

Fahrenheit 451

by BRIAN LOCKHART

That Huckleberry Finn was one wacky and adventurous boy.

I loved reading about him when I was a kid, and that of his pal Tom Sawyer. They floated around the Mississippi River on rafts, explored caves, found trouble, yet redeemed themselves in the end.

You have to love a kid like Tom, who had the savvy to convince his friends that whitewashing the fence ? his chore given as a punishment ? was actually fun. Tom sat back and relaxed while his friends agreeably did the chore for him.

Both of these novels are considered American classics by Mark Twain, yet are being pulled from school libraries because of some of the language, notably the use of an obviously racist term.

Of course, as it usually goes, it is a small minority making the decisions of which books are offensive.

Common sense would be to tell a kid reading one of these books the novels are set in the 1840s, in a state where such language was common ? for the time. However, those terms are now considered offensive and shouldn't be used. That doesn't mean you should stop someone from reading the book.

This nonsense has now arrived in Ontario.

A school in Peel Region has to some estimates, apparently pulled over 50 per cent of its books from the school library, as a result of some new equity-based book-weeding process. Yup, throw them out.

One student who brought this to the attention of media, was told the school removed all books published prior to 2008.

The school said it was done to eliminate damaged, mouldy, or outdated books, which makes no sense at all.

Unless a book is about betting statistics for gamblers on the upcoming football season, most books don't go out of date ? they are of their time. If books are getting mouldy, you've got bigger problems in your building than inappropriate words on a shelf. Many people have books that are 50 or 100 years old in their home libraries that haven't gone mouldy or become dangerous.

It is a dangerous thing when any kind of government agency tries to tell people what they should and should not read. It's even more dangerous when ?educators' working for the public think they should decide which books should be available to them.

Fahrenheit 451, the dystopian novel by Ray Bradbury, presents a society where books have been outlawed, and ?firemen' burn any that are found. The novel was inspired, in part, by the Nazi Book burnings ? a campaign conducted to destroy books that were considered subversive or representing ideologies opposed to Nazism.

Whenever SOMEONE else doesn't want YOU to read something, there should be cause for concern.

There are some parent groups that are opposed to some books being placed on public school library shelves. Most notably, they are books that discuss LGBTQ issues in various forms.

I can understand why some parents don't want their children exposed to such topics at a young age. Kids that young haven't figured out anything in life yet. They are still learning to tie their shoes.

However, the thing is, young children don't seek out books on gender identity or similar topics. No kid that age, on his own, ever went to the library looking for such a book.

The only time a kid that age would be reading a book on the subject is when an adult gives it to them and tells them to read it.

I'm speaking from experience here ? I was once a kid! At that age, girls like to read Charlotte's Web, and for boys, there was a series we all read about a kid named Henry and his goofy adventures or another series, long forgotten, about boys who built hot rods.

There's an easy solution to avoid reading a book you find offensive ? don't pick it up and read it. That also goes for television, movies, magazines, stage plays, musical performances, and any other activity you don't like.