

Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials

Initiated by: James Gudaitis

Address: 7030-D Arnold Ave Phone: 333-2874

Representing: Self Son Daniel Organization/group

School Bartlett High School

Material questioned: Title "The House of the Spirits" Author Isabel Allende

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, NY. Copyright date 1985

Audio Visual Materials: Film Filmstrip Record Other  
(Please circle)

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to the following questions. If sufficient space is not provided, use additional sheets of paper.

1. Have you seen or read this material in its entirety? Yes.
2. To what do you object in this material?  
Please cite specific passages, pages, etc. See attached 9-page critique.
3. What do you believe is the main idea of this material? Perverted sex, with a sub-theme of the occult and supernatural, and a minor reference to political change in a South American country.
4. What review(s) of this material have you read? Spark Notes.com
5. Have you talked to anyone to discuss how the material fits into the overall District program?  
No.
6. What action do you recommend that the school take on this material? Eliminate it from your approved book list.
7. In its place, what material do you recommend that would provide adequate information on the subject? Other books by realist authors, such as "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" by Thomas Hardy, or "Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain.
8. Have you spoken with the unit principal? Yes What was his/her response?  
She (Ms. McKean) listened and told me she would forward my complaint to the Controversial Issues Sub Committee.

James Gudaitis 4/30/04  
Signature of Complainant Date

Mary McKean 4/30/04  
Signature of Unit Principal Date

April 24, 2004

To: Anchorage School Board

From: James Gudaitis, parent of Daniel Gudaitis, a senior at Bartlett High School

Subject: Objections to the book, *The House of the Spirits*, by Isabel Allende. © 1985, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., NY., 368 pgs.

This book was required reading by Ms. Kathryn Berkowitz in her AP Literature class. First, I will provide a plot overview of the book, followed by a list of the main characters, and conclude with a excerpts from the book that I found most objectionable.

1. Plot Overview [retrieved from Spark Notes  
(<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/houseofspirits/summary.html>)]

On the day that the priest accused her of being possessed by the devil and that her Uncle Marcos's body was delivered to her house accompanied by a puppy, Barrabás, Clara del Valle began keeping a journal. Fifty years later, her husband Esteban and her granddaughter Alba refer to these journals as they piece together the story of their family.

Clara is a young girl when Barrabás arrives at the del Valle house. Her favorite sister, Rosa the Beautiful, is engaged to Esteban Trueba. Clara is clairvoyant and is able to predict almost every event in her life. She is not able to change the future, only to see it. While Esteban is off in the mines trying to make his fortune, Rosa is accidentally poisoned in the place of her father, Severo del Valle. Rosa dies. Clara is so shocked by the events that she stops talking. Nine years later, Esteban has made a fortune with his family property, Tres Marias, thanks to his hard work and to his exploitation of the local peasants. On top of exploiting their labor, Esteban exploits all of the young girls of the peasant families, notably Pancha, for his sexual satisfaction. In addition to the peasant girls, Esteban also has sexual relations with prostitutes, including Transito Soto. Transito and Esteban become friends, and he lends her money to move to the city. Esteban's mother is about to die, and he returns to the city, where he pays a visit to the del Valle home. Esteban and Clara become engaged and marry. They move into the big house on the corner that Esteban built for them. Esteban's sister Ferula moves in with them.

About a year after they are married, Clara and Esteban's first child, Blanca, is born. When the family travels to Tres Marias for the summer a few years later, Blanca meets Pedro Tercero and they fall in love. Pedro Tercero is the son of Pedro Segundo, the peasant foreman of Tres Marias. Toward the end of the summer, Clara becomes pregnant again with twins, who she announces will be named Jaime and Nicolás. Days before the twins are due, Clara's parents are killed in a car accident. Rescuers are unable to find Nivea's head. No one wants to tell Clara that Nivea is buried headless, because they do not want to upset her just before the birth. Clara, however, realizes that her mother's head has not been found and makes Ferula go with her to find it. As soon as she recovers her mother's head, Clara goes into labor. Over the years, Ferula and Clara have developed a deep friendship. Ferula's feelings for Clara border on passionate love, and she and Esteban develop a rivalry over Clara's affections. One morning, Esteban comes home unexpectedly and finds Ferula in Clara's bed. Esteban kicks Ferula out of the house. As she leaves, Ferula curses Esteban to eternal loneliness.

Blanca and Pedro Tercero's love grows as they mature, and they soon realize that Esteban would disapprove if he knew. In addition to their being of different classes, Pedro Tercero is a revolutionary, while Esteban is a conservative. Blanca and Pedro Tercero continue their romance in secret. Several years later, they are exposed to Esteban by Jean de Satigny, who is trying to ingratiate himself with Esteban so he can become either his business partner or his son-in-law. Esteban makes Blanca leave Tres Marias and tries to kill Pedro Tercero. In his anger, Esteban hits Clara. She never talks to him again. For several years although they live in the same house, they almost never see each other. Jaime and Nicolás finish boarding school and return home. Jaime studies medicine and Nicolás dabbles in spirituality and inventing. Esteban becomes very involved in the Conservative party, runs for Senate, and is elected. Esteban and Clara eventually return to a civil, if silent, relationship.

A few years later, Blanca gets pregnant. Esteban tells her that he has killed Pedro Tercero and forces her to marry Jean de Satigny. About six months after they are married, Blanca discovers Jean de Satigny's unusual sexual practices and leaves him. She gives birth to her daughter Alba as soon as she arrives home at the big house on the corner. Miguel, the younger brother of a friend and lover of Nicolás and Jaime, watches Alba's birth from a closet.

According to Clara, Alba is born lucky. She is raised by her entire family, inspiring great love in all. She is the only member of the family to develop a close and loving relationship with Esteban. Although she thinks that Jean de Satigny is her father and that he is dead, Alba meets Pedro Tercero and establishes a friendship with him. To the great sadness of everyone but herself, Clara dies. When she is eighteen, Alba enters the university where she meets Miguel, and they fall in love. Miguel is a revolutionary. They participate in some of the growing number of anti-conservative protests that are springing up around the country.

To everyone's surprise, the socialists win the elections. Pedro Tercero joins the government. The peasants take over Tres Marias. Esteban tries to stop them and is taken hostage. At Blanca's request, Pedro Tercero intervenes and saves Esteban. Esteban and the conservatives do all they can to discredit the socialists, including preparing to a military coup. A few months later, there is a military coup. Jaime, who is friends with the Socialist president, is killed. Miguel joins the guerrillas, and Pedro Tercero goes into hiding in the big house on the corner. Esteban is at first pleased with the coup but soon realizes that it results not in the conservatives' return to power, but in the establishment of a military dictatorship. He is powerless to do much other than to help Blanca and Pedro Tercero escape to Canada.

The colonel at the head of the dictatorship abducts Alba. He turns out to be Esteban Garcia, Pancha and Esteban Trueba's grandson. Before she died Pancha told Esteban the story of his ancestry. Esteban slowly made his way up the ranks of the military, in the process acquainted himself with Esteban Trueba and his family, especially Alba. Under the guise of finding out where Miguel is, Esteban Garcia exacts revenge on Alba for his grandmother's mistreatment. Desperate to find Alba, Esteban turns to Transito Soto, who runs the Christopher Columbus, a brothel-turned-hotel. Thanks to the connections she has established through her sex work, Transito is able to repay the favor Esteban did for her years before, and she assures that Alba is returned home. Alba and Esteban have just begun to write the story of their family when Esteban dies. Alba carries forth the project, pregnant with a child whose father is either Miguel or one of the men who raped her while she was in detention.

## 2. Main Characters:

**Clara** – barely aware of the material world. She is most interested in communicating with spirits and only pays attention to mundane details such as domestic chores in times of extreme necessity. Clara is often described as floating through the world. At times, this refers to her literally levitating, at others it shows the way she is able to ignore much of what she does not want to deal with.

**Esteban Trueba** – a wealthy miner. He rapes many peasant girls. He marries Clara, and they have a daughter, Blanca.

**Ferula** – Esteban Trueba's older sister. Ferula is jealous of Esteban. After Dona Ester's death, she moves in with Esteban and Clara. Ferula and Clara become great friends. Ferula secretly desires Clara. When Esteban discovers Ferula in bed with Clara, he throws Ferula out of the house forever. As she leaves, Ferula curses Esteban. Many years later, Ferula dies in one of the city's poor neighborhoods. Clara washes Ferula's body herself.

**Pancha** – A peasant girl at Tres Marias. She is raped by Esteban Trueba, taken into his house as a housekeeper, and then thrown out when she becomes pregnant. She is the mother of an illegitimate son of Esteban Trueba's, who is the child's namesake. Pancha passes on to her son Esteban Garcia and then her grandson Esteban Garcia her resentment toward Esteban Trueba.

**Transito Soto** – A prostitute that Esteban Trueba first encounters while restoring Tres Marias. Transito borrows money from Esteban to move to the city and establish a brothel there. In good faith, Transito returns the favor to Esteban many years later by helping him secure Alba after she is captured.

**Jean de Satigny** – Blanca's husband. Jean de Satigny is a French immigrant who wants to join de Trueba family through business or marriage. He is able to marry Blanca thanks to his revelation of her affair and her subsequent pregnancy. When Blanca discovers his sexual eccentricities, she leaves him.

**Jaime and Nicolás** – Twin sons of Esteban and Clara.

**Amanda** – A lower class woman, active in university counter-culture. She has a relationship with Nicolás and gets pregnant. Jaime, who is in love with her, performs the abortion. Shortly after the abortion, Amanda disappears from the story. She reappears twenty years later when Jaime helps to save her from illness due to drug addiction.

### 3. Objectionable material:

Actual excerpts from the book are in quotes. Summaries or commentary from SparkNotes.com are in *italics*. My comments are in brackets.

Ch 1: [During a Catholic Mass, Clara, the youngest of the del Valle children, says to Father Restrepo,] “Pssst! Father Restrepo! If that story about hell is a lie, we're all fucked, aren't we....” (p. 8).

Ch 2: Esteban Trueba, a wealthy miner, *realizes that he has an enormous sexual appetite*. He rapes a 15-year-old virgin peasant girl, Pancha Garcia. “When Esteban Trueba went out to look for her, it was already late in the afternoon....He threw his arm around her waist, swept her up with an animal-like grunt, and placed her before him in the saddle. The girl did not resist. He kicked his heels in the stirrups and they took off at a gallop in the direction of the river. They dismounted without speaking and looked each other over....Esteban did not remove his clothes. He attacked her savagely, thrusting himself into her without preamble, with unnecessary brutality. He realized too late, from the blood spattered on her dress, that the young girl was a virgin, but neither Pancha’s humble origin nor the pressing demands of his desire allowed him to reconsider....She lay on her back, staring at the sky with terror, until she felt the man drop to the ground beside her with a moan. She began to whimper softly....‘Starting tomorrow, I want you to work in the house’, he said.” The next night, he called for Pancha into his bedroom. “Now Esteban took the time to savor her fully and made sure that she felt pleasure too. He explored her slowly, learning by heart the smoky scent of her body and her clothes...He learned the texture of her straight, dark hair,...of her fresh lips, her tranquil sex, and her broad belly....He was probably happy that night and the few nights after as the two of them cavorted like two puppies in the huge wrought-iron bed...” (pp. 50-51). [Apparently Pancha enjoyed sex after being raped.]

*Pancha becomes pregnant, and Esteban loses interest in her. She leaves the main house, and Esteban begins raping other peasant girls, including one who “could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen years old, but she was fully developed....Not a girl passed from puberty to adulthood that he did not subject to the woods, the riverbank, or the wrought-iron bed.”* (p. 55).

