

readers in the program, and is culturally diverse. Selection is the desire to meet the needs of all readers. Censorship often stems from a personal reaction to the subject matter or the language, or a desire to protect our children from the realities of the world around them. By establishing and following criteria for the selection of lists, committees hope to bypass censorship issues and select only the best of the available books for each reading program.

### **Do children choose what they read?**

It is important to keep in mind the purpose of Forest of Reading programs. Through voluntary participation, students further develop their love of reading, expand their critical thinking skills and begin to appreciate how to discuss and debate books with others. While the list is selected by professionals (teacher-librarians and children's librarians), the winners are entirely the children's choice. Students who participate do so voluntarily, are guided on this journey by professionals, and only need to read five books on the list in order to vote. This is where the self-selection comes into play. The list is ten books long. If a student or a parent objects to one or more titles, then they need not read them.

### **The controversy: Three Wishes**

Making that decision for yourself or for your child is valid. Asking that your views on a book be extended to all readers in a board of education is not.

This has become a divisive issue, especially around a particular book on the Silver Birch list, *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*, by Deborah Ellis.

Triggered by a teacher's objection in York Region District School Board, the Canadian Jewish

Congress asked OLA to remove the book from the list and copied every Director of Education in Ontario to do the same. The OLA Board of Directors stood by its members, ratifying the work done and the choice made.

Five boards did ban use of the book in the Silver Birch Award program. Articles were written in local and national press, TV and radio covered the debate but the words of children speaking about the book are most powerful.

### **Some comments from children**

Toronto District School Board has an on-line conference for students. These postings are reprinted with permission from the authors.

"I think of this exactly like *Quid Pro Quo!* Swearing in books doesn't encourage people to swear, drugs in books doesn't encourage people to take drugs, and suicide bombing and other violence in books doesn't encourage people to be violent! It just tells them that there are such things and makes them aware of the facts not the fictional." J. Grade 5 student

Tess Kalinowski, Education Editor for the *Toronto Star*, interviewing Bernard Katz, a former Chair of the OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee, and key analyst for the Ontario Library Association during the controversy.

#### **Voting Day**

The readers in the Silver Birch program vote on May 10th for their favourite books.

#### **Award Day**

At Harbourfront Centre in Toronto on May 24, the children will reveal to their peers the winners of the Awards for Fiction and Non-Fiction. Deucalion Technologies receives the votes from the schools electronically and compiles the totals in a school-by-school spreadsheet when the final votes are received.

