

March 7, 2006

York Region District School Board
The Education Centre – Aurora
60 Wellington St. West, Box 40
Aurora, Ontario L4G 3H2

Canadian Jewish Congress
4600 Bathurst St
Toronto, Ontario M2R 3V2

BY FAX: 1-905-727-1931
1-416-635-1408

Dear Colleagues:

RE: Three Wishes by Deborah Ellis

On behalf of the BCCLA, I write today to convey our concerns about recent media reports that complaints from the Canadian Jewish Congress have led the York School Board to withdraw Deborah Ellis's *Three Wishes* from the Silver Birch reading program.

Coming as it does just as Canada completes its annual celebration of Freedom to Read Week, this decision to effectively restrict student access to a book because of perceived controversial content seems deeply ill advised to the Association. We write in the hopes we can open up a public discussion with your organizations about this issue. Further, we write to ask you to reconsider this move, which must be seen, in the end, as an attempt to stifle freedom of expression and intellectual freedom for young people.

We do not need, in a free society, to censor and limit what our students read. Our obligations as free citizens and adults who care for the young is to promote and foster free intellectual development and strenuous debate. We should be encouraging children to read difficult and challenging books, and using the opportunity of such reading to promote discussion and further debate. Freedom is a difficult and anxiety provoking project,

often enough, but the proper response to the challenge of freedom is mature reflection and open discussion, not censorship. We urge both the Canadian Jewish Congress and the York school board to reconsider their recent moves against *Three Wishes* and to restore the book to libraries and reading lists associated with the Silver Birch program. We would be very interested indeed in pursuing this discussion with you at your convenience, and look forward to the opportunity to explore this difficult matter with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Gratl', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jason Gratl,
President

cc: Ontario Library Association