

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

To the Montgomery County Commission,

Penguin Random House, the Authors Guild, PEN America, National Coalition Against Censorship, Every Library, Texas Library Association, FReadom Fighters, We Need Diverse Books, American Indians in Children's Literature, and Texas Freedom to Read Project are writing to protest the Montgomery County Citizens Review Committee's re-classification of *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* by Linda Coombs from the Juvenile Nonfiction Collection to the Juvenile Fiction Collection in the Montgomery County Memorial Public Library catalog.

Colonization and the Wampanoag Story is a [carefully researched, fact-based account](#) of the Indigenous perspective of the tribes of the New England area on the impacts of European colonization. Moving it to the fiction section communicates distrust of material that reflects the truths of our American history. It diminishes the legitimacy of Coombs's perspective as a member of the Wampanoag Tribe and Indigenous educators who recommend its use.

We ask the Commission to overturn the Review Committee's decision on *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* and order it to stay in the Juvenile Nonfiction Collection across your county's public libraries.

As free expression advocates, we were also dismayed by the ban on the title while it underwent its review. Book bans restrict access to essential texts and limit one's freedom to read. Best practice affirms that books should remain accessible, not restricted, while undergoing a review.

Further, as advocates for diverse literature, it is critical that *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* is accessible to its intended audiences and appropriately shelved as a nonfiction text. *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* is recommended for children and middle grades and has [been praised](#) for the "breadth and scope of the difficult subjects it examines." The title has received numerous accolades for providing an Indigenous perspective on the impact of European settlement of the Americas, was the official selection by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the [Library of Congress' 2024 Great Reads for Kids](#), and was a finalist in the middle-grade category for the New England Independent Booksellers Association's book awards.

As stated in Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's seminal essay, "[Mirrors Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors](#)," published in 1990: "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part." To fictionalize this book, sends the same message.

By recategorizing this book from fiction to nonfiction, the Committee also runs afoul of the [reconsideration policy](#) enacted by the Montgomery County Commission on March 26th, 2024. In section (9)(j), the policy authorizes the Citizens Review Committee to take

the following actions in response to a reconsideration request: take no action, remove a book from circulation, or “reassign the material to a more restrictive portion of the library.” The Committee is not authorized to overturn fact-based categorization decisions, such as moving a nonfiction book to the fiction section.

The restriction of *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* threatened the freedom to read and the re-categorization of *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* is false, a naked ploy to censor history our children learn. This is a clear attempt to undermine this important work of a nonfiction children’s author. Citizens of Montgomery County, Texas and patrons of the public library system should have access to a wide array of perspectives as they seek to learn about and navigate the world.

Penguin Random House, the Authors Guild, PEN America, National Coalition Against Censorship, Every Library, Texas Library Association, FReadom Fighters, We Need Diverse Books, American Indians in Children's Literature, and Texas Freedom to Read Project have a demonstrated track record of advocating for authors and the freedom to read. We hope to see the Citizen Review Committee’s actions reversed prior to the October 17th deadline given to Montgomery County’s public librarians by the Citizens Review Committee, and are happy to pursue further dialogue and actions to achieve this goal once we have received your response.

Signed,

American Indians in Children's Literature
Authors Guild
Every Library
FReadom Fighters
National Coalition Against Censorship
PEN America
Penguin Random House
Texas Freedom to Read Project
Texas Library Association
We Need Diverse Books