

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, July 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Forest of Reading® is Canada's largest recreational reading program, designed to engage and encourage readers to enjoy reading, with over a quarter of a million readers taking part every year. [First conceptualized in 1994](#), the program has grown from a single award to 10 awards, including books for Kindergarten students through adult readers.

The OLA Board of Directors is pleased to provide this reading initiative and supports its four primary goals:

1. To create a meaningful experience that instills the love of reading and provides opportunities for all young people to become lifelong readers.
2. To give young people a proven head start. Children who read recreationally do better in all subject areas and are more socially and civically engaged.
3. Position libraries as spaces for discovery, exploration, inquiry and imagination in their communities and schools.
4. Promote and celebrate Canadian books, authors, illustrators, and publishers in both English and French.

FOREST OF READING PROGRAMS

The Forest of Reading® offers 10 reading programs with books selected for readers across age ranges, from young children to middle-grade readers, young adults, and adults. It also includes three French-language programs for school-aged children.

Program Name	Grade Range	Book Type
Blue Spruce Award™	JK–Grade 2	Picture Books
Silver Birch Express Award®	Grade 3–4	Fiction & Non-Fiction
Silver Birch Fiction Award®	Grade 5–6	Middle Grade Fiction
Yellow Cedar Award	Grade 5–8	Middle Grade Non-Fiction
Red Maple Award™	Grade 7–8	Middle Grade Fiction
White Pine Award™	Grades 9–12	YA Fiction
Le prix Peuplier	varies	French, Picture Books
Le prix Mélèze	varies	French, shorter Chapter Books or mature Picture Books
Le prix Tamarac	varies	French, Chapter Books
Evergreen Award™	Adults	(English) Fiction & Non-Fiction

OBJECTIVE

The Forest of Reading® lists may include books that families, school staff, public libraries, and readers consider 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 the removal, suppression, or restriction of the 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 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 press and other media of communication”. Please refer to [OLA's Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Intellectual Rights of the Individual](#).

POLICY STATEMENTS

The OLA supports a family's right to decide whether a book is suitable for their child.

The OLA affirms that intellectual freedom requires the freedom to examine ideas and interpretations of life beyond those currently approved by the local

¹Adapted from: American Association of School Librarians:
http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/intellectual_freedom_broc_hureO212.pdf

community or society in general, including those that 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 library staff from various sectors, including school library professionals and public library staff (e.g., children's librarians). These people are experts in choosing books that will engage and challenge young readers. While we do not deliberately select controversial materials, we will not discard any book that meets the selection criteria if it also has 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 not limited by British or Canadian grammar (such as Patois), the writer's craft, pace, and 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 for the age group (school-aged, adult literacy, etc.), a range of readability levels, inclusiveness and diversity, and the themes and content.

4. Accuracy, relevance and authenticity of voice:

- the author(s) writes a story and/or creates characters from their own culture (#OwnVoices), has experience with the culture (i.e., 2SLGBTQIA+, 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 groups, co-authored, etc.)

5. Balance in the final list:

- characters (including protagonists) represent diverse backgrounds, including gender and gender expression, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.
- a variety of subjects and genres appealing to different audiences
- authors and illustrators represent diverse backgrounds, including gender and gender expression, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and 2SLGBTQIA+ characters.
- geographical settings, e.g., rural, urban, alternate realities, etc.

6. Explicit curriculum connections are outside the purposes of the reading programs for school-aged programs. Books may have a connection(s) to a curricular area of study, but they are not relevant to selection for the purposes of this program.

POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

- We live in a society where people are free to object to books and opinions, and to defend their right to intellectual freedom. Removal, banning or restricting 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.

- Difficult or controversial books give children an opportunity to ask questions and 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 safe and structured learning environment, often with the guidance of a caring adult—such as a school library professional— who can help them navigate those challenging issues.
- The Forest of Reading® is a voluntary reading program. Readers who participate in the voting process ideally read 5 of the 10 books in their chosen category. For the picture book categories, readers ideally have read, or had read to them, all 10 books. If a child or a parent/family disagrees with the book's contents, 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 in January 2020

STATEMENT FROM THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

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THE FOREST OF READING AND ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION ON BOOK CHALLENGES AND THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO READ (revised November, 2023)

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON SCHOOL BOARDS BOOK BANNING & RESTRICTING BOOKS (November, 2023)