One morning, because of a bad dream the night before, Esteban was upset. “As he did every morning, he went into the kitchen for his breakfast and saw a hen pecking crumbs from the floor. He gave it a kick that ripped its stomach open, leaving it to die in a pool of guts and feathers, flapping its wings.” (p. 62).

Ch 3: *Instead of losing her abilities as she gets older, as Nana had predicted, Clara becomes more clairvoyant.* “Dreams were not the only thing that Clara read. She could also predict the future and recognize people’s intentions.” (p. 67). She predicts deaths and natural disasters, reads cards, and plays the piano with the cover down.

“ ‘This city is a shithole,’ [Esteban] concluded.” (p. 73). “[for] being a miserable son of a bitch, no, forgive me, Mother, ...” Esteban thinks. (p. 76).

*Esteban and Clara marry. Ferula, Esteban’s sister, moves in with them. In the traditional and acceptable space of female friendship, Ferula and Clara develop a bond deeper than that of*

*either woman to Esteban. Ferula in particular devotes herself entirely to Clara. Ferula's passion for Clara is so strong that it borders on romantic and sexual desire [lesbianism].*

Ch 4: When Clara's daughter, Blanca, was a toddler, "Blanca pulled off her clothes and ran out naked to play with Pedro Tercero [also a toddler]. They played among the packages, hid beneath the furniture, exchanged wet kisses, ...ate the same snot, and smeared themselves with the same filth until, wrapped in each other's arms, they finally fell asleep under the dining room table." (p. 90).

The peasant women said to Clara, "Since when has a man not beaten his wife? If he doesn't beat her, it's either because he doesn't love her or because he isn't a real man...Besides, she was born with a wound between her legs and without balls, right, Se\_ora Clara?" (p. 91).

*Esteban is furious that one of his twin sons will not be named after him, and in a rage he goes off to the best brothel in the city, the Christopher Columbus. There he re-encounters Transito Soto. Transito is happily working as an independent prostitute at the Christopher Columbus, with a reputation as the best woman they have. However, Transito still wants more independence. She and Esteban share not only great sexual appetites but also great ambition, and she tells him of her dream. "What I want is a whores' cooperative. Or whores and fags, to make it more encompassing." (p. 102).*

"The three Mora sisters [friends of Clara] were students of spiritualism and supernatural phenomena. Thanks to a photograph that showed the three of them around a table with a misty, winged ectoplasm flying overhead..." (p. 107). [Ectoplasm is associated with ghosts or demons.]

*Over the years, "Ferula had come to love Clara with a jealous passion" while Esteban's "love for [Clara] had grown to the point where it had become an obsession." They enter into a rivalry which comes to a head when Esteban returns home from Tres Marias unexpectedly to find Ferula sleeping in Clara's bed. In a rage, he throws his sister out of the house; she leaves, cursing him to eternal loneliness.*

Ch 5: [Blanca and Pedro, both just 15 years old, become lovers.] "They sought each with their tongues, as they always did,...and fell kneeling as they kissed in desperation. Then they rolled onto the soft bed of damp earth. They were discovering each other for the first time, and there was no need for words. The moon crossed the whole horizon, but they did not see it; they were too busy exploring their deepest intimacy, insatiably entering each other's skins. From that night on, Blanca and Pedro Tercero met every night in the same place, at the same time." (pp. 134-135).

Ch 6: [Clara was angry with Esteban and wouldn't sleep with him.] "I [Esteban] drilled a hole in the bathroom wall so I could watch her naked, but it got me so excited I decided to plaster it over. To hurt her feelings, I pretended I was going to the Red Lantern [prostitution house], but all she said was that it was a lot better than raping peasant girls, which surprised me, because I didn't think she knew about that. As a result of her comments, I tried rape again, just to see it would get a rise out of her, but time and the earthquake had taken their toll on my virility. I no longer had the strength to grab a sturdy peasant girl by the waist and swing her up onto my saddle, much less rip her clothes off and enter her against her will. I was of an age when you need help and tenderness if you're going to make love. I was old, damn it." (p. 155).

“Nicolás’ interest in spiritual things had begun a few years earlier...he would visit the three Mora sisters in their old mill to study various occult sciences. But soon it became abundantly clear that he had not the slightest talent for clairvoyance or telekinesis...” (pp. 160-161).

[Count Jean de Satigny followed Blanca during one of her nightly encounters with her lover.] “In a bend of the river, ... he saw them...they were naked. The man had his back to [Jean], but he had no difficulty recognizing the Jesuit priest who had helped officiate at the funeral mass of old Pedro García...Blanca slept with her head resting on the smooth brown stomach of her lover.” (p. 169). [When he learned of this, Esteban Trueba, Blanca’s father, was furious] with that “lazy, good-for-nothing son of a bitch. I should have killed him when I said I would!...I swear I’m going to find him and when I lay my hands on him I’m going to cut his balls off if it’s the last thing I do.” When Clara objected, Esteban “lost control and struck her in the face, knocking her against the wall. Clara fell to the floor without a sound...Blood was flowing from her nose. When she opened her mouth, she spat out several teeth, ...” (pp. 171-172). *He immediately apologizes, but Clara never speaks to him again for as long as they live.*

Ch 7: “The three Mora sisters loved [Nicolás] very much. They lent him their secret books and helped him decipher the mysteries of horoscopes and divining cards. They would form a ring around him, holding each other by the hand, trying to suffuse him with their healing fluids...” (p. 188).

[Amanda gets pregnant after an affair with Nicolás. Amanda does not want to marry Nicolás because she does not love him.] “ ‘Now what are we going to do!’ he exclaimed. ‘An abortion, of course,’ [Amanda] replied.... ‘Ask your brother Jaime for help.’ ” (pp. 199-201). *Nicolás turns to Jaime for help. Although he has not yet finished medical school, Jaime agrees to perform the abortion.* [Jaime, who secretly loved Amanda, struggled when performing the procedure.] “For if this child had been his instead of Nicolás’, it would have been born healthy and intact, instead of exiting in bits and pieces in this sewer of a clinic.” (p. 206).

Ch 8: *Jean de Satigny develops increasingly strange habits, which begin with snorting cocaine, smoking opium, hiring extremely unqualified Indians as household servants, setting up an elaborate photography studio Blanca [his wife] is never allowed to enter, and going to the casino. Jean soon embarks on a new business enterprise: covertly unearthing and exporting Indian antiquities. Blanca is not perturbed by this either, until he starts bringing Indian mummies into the house.* Blanca is disturbed when she hears “moans, suffocated cries, and laughter” coming from the off-limits laboratory, and she “no longer doubted that something was going on with the mummies.” (p. 220). *The next day, Blanca manages to get everyone out of the house, and she breaks into the studio. There, to her great surprise, she discovers that the nocturnal noises came not from mummies but from Jean and the Indians he employs.* “The walls of...the studio were covered with distressing erotic scenes that revealed her husband’s hidden character....There was the entire Incan court, as naked as God had put them on this earth, or barely clad in theatrical costumes. She saw the fathomless abyss between the thighs of the cook, the stuffed llama riding atop the lame servant girl, and the silent servant who waited on her at the table, naked as a newborn babe, hairless and short-legged, with his expressionless stone face and his disproportionate, erect penis.” (pp. 221-222).

Ch 9: Blanca’s daughter, Alba, is born. Her grandmother was Clara, whose “age and experience had sharpened Clara’s ability to divine the occult and to move objects from afar....Clara’s communication with wandering souls and extraterrestrials was conducted through telepathy,

dreams, and the pendulum she used for that purpose..." (p. 227). [Clara wanted to teach this ability to Alba.] "The little girl also took part in [Clara's] Friday sessions, during which the three-legged table jumped in broad daylight without the aid of any special tricks..." (p. 239).

*One day, Esteban Garcia arrives at the house in the city and requests an audience with Esteban Trueba. While they are waiting for Esteban Trueba to come home, Alba enters the room. [Alba is 6 years old now.] Esteban Garcia is fascinated with her. Overcome with jealousy and desire, he simultaneously attempts to strangle and to molest her. "He wanted to hurt her, destroy her, but he also wanted to continue smelling her...and having her soft skin within reach of his hand...With one hand he encircled the child's neck..., aware that she was so tiny he could strangle her with very little effort. He wanted to do it, feel her writhing and kicking at his knees, squirming as she fought for air. He wanted to hear her moan and die in his arms. He wanted to pull off her clothes. He felt violently aroused. With his other hand he ventured beneath her well-starched dress, running his fingers up her legs until he found the lace of her batiste petticoats and her woolen drawers with their elastic bands. He was panting...Esteban García took her hand and placed it on his stiffened sex. 'Do you know what this is?' he asked hoarsely. 'Your penis,' she replied, for she had seen it...on her Uncle Nicolás whenever he walked around naked doing his Oriental exercises." (pp. 243-244). A moment later, Esteban Trueba enters the room. Without saying anything, Alba runs out.*

Ch 10: "Pedro Tercero never got used to the life of a bachelor, despite his success with women, especially the magnificent adolescents....He tried to make these young girls happy for a short while,...until he finally, delicately, left them. Frequently, when he was in bed with one of them and she was sighing in her sleep beside him, he would close his eyes and think of Blanca, with her ample body, her warm, generous breasts, ... and he would feel a cry pressing in his heart." (pp. 263-264).

*Esteban Trueba becomes increasingly depressed. One day, two of his friends try to cheer him up by taking him to the Christopher Columbus, the best brothel in the country. "I have to admit I had never seen a fag close up except Carmelo,...so I was taken aback when one of my friends, a family man and a broker on the stock exchange, chose one of the fat-assed boys in the [photo album]. The boy appeared as if by magic from behind the curtains and led my friend off by the hand, giggling and wiggling his hips like a woman." (p. 267). Esteban has great difficulty choosing a prostitute. Finally, he is offered the best in the house, who turns out to be Transito Soto. The two old friends are very glad to see each other. Transito explains to Esteban that the brothel is doing so well because she has succeeded in setting it up as the cooperative of prostitutes and homosexuals that she always wanted. "'We're doing very well. It's a good business, and no one here feels exploited. We're all partners. This is the only whorehouse in the country with its own authentic Negro. You might have seen others, but they're all painted. But you can rub Mustafá with sandpaper and he'll still be black.' ... Tránsito removed her last veil, and her magnificent nakedness so overwhelmed me that I immediately felt deathly tired. My heart was weighed with sadness and my penis was as flaccid as a withered, aimless flower between my legs....Without ceasing to speak, Tránsito opened her legs, casually separating her the soft columns of her thighs as if she were simply adjusting her posture. I began to cover her with my lips, inhaling, pressing, and licking, until I forgot all about my grief and the weight of the years, and my desire returned with the force of other times, and without stopping my kisses and caresses I pulled my clothes off in*

desperation, happy to discover my masculinity intact and firm while I plunged into the warm compassionate animal that was offering itself to me..." (p. 268-269).

Ch 11: [Esteban García, who sexually molested Alba when she was six, paid her another visit on her fourteenth birthday.] " 'I have a present for you,' Esteban García said, his mouth twisting into a smile. Alba tried to turn her face away, but he held it firmly in both hands, forcing her to look at him. It was her first kiss....García's tongue tried to pry open her lips while his hand pressed against her jaw until he forced it open. She imagined that tongue as a warm, slimy mollusk, and she was overcome by a wave of nausea, but she kept her eyes open. She...felt the ferocious hands wrap themselves around her neck; then without interrupting the kiss, the fingers began to tighten. Alba thought she was choking, and pushed him with such force that she managed to get away from him... 'Did you like my present?' He laughed. Alba watched him disappear across the garden with enormous strides, then sat down and wept." (p. 278).

