

Tennessee school board bans Holocaust graphic novel

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—A Tennessee school board voted unanimously to remove a Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel about the Holocaust from its curriculum over concerns about offensive words and rodent nudity.

The 10-member board of education in McMinn County, about 60 miles south of Knoxville, voted Jan. 10 to remove the book *Maus*. The graphic novel by Art Spiegelman depicts Nazis as cats and Jews as mice. It received a special Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

School board members raised concerns over a handful of vulgar words deemed inappropriate for the eighth grade, as well as a depiction of the author's mother naked, rendered as a mouse.

The book was an "anchor text" for McMinn County's eighth-grade English language arts instruction.

Creator calls the decision 'Orwellian'

Spiegelman, who wrote and illustrated the book based on his parents' experience in Nazi-occupied Poland and later at Auschwitz, told CNBC he was baffled by the decision.

"I've met so many young people who ... have learned things from my book," he said, calling the decision "Orwellian."

The most recent school board vote came ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day Jan. 27, marking the 77th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

School boards in politically conservative districts across the nation are reexamining their curriculums because of parent objections that children might find the materials anxiety-provoking.

Most of the objections center on race, gender or sexual orientation. In last fall's Virginia governor's race, Glenn Youngkin, who won the race, ran an ad in which a parent supported banning Toni Morrison's *Beloved* from schools. The book speaks in explicit terms about the effects of slavery in the United States.

Some of those efforts to ban books have focused on critical race theory, an academic theory that some conservatives have said causes children to be taught that America is a wicked, racist country.

In December, the North East School District in San Antonio pulled 400 books from library shelves to review them, after state Rep. Matt Krause, R-Fort Worth, sent a letter inquiring about a list of more than 800 titles.

The president of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, who is Jewish, tweeted: "Yes it is uncomfortable to talk about genocide, but it is our history and educating about it helps us not repeat this horror."