



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 15, 2018

## Citing Racism, Minnesota School District Drops Two American Literary Classics From Curriculum

The Duluth, Minnesota, school district has removed two American literary classics from its curriculums and class reading lists, saying that racist language and content in the novels may make some students feel uncomfortable.

As reported by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, in “an effort to be considerate of all students,” Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, both of which include “racial slurs” as key parts of their narratives, “will no longer be required reading in the district’s English classes next school year.” The district emphasized that while the books will no longer be included in school curriculums, they would still be available for those students who wish to read them.



“The feedback that we’ve received is that it makes many students feel uncomfortable,” the district’s curriculum director, Michael Cary, told reporters. He added that district officials felt “we could still teach the same standards and expectations through other novels that didn’t require students to feel humiliated or marginalized by the use of racial slurs.”

Reported the *Star Tribune*: “Cary said the decision, made as a group by district leaders and leaders in Duluth’s secondary schools, came after years of concerns shared by parents, students, and community groups.”

Cary said that the school district was “doing this out of consideration of the impacts on our students and specifically different groups of students in our schools, and especially our communities of color.”

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, considered one of America’s most important literary works, recounts the adventures on the Mississippi River of a homeless Missouri boy and his runaway slave friend. The book mocks misguided ideals, including misconceived notions of honor, dignity, and righteousness, as well as racism. Jim, the slave in the book, despite being uneducated, turns out to be the most noble person in the book, based on the actions of the characters. The book shows that slavery is harmful, mean, and wrong.

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, narrated from the perspective of a child, tells the story of a small-town Southern trial lawyer and his efforts to defend a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman.

Both novels of necessity include language and circumstances intense with racism and hatred — elements that have rightly made generations of readers “uncomfortable” and provided important opportunities for teaching and discussion about attitudes, actions, and their impact on others.



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But both books are anti-racist, anti-bigotry, and anti-hypocrisy — all valuable lessons that kids should learn. Yet these books are being removed from the curriculum because the N-word might make kids uncomfortable, even as the school district admits the kids hear the word daily (it's used by blacks in song lyrics, group names, and casual conversation) and even while stories about transgenderism and homosexuality are pushed by school districts on kids on a daily basis, which many kids find very uncomfortable. Maybe critics of the books should actually read them to learn about the faults of hypocrisy.

However, instead of embracing those opportunities, the Duluth school district has opted to make sure students and staff remain buffered from potentially uncomfortable teaching moments. The town's local NAACP spokesman, Stephan Witherspoon, couldn't be happier, calling the move "long overdue." Insisting that the two works include "oppressive language" unfit for students, Witherspoon said that alternative — albeit inferior — literary works exist that could be used to inoculate kids against racism while making sure they aren't required to reach beyond their comfort zone.

"Our kids don't need to read the 'N' word in school," Witherspoon declared, insisting that "they deal with that every day out in the community and in their life. Racism still exists in a very big way."

Cary assured that political correctness would guide the process for coming up with replacement literature that won't make kids feel uncomfortable. "Conversations about race are an important topic, and we want to make sure we address those conversations in a way that works well for all of our students," he said. He added that "the decision to protect the dignity of our students seemed like a reasonable and easy one to make that didn't require teacher input. But in terms of making sure that we select excellent novels that serve the same purpose, that definitely needs teacher feedback and their help in making that decision."

One group weighing in against the school district's decision was the National Coalition Against Censorship, which pointed out that both books offer vital historical perspective on the issue of race in America — perspective that all American students need. "We're potentially treating students too delicately," said the group's spokesperson Nora Pelizzari. "This country still has significant racial tension and needs to grapple with that in a real way."

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