Ch 12: "[Jaime] now found himself trapped in a demanding relationship [with Amanda] at an age when he no longer saw himself capable of tumultuous love. I'm no good at these things anymore, he would think after those exhausting sessions with Amanda, who, in order to charm him, resorted to the most extreme expressions of her love, leaving both of them undone." (p. 300).

" 'Go to hell,' Trueba said without conviction. 'Fine. That's where we're going. You're coming with me' [Pedro Tercero replied]... 'Old Trueba's got his balls in the right place,' the President said. 'He really should be on our side.' " (pp. 306-307).

Ch 13: *On the day of the coup, Pedro Tercero comes to the house in secret and asks for Blanca's help. She hides him in one of the back rooms of the house, telling no one. For several months, she keeps him hidden there. They renew their love with great intensity.*

Ch 14: *Alba is held along with a great number of other prisoners. She is physically, sexually, and emotionally tortured by guards as well as by Esteban García [the one who sexually assaulted her at age 6 and 14]. "A brutal slap knocked her to the floor. Violent hands lifted her to her feet. Ferocious fingers fastened themselves to her breasts, crushing her nipples. She...kept repeating a monumental no while they beat her, manhandled her, pulled off her blouse, and she...could only say no, no, and no..." (p. 345).*

Ch 15 (Epilogue): "The women [in the prison] spent the whole day singing at the top of their lungs. The guards would pound on the wall. 'Shut up, whores!' 'Make us if you can, bastards!'" (p. 363).

*At the age of ninety, Esteban Trueba dies. Alba is not, however, the last living member of her family: she is pregnant. The father of her unborn child may be Miguel, or it may be one of the many men who raped her while she was detained.*

4. Objectionable contents:

- a. Physical and sexual violence against women, including the sexual molestation of a 6-year-old girl, and numerous rapes of teenage girls.
- b. Occult (witchcraft) practices, including communing with spirits, levitating, card reading, and moving objects (telekinesis).
- c. Glamorization of homosexual and heterosexual prostitution.
- d. Foul language: one use of "f--k" by a child, a few uses of "son of a b---h" and "bast--d".
- e. Orgy with mummies (implied).
- f. Condescending view of Catholicism, while endorsing occult and supernatural practices.
- g. Abortion.

This information is provided to the Anchorage School Board. Request you consider the objectionable material in this book inappropriate for any high school class and remove it from the approved list of instructional materials.

I would be happy to speak to any board member about my concerns. You can reach me at my home number, 333-2874. Thank you.

  
James Gudaitis

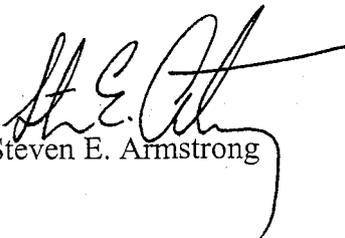
To: Anchorage School Board

20 January 2005

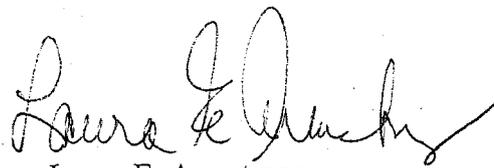
From: Steve and Laura Armstrong, parents of Chad Armstrong, class of 2004

Subject: Objections to the book, *The House of the Spirits*, by Isabel Allende

1. After discussing this book with my son and Mr. Gudaitis, it is quite obvious this book should not be part of the curriculum in the Anchorage School District. Although I have not read the entire book, I have read excerpts and believe that this book should definitely not be part of any high school curriculum.
2. We find not only the language to be terribly offensive but the theme, content and overall story to be reprehensible with no social redeeming value whatsoever. We also believe that just because this is an "AP" class preparing advanced students for college, these are still not college kids and should not have to be subjected to such trash. This book was mandatory reading for all the students.
3. Surely, even in an AP class, we can find more suitable reading for 16 and 17 year old kids. My wife and I would be happy to discuss this further with you if desired. Unfortunately, the date that Mr. Gudaitis has set up with the school board conflicts with prior commitments for both my wife and me, so we will be unable to attend.
4. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us at 868-3027. Thank you for your time and consideration.



Steven E. Armstrong



Laura E. Armstrong

Controversial Issues Review Committee  
Summary of the minutes from the meeting on January 26, 2005

Compiled by Enid Hunter ED.D, facilitator

The Controversial Issues Review Committee was called to order at approximately 6:41p.m. on January 26, 2005, in the fourth floor conference room of the 6<sup>th</sup> and K Building.

Committee members present:

Susan Haines, PTA  
Linda Kumin, Elementary Librarian  
Mary Jo Iagulli, Middle School Librarian  
Glen Nielsen, Elementary Principal  
Atisa Logo, Minority Community  
Sabri Ghodsie, Secondary Teacher  
Mary Cook, Citizen-at-large  
Brooke Hull, Elementary Liaison  
Gina Pastos, Secondary Principal

Enid Hunter, Facilitator (non-voting)  
Wanda Walker, Secretary

Committee members absent:

Philip Giorgione, Citizen-at-Large  
Jacqueline Hutchins, PTA  
Matthew Shuckerow, Student Advisory Board  
Jason Armstrong, Citizen-at-Large  
Liz Carter Citizen-at-Large  
Mary Rita Ely, Secondary Teacher  
Martha Aarons, Citizen-at-Large

Also present:

Mardell Kiesel, Language Arts Coordinator  
Kathryn Berkowitz, Bartlett AP Literature teacher  
Herbert Berkowitz, Former CIRC member  
Rhonda Gardner, No Child Left Behind Coordinator (former AP teacher)  
Mary Henderson, Bartlett Language Arts Department Chair  
James and Charlott Gudaitis, Parents

The purpose of the meeting was to hear a complaint filed by Mr. Gudaitis regarding the book The House of the Spirits by Chilean author, Isabel Allende. Mr. Gudaitis wanted the book removed from the approved book list for the AP Literature course. Mr.

Gudaitis felt the book contained perverse sexual material and a sub-theme of the occult and supernatural. Mr. Gudaitis cited numerous passages from the book that he regarded as objectionable. Before this meeting, committee members had an opportunity to view the complaint and the nine pages of documentation that Mr. Gudaitis had prepared to substantiate the complaint (Attachment A). In addition, Mr. Gudaitis read a statement from Steven and Laura Armstrong who objected to the book on similar grounds. After Mr. Gudaitis completed his presentation, he responded to questions from the committee.

Kathryn Berkowitz, the teacher who assigned the material at Bartlett High School, discussed her rationale for the use of this particular book. Mardell Kiesel, Rhonda Gardner and Mary Henderson also spoke about why this book is used in the AP Literature course. Points covered in their testimony are as follows:

- This book is approved for use in an Advanced Placement (AP) Literature course and is referenced in AP exams prepared by the College Board.
- This book was approved for AP Literature by the Language Arts Curriculum Committee and by the Anchorage School Board in 1998.
- This book was a resource used in an AP training event sponsored by College Board and attended by Ms. Berkowitz.
- AP Literature is a choice offered in the Anchorage School District Program of Studies and is not a required course. The AP curriculum is college level coursework and the text and related assessments correspond to resources used in universities nationwide.
- Ms. Berkowitz selected this book to follow a study of The Grapes of Wrath as both represent the political, economic and social events of an era and are based on actual historical events. The Allende book represents a literary genre known as “Magical Realism” that is prominent in Latin American literature.
- The House of the Spirits is among the few choices of recommended and challenging literature that is written by a strong, female, minority author. The Allende book has strong ties to current events as the author’s family faced retaliation at the hands of the Pinochet regime.
- Other choices with similar theme and purpose are available for students who choose not to read this particular selection.

By a vote of 7-2, the committee voted to not remove the book from the AP book list. There were no abstentions. □

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Enid Hunter, Ed.D.  
Facilitator, CIRC

Transcription of CIRC meeting of January 26, 2005  
The House of the Spirits

Dr. Enid Hunter brought the meeting to order at 6:41 p.m.

Dr. Hunter introduced Wanda Walker her Executive Secretary who would be taking care of the minutes. Those in attendance were asked to speak clearly and state their name to make transcription of the tapes easier.

Those present at the meeting were:

Mardell Kiesel, Language Arts Coordinator

Linda Kumin, Librarian

Kathryn Berkowitz, AP Teacher Bartlett

Herbert Berkowitz, Former Committee Member

Rhonda Gardner, No Child Left Behind Coordinator (and former A/P teacher)

Mary Henderson, Department Chair at Bartlett

Gina Pastos, Secondary Principal

Glenn Nielson, Principal at Denali

Mary Cook, Parent

James Gudaitis, Parent

Charlott Gudaitis, Parent

Susan Haines, Counselor

Mary Iagulli, Librarian

Atisa Logo, Minority Community

Brooke Hull, Teacher

Ghods Sabri, Minority Community

Dr. Hunter thanked those present for their time, diligence with all the reading, and thoughtful reflection that is involved with this committee. This is an advisory committee to the Superintendent. We will reach a decision about our recommendation and I will give it to the Superintendent. She may or may not accept it. The Superintendent's recommendation will be presented to the School Board. You are welcome to testify at the board meeting. You may identify yourself as a member of this committee; but you may not speak as a "representative" of the committee.

An informal discussion will take place after the complainants review their issues and concerns between the committee and the complainants. We will hear from representatives from the School District and we will have the opportunity to ask questions and talk with them. After that, the committee in and of itself will engage in debate and discussion.

Dr. Hunter – Mr. Gudiatis everyone here has had a chance to read your nine-page dialogue about the book. I emailed everyone a copy. Would you like to review that and address that with the committee?

Mr. Gudiatis – Sure, I'd be happy to. Thank you all for convening on my behalf. I didn't realize this whole meeting was on this one complaint. My son, Daniel, was a senior in Mrs. Berkowitz's class last year. It's been almost a whole year since I raised the concern. He's now a freshman in college and is attending classes tonight or else he'd be here. One of his classmates was Chad Armstrong, who's also taking classes tonight and can't be here but, his parents Steven and Laura Armstrong weren't able to be here but wrote a letter also objecting to the book and using it in class. I'd like to include in the minutes of this meeting. I don't know if you want me to read the letter, I do not have copies for all the committee members.

Dr. Hunter – Sure, it doesn't look too long.

Mr. Gudiatis – It's pretty brief and I'm a quick reader.

