

NY Times

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## School Censors Violate the Rights of Children

To the Editor:

In "The Censorship Sweepstakes" (editorial, March 10), you say the Southampton middle school's cancellation of a student production of "Peter Pan" is a "tad more defensible" than a related and equally specious California decision to eliminate from statewide 8th and 10th grade English tests writings of Annie Dillard and Alice Walker because the Southampton students are "younger and more impressionable."

How much younger? Middle school includes eighth grade. Censorship is censorship, no matter where it occurs. It is no more defensible in New York than in California and in both places violates the First Amendment rights of the students to read or see what they choose.

"Peter Pan" is a wonderful, fantastical play, whose characters nobody needs to take seriously (who can forget Mary Martin in the title role soaring over the orchestra pit singing, "I'm flying!"). Its allegedly offensive stereotype is not of Indians themselves, but Sir James Barrie's satirizing of white American caricatures of Indians. What a pity the Puritans of Southampton deny their children Sir James's wit and imagination.

ROBERTA PLINER  
New York, March 10, 1994

### Ban Stowe's Novel?

To the Editor:

I was dismayed to read your March 8 report that a middle school in Southampton, L.I., had canceled a production of "Peter Pan" as insulting to Indians. Sherry Blakey-Smith, director of the Southampton School District's Indian Education Program, tipped her hand when she defiantly asserted, "We wouldn't do 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' in a school."

Why in the world not? If Harriet Beecher Stowe's noble abolitionist epic is not acceptable in American schools, then what can they teach nowadays? Ms. Blakey-Smith's apparent ignorance of what Stowe's novel is about illustrates the dangers of chiseling away at the curriculum until there's nothing left but intellectual baby food.

JAMIE JAMES  
New York, March 10, 1994

### Yes, in Virginia, Too

To the Editor:

Re "The Censorship Sweepstakes" (editorial, March 10): Please do not leave Virginia out of your hall of infamy. Fairfax County, the richest per capita in the country, also appears to be among the least enlightened, judging by their treatment of my 1981 children's book, "Families."

I wrote "Families" as a single mother with a 6-year-old daughter because I believe that children are helped by seeing their own reality reflected in literature. My daughter, Corey, and I knew children living in many different family constellations, but could find none of this rich variety reflected in books. Children's literature seemed stuck in Dick-and-Jane time warp, where every child had two parents, two siblings, a dog, a cat and a house in the suburbs.

"Families" includes not only human but animal families, ranging from lions to ants. It also mirrors the ethnic variety of an Upper West Side public school. It is narrated by a 6-year-old, who lives with her mother in

lesbianism by showing two women living together and, even worse, "glorifies divorce."

They refer to a scene that shows the narrator going to see her father during vacation, and shows one of her friends saying what one of Corey's friends did say to her mother at the time, "Why don't you get divorced so I can go to Chicago on the airplane too?" Only people who go through life inspecting the world for smut could take this as anything but a joke.

Are the parents of Fairfax County so deluded that they think the divorce rate is caused by children's literature? Are they willing to let a couple of hysterics determine their children's reading material? And is it too much to expect a school administration to stand up to this kind of nonsense, rather than to cave in without a struggle?

People in Fairfax County who may want to defend the Bill of Rights, not to mention realism in children's literature, can get in touch with me, the American Civil Liberties Union or the National Coalition Against Censorship.

MEREDITH TAX  
New York, March 13, 1994



one city, like my daughter, and goes to see her father in another during vacations.

The book is being removed from the family life curriculum of Fairfax County, where it has been used without incident for six years, because two parents (leading opponents of the entire curriculum) say it encourages