

# Intellectual Freedom in the Westmount Charter School Mid-High Learning Commons



In the Westmount Charter School Mid-High Learning Commons, we have books that may appeal to a wide range of interests for students of varied ages, backgrounds, cultures, sexual orientations, gender identities, and religions. A school library that limits censorship and promotes intellectual freedom can offer students of varied ages a safe and inclusive environment to explore various ideas and perspectives. Students can develop critical thinking skills, expand their knowledge base, and engage in meaningful discussions and debates by providing access to diverse materials.

Our Learning Commons has worked to develop a collection that reflects the needs and interests of our diverse student body. Our goal is to provide materials that represent the voices and experiences of our students and promote a culture of inclusivity and diversity while promoting educational content both related to and separate from the Alberta Provincial curriculum. We aim to provide a broad and inclusive collection that celebrates diversity in all its forms, including but not limited to ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and socio-economic status. We seek to support our students' academic and personal growth by providing access to a range of viewpoints, ideas, and perspectives.

We select materials based on the following criteria:

- Accuracy and quality of content
- Relevance to the curriculum and interests of our students
- Representation of diverse viewpoints and experiences
- Contribution to a well-rounded and inclusive collection
- Literary and academic merit

Our collection includes both digital and print materials that cover a range of topics, including but not limited to:

- Diverse cultures and identities
- Social justice issues
- Multicultural literature
- Biographies and memoirs of historically marginalized individuals
- Diverse voices in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields

While intellectual freedom is crucial, it is also essential to consider the age and stage of our students. While the school staff will not censor content that students check out, we do ask our students questions when the content might appear mature for the student in question. Ultimately, the choices at school rest in the hands of the student. If parents request that their children not read a certain book, series, or topic, we assume that students will respect their parents' wishes and would not in any way undermine those choices.

The library and teaching staff work together to provide age-appropriate materials and resources relevant to the curriculum and ensure that students are not exposed to explicitly harmful, illegal, or discriminatory materials. A school library that values intellectual freedom and open access to information can assist in fostering a culture of lifelong learning and encourage students to become active and engaged members of their communities.

Some essential questions and references:

#### [What is intellectual freedom?](#)

Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas, through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored.

[The Role of the Library in Intellectual Freedom](#)

#### [Are "information rights" "human rights"?](#)

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says: "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms [including] freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication. (Section 2b).

[Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)

[This applies to children as well.](#) The UNICEF Convention on the rights of the child states:

#### Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

## Article 14

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

[the united nations convention on the rights of the child | unicef](#)

### How is content selected?

In our library, we aim to select a broad range of books and other materials that represent a diversity of topics, viewpoints, and perspectives. We will not select any materials that could be defined as “hate speech” under the Canadian Human Rights Act; meaning no materials that express detestation or vilification of an individual or group of individuals based on their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics or disability. ([Combatting hate speech and hate crimes](#)). Materials are examined based on the presumed intent of the author, literary excellence, and the community's customs when considering the value and effectiveness of any book. ([Not Censorship But Selection](#))

### What are the professional responsibilities and code of ethics for library staff?

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations guide public and school libraries. Further information can be reviewed on the following web pages:

- [Canadian Code of Ethics for Librarians](#)
- [Canadian Federation of Library Association Statement on Libraries and the Intellectual Freedom of Children and Youth](#)
- [Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries](#)
- [Freedom to Read Canada](#)