"To the Anchorage School Board" dated January 20, 2005

"Steven and Laura Armstrong, parents of Chad Armstrong class of 2004 objects to the book, "House of the Spirits." After discussing the book with my son and Mr. Gudiatis, it is obvious this book should not be part of the curriculum in the Anchorage School District. Although I have not read the entire book, I have read excerpts and I believe this book should definitely not be part of any high school curriculum. We find not only the language to be terribly offensive but also the theme content and over-all story to be reprehensible with no social redeeming value whatsoever. We also believe that just because this is an AP class preparing advanced students for college, these are still not college kids and should not have been subjected to such trash. This book was mandatory reading for all the students. Surely in an AP class we can find more suitable reading for 16 and 17 year old kids. My wife and I will be happy to discuss this further with you if you desire. Unfortunately, the date Mr. Gudiatis set up with the School Board (which was not my setting up) conflicts with prior commitments with both my wife and I, so we will be unable to attend. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call at their home number. Thank you for your time and consideration. Steven and Laura Armstrong

Dr. Hunter – Ok, I can communicate to them that they would have an opportunity to come and address the School Board on the evening that this comes up. Ok

Mr. Gudiatis, Ok, thank you. Well, the complaint is not so much about - he mentions the entire book - I don't necessarily have a complaint about the entire book. As I say in my 9-page critique I listed specific, the most objective able items that I feel are inappropriate for high school required reading. If I may I'd like to read just one of those passages and the page numbers that I used in my critique correspond with probably a different page number that you may have had in the book you read. They may not correspond exactly, but out of chapter 11 one of the main characters Esteban Garcia first encounter with the daughter Alba when she was six years old is fascinated with her, let me find the text, ahh this may not correspond with yours but this is in chapter 9 near the end. **"When he sees her, he wanted to hurt her, destroy her but he also wanted to continue smelling her, (remember she is six) listening to her baby's voice, and having her soft skin within reach of his hand. He stroked her knees, just above the border of her embroidered socks. They were warm and had little dimples. Alba continued chattering about the cook who had stuck walnuts up the chickens' tails for the evening meal. He closed his eyes. He was shaking. With one hand he encircled the child's neck. He felt the tickle of her braids against his wrist and squeezed ever so gently, aware that she was so tiny he could strangle her with very little effort. He wanted to do it, feel her writhing and kicking at his knees, squirming as she fought for air. He wanted to hear her moan and die in his arms. He wanted to pull off her clothes. He felt violently aroused. With his other hand he ventured beneath her well-starched dress, running his fingers up her child's legs until he found the lace of her batiste petticoats and her woolen drawers with their elastic bands. He was panting. In a corner of his brain he had just enough sanity left to realize that he was poised on the edge of a bottomless pit. The child had stopped talking and was very still, staring up at him with her huge black eyes. Esteban Garcia took her hand and placed it on his stiffened sex. "Do you know what this is?" he asked hoarsely. "Your penis", she replied, for she had seen it in the illustrations of her Uncle Jaime's medical books and on her Nicolas whenever he walked around naked doing his Oriental exercises. She's able to get away. Later in the book in chapter 11 she is now 14 years old on her birthday. He is visiting the home, "I'm fourteen. Today's my birthday," she said hesitantly." "Then I have a present for you," Esteban Garcia said, his mouth twisting into a smile. Alba tried to turn her face away, but he held it firmly in both hands, forcing her to look at him. It was her first kiss. She felt a warm, brutal sensation as his rough, badly shaven skin scraped her face. She smelled his scent of stale tobacco and onion, and his violence. Garcia's tongue tried to pry open her lips while his hand pressed against her jaw until he forced it open. She imagined that tongue as a warm, slimy mollusk, and she was overcome by a wave of nausea, but she kept her eyes open. She saw the hard cloth of his uniform and felt the ferocious hands wrap themselves around her neck; then without interrupting the kiss, the fingers began to tighten. Alba thought he was choking, and pushed him with such force that she managed to get away from him. Garcia got up off the**

**bench, smiling ironically. He had red splotches on his cheeks and was breathing rapidly. "Did you like my present?" He laughed. Alba watched him disappear.** There were many other objections, passages that I object to, but those were probably the most outrageous and why anyone here who has a student in school would want their kids in school to read such pornography is beyond me. So, that's the summary of my complaint.

Dr. Hunter - questions?

(Speaker didn't say name.) I noticed that a lot of the excerpts that you put in here were in Sparks's notes and was wondering if you had read the book in its entirety.

Mr. Gudaitis - Yes I did. The Spark notes were in italics, most of it were quotes from the book.

Mary - This might be immaterial, was your son offered an alternative book at the time.

Mr. Gudaitis - I don't know if he was offered at the time when the book was first given to the students. He was, I don't recall exactly, but I think a week after the assignment was given he had spring break to read the book and had to be prepared to discuss it in class when they returned from spring break. It was when he returned from spring break, that he was reading it during spring break, when he came back he mentioned some of the things, he went on vacation to Florida with a friend and when he got back he mentioned some of the content of the book he didn't like and I took the liberty to read some of it myself and then I went to Spark notes to get a summary of the entire book and some in-depth notes on each of the chapters. I read enough to know I didn't want him to finish the book. I called Mrs. Berkowitz and she said there was another book he could read and she wished of course we would have brought it to her attention sooner but I just explained how I came to find out that. And so he did read the alternate choice. It was "Tess of the D'Urbervilles."

Dr. Hunter - other questions? We have some people here from the district that will be able to provide some more information. Kathryn do you want to start?

Kathryn - Ok I've been using this book for some time and a copy of the letter on how I use the book has been sent around the room. I want to reply about the passages you read to us, they truly are disgusting and everybody agrees with that. The author wanted us to be disgusted by that. There is never a question when you read about Esteban that he was a good person. He is the bad guy in the book. He actually represents eventually, because this is not directly a history

book but he eventually represents Pinochet who took over the country at the time of the coup. So, the author was in exile in Argentina writing this book about the things that had happened to her family, which was among other things this experience. So it never ever is shown as something positive nor is Esteban Garcia ever shown as a positive character. And that's one of the problems of his thinking, that's always a problem with a negative character. You can't have a story without some kind of conflict and Esteban Garcia is one of the conflicts in this story, as he was in Chile. So that's my direct response to that passage, it is disgusting. If we didn't have pedophilia in this world I would say we should never read about stuff like that, but unfortunately, we have allot of pedophilia in the world. To pretend in my English class that there is not such a thing I don't think that's a wise decision so that is why when it comes up in discussions - we discuss it in the class afterwards. Anyway that's a different philosophy obviously between you and me and we talked about it on the phone. So do you want me to say what's in my letter.

Yes could you summarize that.

Kathryn continues - I've been using it for quite a few years and actually the reason I used it in the first place at an English Dept meeting many years ago Mary told us that the district wanted every English class to use multicultural materials and we were to start then. I received materials about teaching this book from a summer conference I had gone to. So I pulled it out and read the book and decided I would use it. There are other books I know are controversial as well, but I always give alternatives, but more important than that is my basic philosophy which I start telling my kids from the very first day of class and that is in my class I never expect my students, I never make them like the book I give, or agree with a book I give. What I want them to do is be able to discuss it as a piece of literature. They may end up saying I have now read this book and I completely disagree with how this author blah, that's just as brilliant a response as I really liked this book blah blah blah. I tell them right at the beginning and this startled some of them because some of them have just be taught to "parrot" back what the teacher had said, so I'm careful to tell them what I think they need to know about the book before they begin. Without except my overall thing, which I say there's so many books in the world I never have to teach what I don't like and I like them for all kinds of different reasons in my letter I tell the reasons why I like this book. So jumping down I use it right after "Grapes of Wrath". Grapes of Wrath is a realist novel, and he (Steinbeck) also had a political agenda but he put in his book that he thought socialism would solve all of America's problems. He uses this vehicle "Grapes of Wrath" to show that. People violently opposed this book especially in Salinas, Calif where he lived because they were the growers that responded this way to the people that came in. They burned the book and hated the book, but I use it in my class to show that authors put their

own personal political and economic opinions in their novels, ok so when everyone starts feeling so sorry for the poor Jones and blah and everybody's having meetings and demanding that everybody has free this and that, I make them talk about what do we call that and they realize that it's socialism - I didn't tell them that, but somebody finally figured it out and then they have to think wow we felt really bad for all these people and the solutions we don't believe in them. And then we talk about what to do about that and how we feel that way and Steinbeck's pretty powerful. The same thing happens with this book and I tell them, I hint, I'm really pleased with the way my introduction works, first of all I bring in this book which is this company makes books for 9 to 12 years old it's a wonderful introduction for children's introduction to Chile even in this book for children from 9 to 12 years old there is a picture of the women in the square of Santiago demanding word about the disappeared and that happened during the Pinochet over throw of the Andes government and we see the soldiers crossed arms preventing them. Even in a book for children we hear about the atrocities of Pinochet, gently, gently but they're there. The next thing I read to them is the World Book Encyclopedia entry about Inez rise to power and the over throw it's a little more specific and a little more stronger and then I read them the Encyclopedia Britannica treatment of the same history that is much more sophisticated and talks about communism and so on.

Then magically, I think I got I was able to find an article from the Australian Communist Party Newspaper right after Allendale was elected and they are celebrating finally the people have democratically elected they are finally understanding the greatness of communism and hurray. Then I say and hold up this book this is yet another version of that story. This is from a woman's family was Allende and what happened to her family. So they know that is my expectation, understand this as her right after Grapes of Wrath they understand that this is her version of the events that are historical. I think the most important thing is that I believe that this book was the cause of the world coming to understand what the Pinochet government had done and what it was doing and he had to leave the country and he lived in Britain for awhile and was finally tracked down by the new government in Chile and brought home. And they have been trying to get him to trial; his defense attorneys have been wonderful. They have been very skilled. They want you to know he is very sick now, poor boy. And so on, but they finally the Supreme Court just weeks ago, the Chilean Supreme Court has demanded that he be brought to trial. I think it's because of this book, I think that it's an amazing thing that this book has that much power and is able to do that. I want my students to know about this. So anyway, I am really sorry that some hmmm things that are so awful that happen in the world all the time all over the place happened to this family as well and she's not going to blink, she's going to put them in her book, she wants everybody to know that. And so I really do try to help my students I don't want them to be shocked or hurt but these kids are getting college credit for the stuff if they do well on the

tests and I know that is something we are struggling with all the time on any number of things. Right now we're reading **Wuthering Heights** and it has quite a few aspects as the House of Spirits there is a really interesting narrator problem involved in Wuthering Heights one guy starts telling it, then he starts quoting another person that tells the story and they go back and forth and back and forth in time all of that happened in House of Spirits too and they had a little bit of experience with a book written in the Victorian period that has a lot more than it seems to they discover domestic violence in that one too, they discover dissipation of an important character he drinks himself to death he loses the family fortune and all that kind of stuff happened in a Victorian novel. That same thing happens here, I think it's important that they know that. That things that happen now also happened in the Victorian period. There are so many things that I think are important about this book that I continue to use it but I also understand and appreciate your concerns so I always offer an alternative of a book that I think is equally important in some other way that they can read and study.

Brooke - When you offered another book, how many students would opt.

Kathryn - Very few have, but also by the time I have introduced this book I usually have a sense in my classroom of who might take the alternate, one year there was five. I don't know if they had decided ahead of time, but they knew there was language and several of them decided together to read that so that was great. I gave it to them together and gave them assignments to work on together. Mostly not though, I think only about a dozen over the years have asked for the alternate. On this particular case.

Mary - You mentioned in the beginning there are many many books that you like, I was just jotting down the attributes or whatever of this book you mentioned and mentioned it filled a multi-culture requirement and that it expressed social and political opinions, which are valuable

Kathryn - or valuable for the kids to understand how to recognize in a book and I think that's more important ...I'm not trying to teach socialism or teach communism or whatever that's in the book, but I think it's absolutely essential for them to get practice under guidance from me in finding those things in the book, otherwise we're just reading wind not realizing we're being influenced

Mary - but you also mentioned specific Pinochet, Allende the whole situation was it valuable to teach that, then there's also mention of it being an example in our literature and I found it out as an example of Magical realism, you mentioned that in your letter too. What to you is the most, why is this book the one and not some other book that would be out there that would not have the graphics

Kathryn - it's actually very difficult to find a modern novel that doesn't have stuff like that in it, it's almost impossible, I talk to them about that, there's an understanding a gentleman's agreement among publishers, authors for generations, decades, centuries that those things, words were not allowed in the book, they were put in there but they were so hidden that if you didn't know you were reading that then you would miss it. In *Wuthering Heights* there's a good example, all of a sudden this baby's born and the kids go "baby" what, when....so I say ok here's where they saying about lying in, they don't know how to recognize that in an older book. They use to hide those things in at that time. When the U.S. Supreme Court said they couldn't do that anymore, all the authors that had been sitting there wishing they could put those words in their books - put them in their books. It started just like a door had dropped down. So it is almost impossible now to find something in modern literature that doesn't have language, adult situations ...it's like the list on television

Mary - I'd like to follow up on something, on the things that I know, what is the one thing that is most valuable in your class, what purpose or what are those purposes is this book most valuable to you in your class

Kathryn - I don't know if there's one thing, I try to express why it, why I think it follows another modern novel very well. Another reason, another Magical realism book we could use is "*A Hundred Years of Solitude*" that's stronger, its got more things in it, it's more difficult to read than this so it's why we use ...wish I could be more specific than that.

