Barometer Rising
Hugh MacLennan
At a convention in 1960, members of the Manitoba School Trustees Association voted unanimously to ask Manitoba’s department of education to remove this novel from the high school curriculum. *Barometer Rising* is a story of family conflict and romance set in Halifax during World War I. “What the trustees objected to is the vulgarity and the language used in it,” said Frank Kennedy, a trustee from Norwood, Man. Most trustees had not read the novel.

Go Ask Alice
Anonymous
In 1978, school boards in Richmond and Langley, B.C., removed this book from their high schools. *Go Ask Alice*, which reads like a diary, describes a teenage girl’s experiences with narcotics and sex.

In Richmond, students sent a petition to the school board to protest the ban, and the Richmond Teacher-Librarians’ Association supported them. In Langley, a committee of school trustees, librarians and parents recommended keeping copies in school counsellors’ offices. But these efforts failed; both bans stayed in effect.

A Jest of God
Margaret Laurence
(Cover: McClelland & Stewart, 2008)
In 1978, a school trustee in Etobicoke, Ont., tried but failed to remove this novel from high school English classes. *A Jest of God*—which won the Governor General’s Literary Award for fiction in 1966—depicts the unhappy life of an elementary schoolteacher in small-town Manitoba. The trustee objected to the portrayal of teachers “who had sexual intercourse time and time again, out of wedlock.” He said the novel would diminish the authority of teachers in students’ eyes.

Such Is My Beloved
Morley Callaghan
(Cover: McClelland & Stewart, 2007)
In 1972, two Christian ministers tried to get this novel removed from a high school in Huntsville, Ont. The novel, which is set in the 1930s, tells the story of a young Roman Catholic priest who tries to persuade two women to abandon their lives as prostitutes. The ministers objected to the novel’s depiction of prostitution and the use of “strong language.”

Canadians have long tried to remove books and magazines that they deem offensive, or inappropriate for certain audiences, from public libraries and schools. Sometimes they have succeeded and sometimes they have failed. To mark Freedom to Read Week, we present 30 of their targets in recent decades.
Challenged Publications

Lives of Girls and Women
Alice Munro
(Cover: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971)
In 1976, a high school principal in Peterborough, Ont., removed this novel from the Grade 13 reading list. The novel depicts the life of a girl growing up in small-town Ontario in the 1940s. The principal “questioned its suitability” because of the explicit language and descriptions of sex scenes,” reported Jeff Sallot in The Globe and Mail.

Hold Fast
Kevin Major
In 1988–89, an individual tried to get this young-adult novel removed from a high school library in Estevan, Sask. Hold Fast tells the tale of a troubled lad from small-town Newfoundland who challenges adult authority at almost every turn. School authorities in Estevan considered the complaint but kept the book in the library.

The Last of the Golden Girls
Susan Swan
(Cover: Lester & Orpen Dennys Publishers, 1989)
In 1989, two women in Alberta heard the author read a passage from this novel, which describes the sexual escapades of three female friends in Ontario’s cottage country, on CBC Radio. Thinking the passage obscene, the two listeners complained to the police in Edmonton. A few months later, after having listened to the tape, a detective dismissed the complaint.

Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era
John Newlove, editor
In 1987, Parents for a Quality Curriculum objected to the use of this anthology—and five other works of contemporary Canadian fiction—in high schools in Victoria County, Ont. The parents objected to “anti-establishment attitudes” in the poems, but the school board voted to keep Canadian Poetry on its reading list.

Written by Franklin Carter | Design by Reva Pomer
The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz  
Mordecai Richler  
(Cover: Penguin Group Canada, 1995)  
In 1990, parents demanded the removal of this novel from high school reading lists in Essex County, Ont. They objected to “vulgarity, sexual expressions and sexual innuendoes” in the text. The novel, which is set chiefly in Montreal in the 1940s, tells the story of a young Jewish man who strives for material success. Noted Canadian authors—including June Callwood and Al Purdy—defended the book. But the Essex County Board of Education advised teachers and principals to avoid using novels in class that “might provoke undue controversy.”

