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.
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.

**The Apprentice ship 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 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.

**To Kill A Mockingbird**
Harper Lee
(Cover: 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., asked to remove Lee’s Pulitzer Prize–winning novel and blafka 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.

**The Young in One Another’s Arms**
Jane Rule
(Cover: Doubleday, 1977)
In 1993, 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 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.

**Marie Tempête: Le secret d’Emilie**
Patrick Cotihais and Pierre Wuchs
(Cover: Editions Glénat, 1994)
In 2002, 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.

**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 Blalock 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.

**Asha’s Mums**
Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paule
(Cover: Women’s Press, 1990)
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**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.

**Of Mice and Men**
John Steinbeck
In 1994, an Alberta 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.”

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The tribunal cleared without hearing it, but the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal held a hearing in 2008. America Alone excerpted Mark Steyn’s bestselling book. On Oct. 23, 2006, Maclean’s, the Canadian and Ontario human rights commissions dismissed the complaint. The book considers the impact of Muslim immigration to Western 2007, Maclean’s, the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) filed complaints with 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

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

Underground to Canada
Barbara Smucker
(Cover: Groundwood Books, 2003)
In 2002, African-Canadians lobbied the Tri-County District School Board in Nova Scotia to remove Underground to Canada, John Ball’s In the Heat of the Night and Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird from classrooms. The complainants objected to the depictions of black people and the use of the word “nigger” in these anti-racist novels. The school board rejected their request.

Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak
Deborah Ellis
(Cover: Groundwood Books, 2004)
In 2006, the Ontario branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CIC) 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 CIC urged school boards to withdraw Three Wishes from the reading program. At least five school boards restricted or denied access to the book.

Les nombri
Philip Pullman
(Cover: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1996)
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.

The Handmaid’s Tale
Margaret Atwood
(Cover: Seabird Books, 1996)
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 curriculum for Grades 11 and 12. The Handmaid’s Tale remained on Grade 12 reading lists.

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.