No name speaker - I would like to say that I've known Kathryn she's always had the student's best interests at heart and I know she plans her lessons very well and we are always asking to integrate the literature and history and so I think that is the case in point here. I don't like all the graphics Enid but if you were to look in the bookroom at some of the other books you would find they have some of the same material in them and they are on our curriculum so I feel it is though we need to look at this very carefully, there are some things our students don't need to know about this particular age again we are living in this modern age and those books are out there and they read them. If you go to the catalog to order books, you'll find out they have lists of things that may be graphic and so forth.

Kathryn - Another fascinating aspect about this year, whether I use it this year or not is that this past year this country has been obsessed, transfixed with the question of torture in war and political prisoners and things like that and quite a bit at the end is about the prisons of Pinochet and political prisoners and the students are really quite moved by the strength of the prisoners in their

solidarity and so on, strength under the circumstances and it's, I'm fascinated that it's so timely more timely as the years have gone on.

.....

Rhonda - Let me respond to Ms Cooks questions as well about which other books would fit these categories, probably the four most people use to fit the minority are the multicultural author the magical realism as this book, (House of Spirits) the Marques book, Wesley Ultima by Rudolpho Renia, it really plays up the spiritual aspect of natural realism not the sexuality so much, really plays up the spiritual aspect so you have to weigh that, the other one is Tony Morrison's "Beloved." Have both in there. So it really is for this Chandra and multicultural piece, which really do go hand in hand those, are the top four and there will be concerns with all of them.

No name speaker - What about Inez's own book Evalona.

Kathryn (?) - .....It's a baffled series of stories she wrote...actually my own children were in college when they started to read them. I would ask their friends if they had read Inez and they said we like the stories...even better than bla....turning of a playground...and in a way I remembered that one of the things that concerned you the most was the occult and you were worried about that as well. The magical realism that has come out of So. America is kind of a nod toward the ancient beliefs of their grandparents and great grandparents and so forth and they love those people, they love the ancient people ... and it is a depiction of that mode of thinking of ancient times when Clara the wife of Esteban looks, all that stuff it's never literal, it suppose to be a nod back to those days when and how the old people believed in. That's another thing obviously the whole year I been working with them on symbolism and how characters can be symbols and how certain events can be symbols and so forth, it's a difficult thing for them. Teenagers are very literal and I know I have to work really hard with them about explaining what the author has in mind.

No speaker name, You have asked how wide spread the teaching of this book is in the district and I know that you have gotten some responses back, would you like to share those with the committee.

No speaker name - I like too quickly, but a couple of things have been said....the first two surveys that you'll see and this is completed as of today very very recent, you'll note that not all of our high schools have chosen to purchase this book for their curriculum, It is however an approved choice, and I have researched the paperwork on that approval process and the AP lit com class...is part of the framework that was approved by the School Board in 1997, then "The

House of Spirits" was part of the materials package that was approved for the language arts classes in the high schools. Including two in the English Language Arts Dept. and that approval process took place the following year in 1998.

Kathryn: Ok I was trying to remember I know I started using it in 1998 but I probably started thinking about using it in '96"

No name speaker -And I'm sure Kathryn that you and others in this room and your colleagues were part of that review process and that process doesn't happen in a month or even in a year it happens over time and we look at our curriculum, we arrive at our framework and by that time we're in outcome behaviors in advance placement literature class and then teachers such as yourself, such as Rhonda, such as Mary, come to the table and you recommend texts for these courses and for the level of courses for which they are to be used and at that time in 1998 it was approved along with several other titles, pages and pages of titles but just for the committees information, that information is here

No name speaker - Would that be part of the training that you went through, you said you went through some training initially

Kathryn - No I went, the College Board itself every summer has weeklong conferences and things like that and I went out to them, not just for this particular one. It was given through the College Board and taught by a successful AP teacher for people who were just beginning and it was taught in 1994 when I moved from.....

No name speaker - .....some of you may not be aware of the College Board, the College Board is a national association that's been around since 1900 and their goal is to inspire, promote, prepare kids for higher level learning, the goals specifically is to provide academic content and high expectations, training opportunities for teachers so students can participate at a university level in courses during their senior year, sometime junior, but most often, hmm yes junior and senior year because we do...sometimes sophomores but truly is a lit course that has been developed by people across the nation these are people who are reading in committees along with university people, along with AP people there isn't a collect recommended syllabus for teachers such as Kathryn , it is a challenge for a teacher of an AP course to select an appropriate syllabus and that syllabus may be titles that are drawn from released tests by the College Board and when looking at those tests it is very apparent that some texts lend themselves well to critical analysis to critical thinking comparing contrasting to looking for those themes and support of those themes that are required during

timed writings for students who are taking what we are calling our Advance Placement Exams. So if a teacher such as Rhonda, Mary, Kathryn were to see these titles over and over again in these released tests, of course you may want to include them your syllabus, I've looked at several syllabi from AP teachers and there's lots of overlapping titles but they are not exactly the same from teacher to teacher. I think what we're trying to achieve is a balance of material, material that represents men and women authors but also all of these texts need to provide the type of texts that bring kids back to questioning, to seeking more information, to finding themselves challenged, to challenging the teachers. AP is a choice; it's not a requirement in our district

Mr Gudiatis (?) When you think about it, AP is not just the equivalent to the first year .....(keeps muttering as the speaker below pipes in)

Woman speaker - It actually is absolutely it is, while we have exercise caution and we review very carefully those tests that we require in an English class those restrictions must be lifted for an AP class. For an AP teacher the tests that she or he uses are the very crux of a university class. It is an adult material, there is not question about it, we all recognize it and so those same guidelines that we will use and we instruct our committees to use when they're reviewing resources for adopted curriculum are not the same for AP courses. I would dare to say this would hold true across all our curricular areas but most specifically it is probably critical to those of us in the language arts. Hmmmm I agree ...absolutely so because it is a choice, because parents each of us in this room who happens to be a parent as we are working with our students and guiding our students to make these choices at high school of course we want them to have the most challenging curriculum. We want them to have the best teachers. With that may be a choice to take AP English courses. With that choice (end of side one of tape)...(begin second side of tape) ... is what we ask all of our teachers to do in the Anchorage School District with the Language Arts Program that a choice for one may not be an acceptable choice for another and that all of our English teachers are asked to please have more than one title for the instructional purpose so when we are aware of the instructional purpose and we know the intent of the unit and or the plan for use of the book then there should be more than one title offered to the students especially if it is one as such described here. One that might be objective by some readers that is due on our district and not never more clear than in the AP classes due to content and to the resources that we use.

Mary - .....Allende very popular, that is huge huge .....and we all know authors that are popular and not literary and that's the way it's always been...had a huge best seller a hundred years ago and everybody.....what makes the difference, what decides the course after all this literature, what

decides, who decides how decides this literary cannon ...super bowl...and needed and will it stand the test of time

Enid (?) I'm going to go back to the two teachers, who have used the book, I don't know if you have used the book Mary or not but would you speak to that because I think again it's the teacher that chooses the story for the AP of most of the choices and this book for everyone in the district was a quality choice and it was one that won approval by a very large committee, by the Principal's Committee and the Board at large in 1998 so given that the literary cannon

Rhonda, I have never used this book, I used Morrison "My Beloved", oh I thought you had, oh ok, very simply there's two things there's the universal theme and the reaction you saw that Kathryn had when she was talking about that passage. The universal theme covers so many areas and so much complexity that is so beautifully interwoven and the fact that when you read this book you have a powerful response regardless of whether it's positive, you have a powerful response. Those are the themes....

Mary (?) - .....think about Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer or some of those books and some people say don't use that book anymore.....but think about the times and what was occurring and use that as sort of a guide about what had happened in the past ...future and I think if you have a book like this that you can think about it this way and tell them about the history and about what's going on in the world and what we need to be thinking about for our children in the future I don't think that we can hide some of these things they need to know what's going on and we need to have the teachers there to show and guide them and let them know it's not what should be happening and we have so many things happening today all over the world that if you have the people we need to make sure that you hold on to it and....so I haven't used it .....use for a special kind of program .....(lots of muttering, the you say speak up I don't think the mike can pick you up) Well in essence I was saying that I believe we need to be very serious about books and whether or not we're going to hold on to available time and we have the money and you know the story about that, so if we find something wrong with it we need to of course point that out but still determine whether or not we should hold on to it for the good of the students to have.....as they move forward and become young adults .....thing about books like Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer they were controversial too in some categories in some cultures but we determine that the author was not a person to object to color like that but he used the language of the day and he talked about how people lived and daily life and their expectations and history was there too for us and I feel we have history and literature too and we can combine the two and get something that's very intimate out of the book. The trouble here is the troubles there you just don't want to read about them really but we have to know

what's going on in the world today ...and the children need to know that so they are not caught out there but are protected

Rhonda - to add to what Mary said we talked about history and it told them about a time but books of literary manner are also timeless we can recheck and still see ourselves we read Shakespeare who's talking to us and that's the beautiful thing that the kids get that

Speaker - or read a book that disgusts you so much, angry, upset, work through it redemption for the changing of the norms or the female so you can see the process, that helped me because you can see when I marked it italics I wrote down - slammed it down I was mad and then read some more read some more and then I could talk myself through it. A book can be disgusting very effectively.

Unknown - that's very true

Speaker - It challenges your thinking.

Please speak up, you're soft spoken....

The response to the work is why we're here, ....talking about what's wrong with it, and I heard it mentioned quality, what makes it's quality and also I did not read it but I read parts of it ....and did get sick, got sick of the examples...and almost threw it away....reality is you read something dirty it eventually comes out of the Bible but if you put something bad in your mind .....work it out, ....my questions concerns when students are exposed to such examples what is their initial reaction, and we don't see that and they might not say it .... Much of the things are censored, movies are censored,...even schools you can't say those kind of words your language is censored, dress now is also censored, my concern is the future of the children in this book ...my concern is personally for students who are exposed to it ...(can't understand poor voice quality) what makes it quality, I heard that Kathryn did not mention anything specific about what makes this book readable so maybe I understand Mary Cook ...understand standards that can be used to guide selection of these books - that's what I think maybe if not, one can be established also see if there's one thing specific that makes this book readable, maybe we can reach, I hope I'm not speaking out of place,

Dr. Hunter, this is a forum are so people can speak what they feel in an environment where all ideas are heard and respected so you do not need to apologize for the way you feel or what you are saying that the purpose for us is to talk as reasonable people and listen as reasonable people and make a decision,

so I think people should not apologize for the way they feel or what they say, they should say it and say it with that knowledge

Speaker, ok I'll finish up then there maybe should be a guideline to help teachers select books and materials because....the language...

