. That's just human nature ? parents want to guide their children, not have a school do it for them.

This is the slippery slope where someone has to decide what children are taught. That's why there are school boards and provincial guidelines. If you don't agree, you have the option of calling your local school trustee or provincial member of parliament.

While the State of Florida has the ability and authority to review their schools and curriculum, punishing a first-year teacher and librarian for having a book on their shelves that someone else ordered years earlier, and turning them into a criminal for it, just makes no sense at all.