The Young in One Another’s Arms  
Jane Rule  
(Cover: Doubleday, 1977)  
In 1990, Canadian customs officers seized this novel en route from the United States to Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto. The officers were searching for sexually obscene literature, but later released the novel to the importer. The novel, which depicts gay characters positively, is legally published and sold in Canada.

The Impressions Series  
Jack Booth and David Booth, editors  
In 1991, 30 angry parents entered Rosary Catholic School in Manning, Alta., detained the principal and demanded the removal of Impressions. The parents claimed the fairy tales and poems in this language arts series for youngsters conveyed morbid, Satanic themes. Later, the school board ordered the removal of the books.

La première fois. 2 vols.  
Charles Montpetit, editor  
Between 1992 and 2002, secondary schools in Quebec invited Montpetit to talk to students about this award-winning non-fiction anthology for teenagers. The government body that funds such visits also sent each school copies of the books to distribute to students. But on five occasions, school authorities belatedly realized that the authors in La première fois had written about sex or sexual experiences. The schools refused to distribute the books and asked Montpetit to discuss other works.

To Kill a Mockingbird  
Harper Lee  
(Cover: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002)  
In 1991, an African-Canadian organization called PRUDE (Pride of Race, Unity and Dignity through Education) in Saint John, N.B., sought to remove Lee’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn from school reading lists. PRUDE disliked the portrayal of racial minorities in both novels.

Maxine’s Tree  
Diane Léger  
(Cover: Orca Book Publishers, 1990)  
In 1992, an official of the woodworkers’ trade union in B.C. asked for the removal of this children’s book from elementary school libraries in Sechelt, B.C. The official said the book, which tells the story of a girl who tries to protect a tree in B.C.’s rainforest, promoted an anti-logging viewpoint. The school board rejected his request.
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Of Mice and Men
John Steinbeck

In 1994, in Alberta's legislature, Victor Doerksen called for the removal of profane, irreligious books from Alberta's schools. He cited Steinbeck's novel, which describes the hardships of migrant workers in California during the Great Depression, as an example. Doerksen had a petition that bore the signatures of 811 Albertans who wanted schools to withdraw books that "demean or profane the name of God and Jesus Christ."

Asha's Mums
Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paulse
(Cover: Women's Press, 1990)

In 1997, school trustees in Surrey, B.C., banned the use in the elementary grades of children's storybooks that depict same-sex parents. One of the banned titles was Asha's Mums. A teacher, James Chamberlain, challenged the ban in court. In 2002, the Supreme Court of Canada declared that B.C.'s School Act required secular and non-discriminatory education. A ban on books about same-sex parents could not be legally justified.

The Harry Potter Series
J.K. Rowling
(Cover: Raincoast Books, 2000)

In 2000, a Christian parent in Corner Brook, Nfld., complained about the presence of these popular fantasy novels in an elementary school. The parent objected to the depiction of wizardry and magic, and the school principal ordered the books' removal. Neither the parent nor the principal had read the novels.

Wallpaper

In 2001, a patron of the Toronto Public Library complained about the June 2001 issue of this glossy style magazine. The cover features a photograph by Joachim Baldauf of three topless models—two male and one female—standing in the sea. The patron said that the female model was being used as a sex object to sell the magazine, but the library retained its copies.

Marie Tempête: Le secret d’Emilie
Patrick Cothias and Pierre Wachs
(Cover: Editions Glénat, 1994)

In 2000, feminists in Hull, Que., began campaigning to remove adult comic books and graphic novels that depict violence against women from the city's libraries. In 2001, they persuaded the city council to ban "all visual documents … that trivialize and/or condone acts of sexual aggression or sexual violence" from public libraries. Librarians reluctantly restricted access to 180 books. Among them was Marie Tempête: Le secret d’Emilie, a graphic novel set in eighteenth-century France.

In 2002, a public outcry in Quebec prompted politicians to repeal the ban, and the books returned to the open library shelves.
Le grand cahier

Agota Kristof

In the spring of 2003, the father of a 16-year-old girl in St-Jérôme, Que., complained to school authorities and the news media about this novel. Le grand cahier, which won literary awards in Europe, describes the effects of war on two boys who live in an unnamed country. The parent described the novel as “very violent and grossly pornographic.” The school quietly dropped the book from its reading list at the beginning of the 2003–04 school year.