Dr. Hunter - what I would like to do is allow time for Mr. Gudiatis to try to give a summary or response and then I would like to go and work as a committee and kind of talk about what we feel if that's ok

Mr. Gudiatis - thank you I want to say one reason that we didn't bring in a recall now is that the assignment I believe was given to my son the day before spring break started and then he left the next day to fly to Florida. It was when he came back that it was brought to my attention, hmm regarding to use the argument that these are social ills in the world and therefore we should expose the children to them because they're going to face them later is a pretty lame argument. Pornography we know is prevalent so we might as well go show them the appropriate sex that they should see in the classroom so that they look at it with a mature adult to help them talk through and tell them what parts of the body are appropriate and this is how you should perform sex. To also say that well if we discount this book or discount that book is the equivalent of going back to book burning is also ridiculous. This book covers, when I first called Mrs. Berkowitz my main objection was to the occult references, which to some people is superstitious

Some people think it's just a game, just magic, just someone's imagination. I have a Bachelor's in Theology and I'm working on my Master's in Religion if you've spoken to anyone in the occult currently or post occult practice they'll tell you that it's real telekinesis moving objects, meditations, levitating all of that is in the book is real and as a my neighbor said getting that exposure is one thing to say well we'll treat it maturely once it's in their minds like the Harry Potter books it brings an interest that someone may at least want to pursue further and dive into and there are plenty of books on witchcraft, occultism, spell casting and so forth that the students could actually pursue this because of the references in this book. It was then when I picked up the book and went through the whole thing rather than just going with the Spark notes that I became even more outraged at the volume of sexual perversion and assaults that is expected for these teenagers to well they're going to get exposed to it anyway for them to think they can handle it maturely. It's not just pedophilia, there's prostitution I'm sure you'll recall, there's heterosexuals and homosexuals and it's glamorized and abortion, there's an implied orgy with mummies and even bestiality with that same orgy with a llama, lesbianism is implied as well as foul language and numerous rapes and assaults of teenage girls. I see the justification as far as multicultural, historical value based because it's based partly on actual events that does not to

me justify exposing all of those other negatives and expecting these teenagers to deal with it maturely. So, I do know, as you mentioned that the teacher has quite a bit of flexibility and liberty in the books that she decides to choose for these students. I realize that an AP class the students chose to take that higher level supposed to quote "prepare them for college". These are still teenagers and it doesn't mean they need to be exposed to this level of obscenity and profanity and filth. Even though the students are offered a choice, I do believe as my son indicated that he was felt to be inferior for choosing an alternate book. He was asked to leave the room while the class discussed this book. He was made what he described as a snide, derogatory remark. I do believe that students who would object to this would not speak up more for that reason, because of peer pressure and the feeling of just being ridiculed you can't handle it, you're a whimp and you all know that peer pressure exists. So I don't think the students are going to speak very freely in picking an alternative book for fear of being ridiculed by the students or the teacher herself. I think at the very least now granted I don't envy a teacher who has to choose to meet all the requirements and preparation and learning objectives in deciding which book would meet and basically satisfy everyone. I don't envy a teacher who has to do that but I'm convinced that there's enough alternative choices that this kind of book does not have to be offered to these AP students. I realize that some books will still have objective able material and I think when an alternative book is chosen and there is objective able material that not to expect the student to voice a complaint. I think a note should be given to the student, to give to the parent that lists the objective able material so that the parent understands and can raise concerns and talk to their child about choosing this alternative text then to read. Because I don't believe most parents, even in the AP class know that their students were reading this kind of book.

Speaker, questions to the response - can't hear you

Speaker - ....(something about these books being difficult)

Ok, could we entertain a motion

Well I think we entertain a motion and then we discuss it as a committee

It's an open meeting, and if

I make the motion we keep the book as it is as long as we divulge our choices  
.....(garbled)

I'll second that

Ok we're open for discussion

I keep coming back to how Barney is uncomfortable a lot of the time and not just in terms of academic learning or in and by ourselves, learning about life changes that we go through and I think that this is a good example of it. I too when I first started reading "Spirit" went "wow, why would I let my child pick this up" and then I thought well no but I would at a certain point because I would know they aren't looking at the profanity and the actions as just the literal sense they would actually be figuring out the those needs of something else which is the whole intent of....which I am hearing. I guess for me too I come up in, .... here's my story, a few years ago I took my young daughter to Nordstroms they were selling leather pants to 5 year olds and I was floored and I went and talked to the salesperson and said "leather pants?" and she said "you don't have to choose them". I said well that's right I don't. What I'm coming up to is I know there's going to be the day when my daughter is going to choose leather pants whether I think it's good or not but at that point in time as a 5 year old wearing leather pants, but perhaps when she's a 9<sup>th</sup> grader and I can still stand her still ...my point being sometimes as parents we're highly uncomfortable with what our kids are going through. I hate to say it, but things are different from when we were grew up, they're very different from when I grew up and I'm just hoping that when my kids grow up they have people that guide them along with discretion, not just myself but good teachers, good teaching and I really hope that in the long run they don't choose the leather pants but if they choose them at least they know that they've had some guidance along the way and I don't feel this is taught cavalierly I don't think it's taught for the literal meaning but I it's taught for the high....I have to tell you having not read anything of this nature for awhile with a guided book group was very uncomfortable for me. If I had a book group to talk through, it would have been oh yes now I get it. I had to go look things up, I used your Spark notes and just as I got ...then it was so I get it now. I did the same thing I read it first, you know I've got kids with attention spans in the hallway and here I am - but it's the way it's presented, the way it's taught that I think is real important. That's why we read....

Susan - I have a 17 yr old daughter and I'm very sensitive to what she is reading and should be reading right now. I found the book very disturbing but I didn't find the sexual assault provocative at all which is how I envisioned most pornography is meant to provoke a stimulus, provoke a response I viewed all the instances of rape and abuse, pedophilia as brutal embodiment of evil existed. I felt the book was more about class struggle than it was about the sins of the father falling to the children. I come back to probably the most nauseating passage in the whole book for me is early on when Esteban Trueba rapes Pancha that young girl that is one of his workers and it just says, "she lay on her back staring at the sky with terror until she felt the man drop to the ground beside her

with a moan she began to break herself free, before her her mother, and before her her grandmother had suffered the same animal fate” and that was probably the most moving element in the book for me because it was about the class struggle and it was about the lack of values that these people had in this society. In that context you know all of the evil that is perpetrated against them, the sexual violence that’s perpetrated against them, you can understand it doesn’t make it acceptable and it’s more objective able, it’s more offensive because of the inequality of power in the society. So it would be something I feel I would want my daughter to read under supervision and with adequate discussion even with myself as a parent, or in a classroom. It’s not something I would hand to her and say “this is a really interesting book, look at it”, it definitely requires some guidance and but again I feel the major themes have to do with the class struggle than with elements of the occult, or the highly objectionable sexual content.

Kathryn - One thing we really haven’t talked about I think certainly from my perspective is the language itself, how it’s written, maybe how it’s translated I’m not sure. It’s well written, there’s lots of descriptive language, there’s lots of cohesion, there’s fluidness in the writing, there’s scenes that have been introduced that have been modeled throughout the whole process. So strictly from a writer’s perspective there’s allot of good writing examples and also some old fashioned writing on and on and on, 150 word sentences that have a place is discussion of how to write a text book. When you have to go and repeat in an AP class for those of us who have done that, that is extremely important to know, what is good, what isn’t good, what is effective, how to make it effective. So that also has to be brought out, it just not the negatives that’s in here, there’s good writing that is worth examining. There is also allot of good vocabulary, just looking at the vocabulary...we need to have that....

Male speaker, When I think of a book, one of the questions Mary had was how to we determine a book that belongs in the literary category. I think there are times when you open a book and the minute you start to realize you know it’s not going to be there, I think there are times when you open a book and you start to think this could be it sometimes it takes time for that book to ascend. I think also too the beauty of the written word is that you’re able to go back to it and over it again and some books it was maybe once part of the literary cannon. The beauty, this book is history and it causes you to be uncomfortable it makes your skin crawl that’s the beauty of the book, it, it’s so well written and the passages you read it fills you with revolt and nausea and you find that Esteban is so reprehensible of course that makes the end of the book just a stronger statement when he does find redemption, but I couldn’t help but Clara for some reason say it on her - I mean she’s that literary tool, that literary piece of the total innocent. I thought of that kid. ...That young boy who can’t speak, Clara can’t speak and they both see the horrors of the world taking and you try to interpret it through

their eyes and I thought of Billy (Budd) another innocent and what happens to him. And of course I'm looking for sub text and different letters and I see and I don't need to copy it's right there a price white characteristic, of course we see redemption and we see and then we think about the literary - the western literary process and how often Christianity is often confused in what we're written and yes it does put some dirt some hard thoughts in your mind. How do you get those out, well by what we're doing now, by talking by having a teacher who's trained and prepared to work through those thoughts. It's a gift to be able to do that, it's a gift we can offer our students. I find myself as a teenager, I was in college my first year and I remember a tape I made of my comp classes and I had a very difficult time in my middle of the road, mainstream university that I attended. It was .....that I had to start, and reading that and understand that I was having nightmares, I was so uncomfortable with that and I didn't have the language and I didn't understand how to delete them, ...on Monday you have to prepare for it, but it makes some of the ugliness in this book ok. In my mind because we do have the option, I guess I would (of course this is Elementary School educator and Principal) I always think about us making sure our bases are covered I guess I would discuss this at their chair discussions, English chair and available folks how we get the word out to parents, how we make sure the kids and the parents know that certain issues will be coming up and that you're welcome to come and review them and you might have some objections to some of the material we don't want children in the ASD to feel disfranchised so that might be something for viewing and I know in hindsight 20/20 that's probably ....to see but I just think the book was extremely well written, I enjoyed it, there was allot to it, you can just take so much away so much from it so I would recommend it in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years.

A woman speaker - I'd like to say it is a challenging book, and it is one of the most challenged books in culture. I think it also, because it's challenging, it's one we need to teach, it needs to be available to be taught and I think it's good for parents to monitor what their kids read I know my kids take AP classes and bring their syllabuses home and I always looked over it most of the time we were very excited about what was on the list and some we had already read, some of them we sat down and read together because then we could discuss and talk about it - our own values - I think that's the most important thing is to sit down with your child and discuss your values. It takes the book away from others would be not good for others

Mr. Gudiatis - It sounds like you're all saying, sounds like you're convinced that a 16-year-old maybe 17, 18 are mature enough to handle this level of reading. I don't think so; I don't think they should be exposed to the junk that's in there. I don't think they are mature enough whether you have your discussions or not to handle this level.

A woman speaker - I think we need to come back and talk about that I think most of our children by the time they're in high school have heard every single word that's in this book most of our children have probably seen pictures or videos, or movies, or TV that is infinitely more explicit in graphic, in this has to do with features, it fills a group that goes through horrifying things and it makes changes in the world and that's what you're looking for it's a challenge for all of us to look and try to make sure these things don't happen and sometimes you need to read something, not because you're going to do it but because it's the right thing to do, but because you need to understand it isn't the right thing to do

Woman speaker, I would have to agree that most 16 yr olds including my children have had discussions about rape being inappropriate, discussions about forcing, abuse, discussions about unkindness, discussions about women how they are treated or not treated, talk about religion, talk about occult, I think most of our children have had those discussions at home, I really do. I'm assuming your children too because we all try to do the best we can and raising a child is not only for good, but it's the unfortunate reality of today's society that and being able to recognize that and I know raising a son I have huge discussions about women and that fine line of treating a women this way and it's ok, and treating a women this way and it's absolutely not ok. So in that respect I think that subject matter has probably come up in your home, I do I really do. It's hard to read this, it's disgusting to read parts in here and it made me mad, but the discussions that do emerge that you've been trained to do that I've already done at home that are hard at 16 or 17 or 18, or the 18 yr olds who 3 months later gone off to college that those issues with women how you treat women and how you treat women when they're drinking and all those things that might be when the kid goes back to say "wait a minute, wait a minute," I'm stopping here because I remember that woman on the ground. So I think it has been discussed.

