



∴ ontario library association

POLICY NAME:	FOREST OF READING® POLICY ON THE SELECTION OF MATERIALS
DATE APPROVED:	NOVEMBER 15TH, 2017 BY FOREST OF READING SELECTION CHAIRS DECEMBER 15TH, 2017 BY OSLA COUNCIL *Updated July 2020

INTRODUCTION

The Forest of Reading® is Canada’s largest recreational reading program, with over a quarter of a million readers taking part every year.

The OLA Board of Directors is pleased to provide this reading initiative:

- To encourage children, young people and adults of Ontario to enjoy reading;
- To develop recognition for Canadian authors and Canadian books;
- To contribute to the financial stability of the Canadian publishing industry;
- To provide staff at school and public libraries with a meaningful tool for improving literacy in schools and libraries; and
- To respond to community interest and need.

The Forest of Reading® is designed to engage and encourage readers to enjoy reading and to create lifelong readers. It offers ten reading programs for children and young adults, designed for various age ranges:

Program Name	Grade Range	Book Type
Blue Spruce Award™	JK–Grade 2	Picture Books
Silver Birch Express Award®	Grades 3–6	Fiction / Non-fiction
Silver Birch Fiction Award®	Grade 4–6	Fiction

Yellow Cedar Award	Grade 4-8	Non-Fiction
Red Maple Award™	Grades 7-8	Fiction
White Pine Award™	Grades 9-12	Fiction
Le prix Peuplier	varies	Picture Books
Le prix Mélèze	varies	Shorter chapter books or mature picture books
Le prix Tamarac	varies	Chapter Books
Evergreen Award	Adult	Fiction/Non-Fiction

OBJECTIVE

The Forest of Reading® lists may contain books that parents, staff at school and public libraries and readers see as difficult or controversial. This policy provides context for OLA’s position on the selection of books in the Forest of Reading®.

DEFINITIONS

Censorship: Censorship is defined as the removal, suppression or restricted circulation of literary, artistic, or educational images, ideas, and/or information on the grounds that they are morally or otherwise objectionable.

The selector seeks reasons to include material in the collection; the censor seeks reasons to exclude material from the collection. It is the responsibility of the school and library staff to provide a diverse, balanced, and high-quality collection representing all points of view on controversial issues.¹

Freedom of Expression: In Canada, section 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the

¹Adapted from: American Association of School Librarians:
http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/intellectual_freedom_brochure0212.pdf

press and other media of communication". Please refer to [OLA's Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Intellectual Right of the Individual](#).

POLICY STATEMENTS

The OLA supports the right of a family to decide if a book is or is not suitable for their child.

The OLA affirms that intellectual freedom requires freedom to examine other ideas and other interpretations of life than those currently approved by the local community or by society in general, and including those ideas and interpretations which may be unconventional or unpopular.

The OLA affirms the importance of fostering a society that tolerates freedom of expression and the opportunity to explore difficult, even personally offensive subject matter.

PROCEDURE

The Selection Committee for the Forest of Reading® consists of staff at both school and public libraries. These people are experts in choosing books that will engage and challenge young readers. While there is no deliberate selection of controversial materials, any book that meets the selection criteria will not be discarded if it also holds the potential to be controversial. Few great Canadian books would be chosen if this were the case.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR THE FOREST OF READING®

The following criteria are presented in order of importance:

1. Literary quality in the case of fiction including but not limited to:
 - structure, richness of language, acceptance of authentic voices that are not limited by British or Canadian grammar (such as Patois), craft of the writer, pace, clarity.
2. Quality of presentation for non-fiction, including but not limited to:
 - appeal and appropriateness of the presentation, clarity, layout, format, diversity of people in illustrations/photographs (including, but not limited to: age, gender, body types, mental or physical abilities, skin colours, etc.)
3. Audience appeal
 - appropriateness to the age group (school-aged, adult literacy etc.), a range of readability, inclusiveness and diversity, the themes and content.

4. Accuracy, relevance and authenticity of voice:
 - The author writes a story and/or creates characters from their own culture (#OwnVoices), has experience with the culture (i.e.,LGBTQIA2S, deaf/hard of hearing community, religion or faith, culture or ethnicity etc.) being portrayed and/or has consulted with or sought the approval of people of that culture (i.e., Elders, community group, co-authored etc.)
5. Balance in the final list:
 - Characters (including protagonists) represent diverse backgrounds, including gender and gender expression, racial and ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQIA2S characters etc.
 - Variety of subjects and genres appealing to different audiences.
 - Authors and illustrators represent diverse backgrounds, including gender and gender expression, racial and ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQIA2S characters.
 - Geographical settings, e.g., rural, urban, alternate realities etc.,
6. Curriculum connection is outside the purposes of the reading programs for the school-aged programs.

POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

- We live in a society where people are free to object to books and opinions, and people are free to defend their right to intellectual freedom. Removal or banning of a book constitutes censorship and sends a destructive message to young people.
- Works of fiction are generally not constructed in an unbiased, balanced way – they proffer opinions and perspectives that challenge the reader.
- Books that are difficult or controversial pose an opportunity for a child to ask questions and to learn. The Forest of Reading® is primarily delivered through schools across Ontario providing the chance for children to debate, inquire, and develop opinions in a learning environment.
- The Forest of Reading® is a voluntary reading program. Children who participate in the voting process must read 5 of the 10 books in their chosen category. For the picture book categories the readers must have read or have had all 10 books read to them. If a child or a parent does not agree with the contents of the book, they do not have to read it.
- A library should be a safe place to explore dangerous ideas.

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON THE INTELLECTUAL RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

**Approval of revision on January 2020

STATEMENT FROM THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

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