Western Standard

In 2006, the Western Standard—a magazine published in Alberta—reprinted eight of 12 Danish cartoons about Islam to illustrate a news article. In Calgary, an imam—and later the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities—complained to Alberta’s human rights commission. They said the cartoons exposed Muslims to hatred or contempt.

In 2008, the commission rejected the complaint. The magazine’s publisher, Ezra Levant, estimated that he had spent $100,000 defending himself. During the dispute, the Western Standard ceased publication.

Maclean’s

On Oct. 23, 2006, Maclean’s magazine excerpted Mark Steyn’s bestselling book America Alone. The book considers the impact of Muslim immigration to Western democracies. In 2007, the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) filed complaints with three Canadian human rights bodies. The CIC said Steyn’s “flagrantly Islamophobic” writing exposed Muslims to hatred and contempt.

The Canadian and Ontario human rights commissions dismissed the complaint without hearing it, but the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal held a hearing in 2008. The tribunal cleared Maclean’s of any wrongdoing.

Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak

Deborah Ellis

In 2006, the Ontario branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) objected to the inclusion of this non-fiction book in a voluntary reading program in Grades 4–6 of Ontario’s schools. In Three Wishes, children speak frankly about the strife around them in Palestine and Israel. Concerned about the “toxic effects” of the book on students’ minds, the CJC urged school boards to withdraw Three Wishes from the reading program. At least five school boards restricted or denied access to the book.

The Golden Compass

Philip Pullman

In 2007, Ontario’s Halton Catholic District School Board voted to ban Philip Pullman’s trilogy of fantasy novels—The Golden Compass, The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass—from its schools. The board objected to “atheist” themes in the British author’s books.
Vue Weekly
In 2007, the Edmonton Public Library received a complaint about this local news and entertainment magazine. A patron described *Vue Weekly* as “a very negative, even dark publication” and objected to the sex ads. The library retained copies in its collection.

The Wars
Timothy Findley
In 2011, parents complained to Ontario’s Bluewater District School Board about the use of this novel in Grade 12 English classes. The novel tells the story of a Canadian soldier in Europe during World War I. One woman objected to depictions of sexual violence and prostitution.

Students and others defended the novel’s literary value. The school board’s textbook review committee recommended that *The Wars* be kept in the secondary school curriculum, and the novel remained in classrooms.

The Handmaid’s Tale
Margaret Atwood
*(Cover: Seal Books, 1998)*
In 2008, a parent in Toronto complained about the use of this dystopian novel in his son’s Grade 12 English class. *The Handmaid’s Tale* tells the story of Offred, a woman who lives in a future patriarchal theocracy.

The parent disliked the novel’s “profane language,” anti-Christian overtones and themes of “violence” and “sexual degradation.”

In 2009, a review panel of the Toronto District School Board recommended that the novel be kept in the curricula for Grades 11 and 12. *The Handmaid’s Tale* remained on Grade 12 reading lists.

The Handmaid’s Tale
Margaret Atwood
*(Cover: Seal Books, 1998)*

Contes pour buveurs attardés
Michel Tremblay
In 2010, a Christian parent in Laval, Que., tried to persuade a high school to ban this collection of macabre short stories. She said that she did not want her son exposed to “Satanism and pedophilia.” The school rejected her demand.

Tremblay is one of Quebec’s best-known authors, and *Contes pour buveurs attardés* has appeared on Grade 10 reading lists in Quebec for years. In the book’s preface, the author says that his stories tackle homosexuality, incest and encounters with the devil, although these references are so allusive that they are almost undetectable.

Les nombrils
*(Series)*
Marc Delafontaine and Maryse Dubuc
*(Cover: Dupuis, 2008)*
In 2009, a school for troubled teens in Laval, Que., pulled this comic book series off its library shelves. School authorities feared that the young, thin female characters in the books might encourage anorexia among female students. The books returned to the library shelves after the vulnerable girls had graduated.

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