Man - I don't know if I'd say that I'd necessarily disagree with you I mean there are lots of 16 and 17 year olds who probably wouldn't have the maturation to handle the book and I think then that my role as a parent and our roles as educators to make sure we have appropriate secondary choices and that we handle those secondary choices in a manner that doesn't disfranchise students and they are getting as much out state tests, oh you mentioned Wuthering Heights, I hated that book because you know...it was written in a completely different way and a completely different time would have had more immediacy to me and more - I just would have responded it to more and I had to read it at age 16 - 17 Wuthering Heights and for myself it was just fine and dandy, it just didn't speak to me but I think that once again that's our role as parents to make sure we are discerning of our kids and we want to the best of all, so I do agree with you that there are some 16- 17 yr olds out there might not have that

maturation but at the same time I know there are 16 -17 yr olds that do and will be able to discuss this book as we are discussing it right now and actually at levels we haven't even thought of.

Woman – If I could just speak to a couple ... this book- this is a reread for me I had read it many years prior and I think that one of the things we have to really remember is that an author usually, the difference between a book like this and pornography is that this set that is in this book and the scenes that are there that are sexual are not gratuitous they are there for a purpose and part of the purpose is to actually challenge our western sensibilities this is a multicultural offering it is written by a woman who lived in a culture that is very different from our own, having just recently read again “Reading Lolita in Tehran” I am reminded that the way I look at literature is based on my belief system and my upbringing and all the values I bring...(long pause of blankness on tape) especially as I look at literature and I do think .....(another long blank spot on tape)

We feel that Catholicism is tied in because Catholicism has a very vital and historic role in this country, and so at any rate I think there is much to be learned here, that students and I have to say again these are AP classes that these students are in – these are students who are at a higher level than most average readers.

I ,,,,,,All of you are educated adults here and I hear everyone of you coming at it from an educated point of view I'm hearing overall theme being “the ends justify the means” because the end is redemption .....the rest of the filth shouldn't really matter I guarantee you if you sent a note home with students that says on that that the parents sign content includes bestiality, assault, foul language, rape, orgy that those parents would not approve of their children using the book but would ask for an alternative if they were given a choice and knew the content of the book.

I would certainly at that point .....(end of tape) (beginning of side 3 last tape)

Mrs. Gudaitis - He felt like he was you picked him out because...he liked you as a teacher and you were the reason he took the AP literature class to begin with the recommendation from Mr Moore. ... - I'd like to make a couple of comments, literary scholarship, I'm no literary scholar anyway, I noticed it changing like all the other disciplines changing quickly and the canons being fed real quickly and lots of new viewpoints coming in, new ways of reading, all kinds “isms” what have you that you can lift that are for lack of a better word “buzz words” or jargon that the literary community ....that's why this book is good, we talked about them and I'm taking about the literariness of the book. We talked about it being an example of Magical Realism, in the reading that I did it

was quick – I gleaned from it that magical realism some words are called a fad, that it's fading it's not even important anymore, it was important for a time but this is probably a discussion within the literary community. I found whole websites devoted to the subject but they would go back and forth the teachers and what have you, the people with the credentials would go back and forth and say no anybody who's an Latin American writer is writing Magical Realism - give me a break - ....I read that this book is a rip off a complete rip off of "A Hundred Years of Solitude" by Mark ..... I read this, I'm not saying this, I haven't read "A Hundred Years of Solitude", I've read a short story by Mark. and that's all. But I read that this book was a total rip off done for commercial purposes, she just hardened it up with allot of raciness that appeals to a possible audience. I read... this so there's not as far as I could tell I could be dead wrong, I admit I'm speaking anticdotally .... I believe we should be talking to some people who have been looking at that that there's still allot of discussion within the literary community itself if you will whether this is the real thing, or commercial best seller stuff, formula stuff with allot of raciness, allot of perviet, allot of stuff to appeal to a mass audience which it did, a huge audience, literature my next point is, this is so elementary I'm embarrassed to say it, the tides are subjective, our great literature is someone else's' pornography. We tried in this country for a long time to define pornography and we haven't been able to do it. Please don't think I'm being disrespectful of this group by saying that, I don't think we can do it. I don't think we can define pornography; I'm not trying to be disrespectful at all. I don't we can, I don't think we're approaching it the right angle here by saying "I think it's great literature", no "I think it's pornography". I think another angle to approach it from is "what is the responsibility of the ASD, of ourselves as parents, and committee members hugely to serve all the students of the district not just a few who either have stopped paying attention, or (2) they are so far advanced they can read this stuff and not even be shocked but just proceed to talk about it very rationally and what's on their mind I'm very opposed the last point, I'm very opposed to levels of participation, very opposed to opt out, second choices and alternate alternatives because I do believe the kids who opt out or take alternative choices are made to feel on a different level. Because I had a kid who did this. And I know it and I heard the kids talk about it, the kids who don't participate with the rest class who opt out because the parents don't approve of the sex education or whatever, they are removed, they leave the room and the rest of the class which is other level proceeds to have a discussion about the great literature. .... This redefines that this book is good literature it belongs on the list we stand behind the book because it's literature, not policy and it's good for everybody if it's not good for everybody then it may not....the kids in the school district. I'm not a book banner, I'm not a book burner but we are choosing we are making the choices the hard choices, we are standing in place of the kids there's a legal term for it .....the teachers, the administrators, community members are standing in

place advocating and so I believe that you believe book is good for everybody, you decide it is good literature from what I'm hearing now is that the book could be great literature, personally I don't think it's great literature..... I'm opposed to the motion.

Woman speaker - I just wanted to add just to reminder that this is already on the list it was approved by a huge, huge process already. So I don't...I agree with you on the point of what is and what isn't but I disagree that it hasn't been deemed worthy. Let's put it that way and I think that's what you were getting at but it's already been deemed good for an AP level class. I just wanted to put it out there as a reminder and there's that and also I take very heavily my responsibility as an administrator and local....and to speak for those children who don't know how to speak for themselves or have parents that aren't involved and I will always come back to academic careers for everybody. Everybody needs to have the opportunity for academic career and as long as you keep that bar high kids will go for it and give them some success along the way. I think this is a vigorous piece, I think it makes you think, I think it does a "number on gray matter up there", and I personally don't ever want to take that away from a student that any opportunity they have and would also like to remind that this is not something that would ever be supported in a 9<sup>th</sup> grade language arts class it's AP level and having been an AP student myself I remember those discussions and those fun discussions I had about literature in my AP class and some of the things we talked about were way out there for the time - it was back in the 70's I'm that old.... I'm sure glad I had that opportunity I would not have had it if I had not gone into AP. I know I wouldn't, I remember talking to my friends about it. But I'm just throwing that in there as a reminder, this isn't our event we not here to do that, we here to make a recommendation about whether it's to stay on that particular list or not.

Yes just to clarify just so you all know what I was saying I'm not making a recommendation that you gain or take it away or do anything else...speaking about the emotion about alternatives and just pointing out that I'm opposed to that part of the alternatives because of what I said because the literary scholarships is still very much up in the air about this book and it's from the 80's so I'm just speaking ...I did not say in any way that I would take this right to read this book away from anybody. I didn't say that.

It was a guided discussion. Just to clarify that I was talking about the alternatives.

You need to help me but there's a quote from Franklin Athen (?), "for every reader a book and every book a reader" and it doesn't say that everyone must

read this book. Every reader has his own needs and to take away the right for a person to say I don't want to read that ...

That's not what I'm saying --- No, no I want to make it really clear

No, no you're not understanding me; you said you would never take the right of anyone to read a book away

That's right, but I would never take the right away from anyone either  
To NOT read this book, it's very important that people have that choice to either read or not read to turn the TV off, to turn the TV on, to go to a movie or not go to a movie you have to make choices in your life and you have to do it by your values

That's true

And I don't think that in an English class everybody must read one book. It's very important that everybody has a choice as freedom to read and freedom to read also means to use not to read it.

Of the other books on your lists I'd like to point out that in Mrs. Berkowitz's class this book is required, it is the book I use with the class after "Grape of Wrath" but I have tests that ...book, tests results are about class struggle and rape and it has some things. ...The year before you went to this book, you read other books are there alternatives to those other books

Not to all of them we do not have, we have a high number .....because that one has common language and sexuality...

My position about the choice is about Mr. Gudiatis didn't know there was a choice is the other choice main clearly. Did he listen, maybe the choice wasn't made clear enough, but that's a side issue ....I'm very skeptical very skeptical about alternatives and different tiers especially in the same AP class

That to me of all classes is the one that would not be appropriate for tiering with that, that would be the least appropriate as I would see it other classes that....

Sometimes you have to have that availability of others, not because of the content but because the readers you have are so able, that lots of kids, a lot of really good readers have already read this, gone through this, have had lots of experience and have to have something else to stretch them, I think that people who....early and then we hit college, we hit high school and you have to read that, well I read that three years ago, what else can I have

The AP students are usually reading past the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level...

Is everybody comfortable with that, does anybody want to add any other comments or go for it?

Well, I move a question has been called, let me repeat the motion, the motion is to not restrict the use of this book at all but still to offer a choice in terms of preference to the students in the class - correctly stated?

Ok. There are nine people that will be voting, so do you mind a voice vote?

Ok

Ms. Hull - support

Ms. Pastos - support

Ms. Logo - NO

Ms. Cook - NO

Ms. Kumin - support

Ms. Haines - support

Mr. Nielson - support

Ms. Iagulli - support

Ms. Sabri - support

Ok, in the case of this committee we do have a quorum of nine people, it's a majority vote that will carry the motion and we have the motion carried seven to two. So, the motion is passed that the book will remain in place with the option still to offer students an alternative. Their choice or...

I would like to say thank you, I think you have valid points and it's tough to come to circumstances which other people who may agree, but not completely agree or totally disagree and if there were more parents like you we'd be so much better, it's hard...

Mr. Gudaitis I would like to add, your pose is extremely well written, and I agree with you on a great many things and yes, thank you. It goes to prove what my husband and I have always said, AP parents are more involved.

I want to thank everybody on this committee for the preparation and the time and effort you spent in preparing for these sessions. Obviously you do your homework and I don't think that we could have discussions with such conviction and such trust I guess without people doing things in their off time and I appreciate that. So, remember that this is just a recommendation to the Superintendent to choose to accept it, or she may not, but she will present it to

the School Board. I will notify everybody when that is going to occur. That offers another opportunity for public testimony. That's where stand, I want to thank everybody for participating.

Mary Alice Cook  
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696-0277  
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February 2, 2005

Dr. Enid Hunter  
1016 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Ste. 432  
Anchorage, AK 99501

**In Re: Controversial Issues Review Committee and *The House of the Spirits***

Dear Dr. Hunter,

Thank you for the efficient and professional way that you conducted the meetings of the ASD's Controversial Issues Review Committee. All present were encouraged to participate in the discussions and the atmosphere of the meetings was at all times courteous and comfortable. One of our committee assignments was to make a recommendation regarding a parent complaint. Mr. James Gudaitis objected to the content of Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* (HOS), a novel assigned in his son's 12<sup>th</sup> grade AP English class. At our January 26 meeting, the CIRC considered Mr. Gudaitis objections and decided, by a vote of 9 to 2, to recommend that the book remain on the district's approved list and that alternatives to it be offered to students. I was one of the two members who voted against this recommendation and am writing this letter to set out in some detail my reasons for dissenting in this vote. I request that you share this letter with Carol Comeau, ASD Superintendent, with each member of the Anchorage School Board, and with Mr. Gudaitis. My reasons for dissent are as follows:

1. The motion which was approved only restated a policy which was apparently already in place. Ms. Berkowitz, the teacher, stated in her letter to you of January 25 that "...an alternative assignment was always offered as the book was introduced." I am not clear whether the student in this case stated that he was informed of an alternative simultaneous with receiving the assignment. However, I believe it is clear that his parents were not aware of an alternative until they spoke with Ms. Berkowitz about their concerns. It seems then, that if the policy was in place, the system must have broken down in this case. At the least, a clear policy of offering alternative reading should have been announced in advance to all students **and parents** in the class.
2. I am skeptical that the policy of offering alternative reading in AP English class is a good one for the same reason that I am skeptical of all "opt-out" policies. I believe that the practice creates

tiers of participation in the class. Students who, for moral, cultural or conscience reasons opt out of certain classroom discussions are sometimes made to feel odd, segregated and out of the mainstream. Mr. Gudaitis stated that after his son left the classroom during discussion of HOS, the teacher mocked and ridiculed him before the rest of the class. This was reported by the student's best friend, also a member of the class. From personal experience with an opt-out situation regarding my own son, I know that students who exercise this option are frequently singled out as nerds, geeks and weirdos. It was pointed out by a committee member that alternative book choices are often available for students who have previously read the assigned book or who read faster than their classmates. This comparison is not valid, however, because of the obvious difference between students who simply need more reading in *addition* to the assigned book vs. students who *decline* to read the assigned book. My position with regard to HOS is that if the book had been judged suitable to be included in the teacher's syllabus, then it should therefore be suitable for reading by everyone. It would also seem that an AP class, with its emphasis on a mature level of learning, would, of all places, be an uncongenial one for "opt outs."

