

**N** Kids'  
**C** Right  
**A** to Read  
**C** Project

A project of the **National Coalition Against Censorship**

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**American Booksellers for Free Expression**  
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Mandy Bourland, Assistant Principal  
Minshew Elementary School  
300 Joplin Drive  
McKinney, Texas 75070

**Via Electronic Mail:** [mbourland@mckinneyisd.net](mailto:mbourland@mckinneyisd.net)

Dear Assist. Principal Bourland:

We are a group of literary, educational and free speech advocacy organizations dedicated to promoting the First Amendment and students' freedom to read. As your Review Committee prepares to consider a recent challenge to *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, we write to offer recommendations based on important legal and educational considerations.

We understand that a formal request has been submitted to remove *The Giver* from the curriculum because of references to homicide and sexuality. We urge your committee to follow [McKinney District Policy EF](#) and make its decision on the basis of the literary and pedagogical merit of the book, rather than modify the curriculum to suit the beliefs of individual parents.

The Supreme Court has affirmed that school officials have broad discretion to direct the use of curricular texts but has cautioned that such discretion be exercised within the parameters of the First Amendment. School officials risk violating students' First Amendment rights when they impose restrictions that are not "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns." *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260, 261 (1988). Were school administrators to remove a book from the curriculum solely because some parents claimed it contradicted their religious, political or moral beliefs, they would be impermissibly allowing the viewpoint of these parents to dominate the public education process. Moreover, such an action would contravene McKinney Policy EF's Guiding Principles, which explicitly state, "a parent's ability to exercise control over reading, listening, or viewing matter extends only to his or her own child." (Emphasis added).

*The Giver* is a much-celebrated novel, which is widely regarded as educationally valuable for Middle School students. In 1994, *The Giver* won the Newbery Medal

and was named a School Library Journal Best Book and ALA Notable book. *Booklist* selected *The Giver* as its Editors' Choice in 1993 and praised Lowry for creating "a well-conceived novel that kids will think about as well as enjoy." Both [Common Sense Media](#) and [School Library Journal](#) recommend the book for middle school readers, with the latter lauding its realistic depiction of "abstract concepts, such as the meaning of life in which there are virtually no choices to be made and no experiences with deep feelings." The *Kirkus Review* agrees, "*The Giver* is indeed a provocative novel (and) invaluable in the adolescent classroom."

*The Giver* invites students to debate deep philosophical questions on the price of conformity versus divergence, the consequences of family planning and the value of democratic freedoms. The issue of a "perfect" society opens up many opportunities for discussion in an educational setting and Minshew English teachers are trained to direct such discussions towards constructive lessons.

While not every student may feel prepared to engage such questions, no single parent may deprive all Minshew students of the opportunity to do so. We hope you will prioritize the educational qualities of *The Giver* in deciding whether to retain it in the Minshew curriculum and will offer alternative assignments to those students who opt not to read it.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for more guidance and support as you review this immensely valuable book.

Sincerely,



Chris Finan, Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship



Millie Davis, Senior Affiliate Developer  
National Council of Teachers of English



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund




Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director  
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