

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP KIDS' RIGHT TO READ

February 1, 2022

School Board Members
McMinn County School District
3 South Hill St.
Athens, Tennessee TN 37303

Re: Removal of *Maus*

Dear Board Members:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including freedom of expression in K-12 schools. We are writing to protest the recent removal of *Maus* from the curriculum in your district and to urge its return pending a formal review as required by district regulations.

Based on a review of the minutes of the Board's meeting of January 10, 2022, it is our understanding that the book was removed without being formally reviewed in accordance with the district's book challenge procedures. Book challenges are often highly contentious and emotional, and the district's regulations are well crafted to ensure that all parties feel that they have been heard and respected. It also ensures that decisions are based on objective criteria that focus on the needs of students. For example, Board Policy 4.403 provides that a diverse committee of education professionals and community members review the challenged work and that the committee employ specific criteria when reviewing the book and issuing a recommendation.

In bypassing the district's established procedure, the Board has deprived itself of the knowledgeable insight which those procedures are designed to provide. Moreover, the minutes of the January 10 meeting do not demonstrate that the Board considered all of the criteria that it has explicitly stated are relevant to making decisions about the removal of materials from the curriculum.

Maus is the only graphic novel ever to have won a Pulitzer Prize. *Entertainment Weekly* listed it at seventh place on their list of the 100 best reads from 1983 to 2008, and *Time* put it at seventh place on their list of best non-fiction books from between 1923 and 2005. It is clearly a highly valuable book which relates directly to a major topic of study in 20th Century history, and was the central educational resource for the district's curriculum on that topic. If any book should not be removed without following the district's well-designed challenge policy, it is *Maus*.

Therefore, we urge the District to convene a committee pursuant to BP 4.403 to review *Maus*, and to stay enforcement of its previous decision to remove the book until that committee can make its official recommendations to the Board.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: The Authors Guild
 Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
 National Council of Teachers of English
 PEN America
 The PEN Children's and Young Adult Books Committee
 Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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