3. The committee engaged in a great deal of discussion about art vs. pornography. Several members described HOS as "beautiful literature." Mr. Gudaitis labeled it "filth." Although in her letter Ms. Berkowitz states that "It is generally agreed among critics that those [sexual] descriptions in HOS are neither gratuitous nor excessive," no specific critical evidence was offered to the committee by Ms. Berkowitz in support of this statement. As is usual in these arguments, evidence can likely be found to support both sides of the dispute. Opinions about books are, obviously, subjective, and I do not believe that our committee could possibly have decided which viewpoint is the correct one. The reporting of each individual committee member's reaction to and impressions of HOS seems to me to be not very valuable in deciding upon a recommendation to the ASD.

4. Ms. Berkowitz's stated reasons for including HOS in her syllabus included: 1) it is an example of multi-cultural reading and fulfills a school district requirement to include such reading; 2) it raises social and political issues and encourages the students to examine them in light of the narrative; 3) it presents the best depiction of the Allende/Pinochet struggle in Chile that Ms. Berkowitz has ever found; 4) it raises the timely issue of torture of military and political prisoners. Noticeably lower on her list were any literary reasons and, after some passionate discussion of the above points, she did mention the magical realism genre and the worthiness of HOS to be included in the accepted literary canon. Ms. Rhonda Gardner told the committee that the tests of "literariness" as opposed to ordinary fiction are the presence of universal themes and the emotional response of the reader. Later, the test of timelessness was mentioned. I submit that some of the pulpiest of fiction contains themes which are universal and also elicits strong emotional response from the reader. The third test, timelessness, would appear to be the most objective. In the case of HOS, published in 1984, I am skeptical whether enough time has passed to be certain that this work deserves a place in the literary canon or whether it is possible that it is merely a well written example of trashy best seller success, forgotten relatively quickly. It is worth noting that Ms. Allende herself has said that she welcomes the "banning" of her books.

“There’s nothing better than being forbidden,” she says. “You’ve got an entire generation that will come up and want to buy your books.” (www.abccasiapacific.com/nexus/stories - 6-25-04.)

5. I am not a literary scholar but I am aware that literary scholarship, like other academic disciplines, changes rapidly and constantly. The debate continues over deconstruction, critical theories, post-modernism, etc. The “magical realism” genre, of which HOS is presented as an example, is viewed by some scholars as a passing fad that has already started to fade. I read that HOS is ridiculed by some serious critics as Ms. Allende’s attempt to rip-off *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Garcia Marquez and, with the addition of her own salacious prose, make it into a best seller. In any case, there are no doubt other books which contain less objectionable content and would fulfill the multi-cultural requirement, fall in the realistic (if not magically realistic) genre, and be a suitable follow-up to *The Grapes of Wrath*, thus filling Ms. Berkowitz’s stated requirements.

6. Mr. Gudaitis raised other objections to HOS in his written complaint besides that of pornographic content. He mentioned occult practices, communing with spirits, levitating, card reading and telekinesis. This objection received little comment at the meeting, except, if I recall correctly, an opinion that it was actually pretty harmless stuff. The above practices, however, are included in the religion referred to as “New Age,” and, in the view of Christians and others, anything but harmless. Mr. Gudaitis also mentioned the “condescending view of Catholicism,” which received no attention from the committee. However, it is again worth noting that Ms. Allende has said that the best part of being a “lapsed Catholic” is that she is able to say whatever she wants to about the Church without fear of reprisal from the clergy.

7. As I reflected on the images of rape (numerous and graphic, the first being that of an adult male rape of a 15 year old girl), of consensual sexual intercourse (again, numerous and detailed), and the explicit description of the sexual molestation by an adult male of a 6 year old girl, I thought of the motion picture rating code which so many parents rely on and wondered which “parental warning” this novel might be given. The website of the Motion Picture Association of America explains the “R” rating (no one under 17 is admitted without an accompanying parent or adult guardian) as that assigned to a film containing “...hard language, or tough violence, or nudity within sensual scenes...so that parents are counseled, *in advance* [italics mine] to take this advisory rating very seriously.” The “NC17” rating (no one under 17 is admitted) indicates scenes which are “...patently too adult for youngsters under 17.” This rating does not indicate that the film is “pornographic” or “obscene” (those being legal terms), but that “...the reasons for the application of an NC17 rating can be violence or sex or aberrational behavior or drug abuse, or any other element which, when present, most parents would consider too strong and therefore off-limits for viewing by their children.” Using these standards, I am confident that HOS would be given at least an “R” rating, if not “NC17.” I am aware that most high school seniors (which make up the AP English class in question) have attained the age of 17. However, according to the survey form given to the committee (“Regarding: *The House of Spirits*”), this novel is also used in Honors 11 at Chugiak High School (during spring semester, so it is not clear whether all students are age 17); in Spanish immersion classes at Chugiak (again, the age of students is not

clear); and in “IB World Literature unit” at West High School. In short, parents of children under age 17 are warned by the MPAA ratings code to inform themselves, **in advance**, of objectionable content. Should not parents of ASD students be likewise warned, **in advance**, of objectionable content in assigned reading material?

More than one committee member stated that because we live in a world filled with violence and evil, it behooves us as adults to ensure that our children are properly educated about this reality and that literature - whether read at home or at school - is one means of doing so. Apparently there is an expectation that parents will be aware of all their child’s reading, will be available and willing to mediate it, and that teachers will stand-in for the parents satisfactorily in this role. I suspect that, due to many reasons which do not necessarily include neglect, each of these expectations is frequently unmet. Setting that concern aside, however, I am not persuaded that because we live in a world where horrific, degrading things happen, we are obliged to show our children graphic images of these acts. Levels of maturity and readiness for such images fluctuate among high school juniors and seniors and it should not be assumed that because some are ready to grapple with these images, it must follow that all are ready. Also, not everyone “deals with” violence in the world by meeting it head-on in written images and explicit language. Some prefer to deal with the reality of violence without encountering it in details which leave nothing to the imagination. These people, including high school students, should be respected for their wishes, not expected to immerse themselves in it or be ridiculed when they decline to do so. With regard to the foulness of the language employed by Ms. Allende, a member of the committee pointed out that such language, when uttered publicly, is not tolerated in school buildings.

Thank you, Dr. Hunter, for the opportunity to explain my dissent from the committee and for sharing this letter with Superintendent Comeau, members of the school board and Mr. Gudaitis. I do support Mr. Gudaitis in his efforts to bring attention to the very objectionable content of this novel and I plan to testify at such time the school board considers his complaint.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Alice Cook". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Mary Alice Cook

January 25, 2005

Dr. Enid Hunter, Executive Director  
Curriculum and Instructional Support  
Anchorage School District

Dr. Hunter,

Yesterday afternoon I received an e-mail from Mardell Kiesel asking for my responses to questions about my classroom use of Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*.

I believe I first used *The House of the Spirits* in the Spring of 1996. Earlier that school year, we had been told in an English Department meeting that the School District had directed that every English class teach a multicultural book; we were each to decide on one and begin to use it immediately. Partly because I had received a unit plan covering Allende's *The House of the Spirits* in a week-long Advanced Placement English Lit teachers' workshop sponsored by College Board during the summer of '94, I bought a copy, read it, and decided to use it. I know I used it again in 1998 and every year since then. I estimate that I have taught *The House of the Spirits* to fifteen sections of A.P. Lit over eight years, roughly 350 students. (I think it has also been used in the HIP program at Bartlett, but I have no specifics about how they used the book.)

*The House of the Spirits* is a challenging book that I save for the end of the students' senior year, and there are quite a few other reasons besides its "multi-cultural" aspect, that I continue to use it. The novel we study just before *The House of the Spirits* is Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. In teaching about the literary school known as Realism, I show that Realists use actual details from real life; and, of course, in *Grapes*, Steinbeck uses the Dust Bowl exodus from the Great Plains to convey his opinion that socialism could solve America's problems. I teach my students to recognize the literary techniques used by an author to promote his or her personal political and economic ideology. I use actual Dust Bowl and Great Depression footage as a cross-curricular history lesson to give context to Steinbeck's fictional treatment of the same period.

*The House of the Spirits* is a perfect next step after *The Grapes of Wrath*. It also expresses a political point of view and is based on actual historical events. The author's uncle was President of Chile and was killed during a coup which established a military dictatorship which endured for several decades. The Allende book, however, represents an entirely different literary genre known as "Magical Realism" which has become prominent in Latin American literature. *The House of the Spirits* has recently been analyzed in published A.P. practice materials in anticipation of the possibility that questions regarding Magical Realism may well appear in the yearly A.P. Literature test.

As with *The Grapes of Wrath*, I give my students factual information regarding the history and geography of Chile, showing them conflicting treatments of that history. The Allende book even has the special virtue of being tied to current events because General Augusto Pinochet, one of leaders of the coup, is frequently in the news as Chile continues its attempts to bring him to justice for the crimes of his military regime.

As is often true in modern fiction, *The House of the Spirits* does depict domestic and political violence and sexuality and uses language in a far more vivid manner than the literature of the past. It is generally agreed among critics, however, that those descriptions in *The House of the Spirits* are neither gratuitous nor excessive. They may not suit everyone's taste, but they are part and parcel of an important work of modern Latin American fiction.

When I introduce *The House of the Spirits*, I always make it clear that there are portions of the book that some could find objectionable, and offer *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy as an alternate assignment. *Tess*, in fact, is the work that was replaced in my curriculum by *The House of the Spirits* in 1996. I have not received previous objections to *The House of the Spirits*, perhaps because an alternative assignment was always offered as the book was introduced. Over the years, a small number of students -- a dozen or so -- have opted to read *Tess* rather than *The House of the Spirits*.

One of the reasons I have continued to use *The House of the Spirits* is the gratifying reaction from a great number of my students. Second-semester twelfth graders are highly distracted by the prospect of graduation and college. It is therefore very special to have had students say (direct quotes from e-mails to me)

"I couldn't put it down."

"I just finished *The House of the Spirits*. I don't know which book left me feeling more moved, this one or *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was really powerful!"

"I really enjoyed the book. Although the last few chapters were really upsetting. I can't believe the torture they inflicted on those poor. . . people. How'd they get away with that? That's terrible! I hope you can answer my questions."

"I just finished the book today and I just thought I'd tell you that it is my favorite book out of all the ones we've read this year. . . ."

It is my desire to continue to teach this book. I believe it is an appropriate work to be assigned in an elective class to students who will be entering college later that year. It is also an appropriate choice for students about to take the A. P. Literature exam.

If you or the committee have any further questions, please contact me at Bartlett High School.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn Berkowitz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Kathryn Berkowitz, teacher  
Bartlett High School