

From: Dale Cole <dcole@bcswan.net>
Sent: Friday, August 18, 2023 1:09 PM
To: Molly White
Cc: Steven Barger; Robin Moffitt
Subject: Fwd: Curriculum Concerns--Wit and Wisdom Book Restrictions

[REDACTED]
Please follow up with this teacher and her principal about these curriculum concerns.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Fri, Aug 18, 2023 at 11:37 AM
Subject: Curriculum Concerns--Wit and Wisdom Book Restrictions
To: Steven Barger <sbarger@bcswan.net>
Cc: Robin Moffitt <rmoffitt@bcswan.net>, Dale Cole <dcole@bcswan.net>

Good morning! My name is [REDACTED]. I am a [REDACTED] teacher at [REDACTED]. When I first heard we were getting Wit & Wisdom here, I was SO excited!! I previously taught 5th grade ELA using this curriculum in Cumberland County and loved it! The students were always so engaged (even the ones who didn't like reading very much) and it caused students to really get to engage on a deeper level with the social studies curriculum. I apologize that this email will be quite lengthy, but as an educator, I believe my voice deserves to be heard, too.

I was incredibly disappointed to hear that, though I am supposed to teach at least 3 modules this year, that I can only teach 2 and a half due to the novel restrictions. I understand that some of this content is, as the kids would say, "uncomfy". However, when looking at the social studies pacing guide as in conjunction with the curriculum Wit and Wisdom offers, it aligns. Social studies and history, in my opinion, is so incredibly important to learn! I always prefaced my previous students by reminding them that not all of history is pretty, however, it's important to learn about our shortcomings so we can continue to improve our country! I'd remind them that one day THEY will be the ones who take charge of our country and that knowledge is the most important tool they can take with them on that journey.

Wit and Wisdom, according to their official mission, puts emphasis on "valuing ALL voices and experiences" and to engage in productive struggle by being able to "read and communicate about challenging topics to build knowledge and literacy". They even continue on to show studies and research that prove how their knowledge (W&W does an INCREDIBLE job of providing factual background knowledge before diving into texts) promotes literacy. Their goal, by incorporating social studies is to "help students to become productive citizens". I believe that the only way we can uphold these missions is to not shy away from the tough topics. The curriculum as a whole does a marvelous job of presenting the content in a way that is age appropriate. The parent letters also allow families to know that their children may come home to ask questions. Isn't that what we want? Students and their families to have open communication about the world around them? Active engagement and participation?

Further, it truly breaks my heart that, growing up in an area with a relatively large Native American population, that we are completely wiping them from the curriculum this year. In the first module, you aren't just reading a "graphic, violent" novel, you are learning about Native culture. You learn about various tribes, what they ate, how they traded goods, what they lived in, what they believed, etc. It truly does not sit well with me that we aren't providing that for these students, especially since Wit and Wisdom has a mission of valuing all voices and experiences. Is the corresponding novel sad? Yes. But it is, unfortunately, the experience of this group of people who really did exist! In the

past, my students left this module wanting to know more about the tribe and Chief Joseph. They also referred back to this story many times throughout the school year. I believe that the great material in this module far outweighs the tragedy in the novel. I'd also like to point out that I always prepared the students for sad sections of the book by providing a warning. They told me this was helpful.

I also am very torn up about the removal of "The River Between Us". This section of module 3 emphasizes the role of women during the Civil War and I, as a woman, don't think it's fair representation to allow the boys' roles to be learned about but erase the women. There is a lot of comparing and contrasting the roles and various POV activities that go with this section as well. I don't think the claim of "white passing is better than being dark" is a strong enough argument to cut this novel. First off, that is not at all the purpose of this novel. Second, this story does take place during the Civil War. It is foolish to pretend that the lightness or darkness of your skin wasn't relevant then. Please also consider, I taught at a predominantly African American school when I taught this before and not a SINGLE one of my beautiful, dark-skinned students came to this conclusion. I, myself, am not white. I, like Delphine in the story, am mixed. When I heard this was the reason for the cut, it really felt offensive to me because it feels as though the school board and district is saying that my representation and the representation of my female and fellow non-white students doesn't matter. This novel was actually my past students' favorite out of all of the books! It has components for everyone. It has ghosts, mystery, romance, and war. I don't think this module will be effective if we only teach "The Boys' War". Lastly, I am having a hard time understanding why a light skinned girl was the reason for not approving a book, but the book with photographs of dead children was approved. It just seems unbalanced and as though the white boys' experiences are being elevated over the experiences of non-white people and women.

Again, I apologize for this being such a lengthy email and I very much appreciate the fact you took the time to review it. I love my job and I love my students and I want ALL of them to get the best education that I can possibly provide. I also want ALL of them to feel like they are represented and important in my room. The fact that the books specifically highlighting strong minority female leads are being unapproved makes me feel as though I cannot represent all of my students. I feel it's just a second blow to me seeing as I am a minority woman. I'm sure there's a process that is used to consider these books and maybe it's a coincidence that the minority female lead stories were cut, but I can also imagine you understand how this would appear to me and other educators and students like me. I am pleading that you reconsider and go back and look at these novels through a different lens. The lens of elevating voices of those who are typically overlooked in history and the lens of realizing just how rich these novels are in conjunction with the curriculum as a whole.

I'd be happy to speak to anyone if anyone has further questions or needs help understanding anything I've written today. Again, thank you for your time.

[REDACTED]

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"Average leaders raise the bar on themselves; good leaders raise the bar for others; great leaders inspire others to raise their own bar." Orrin Woodward