

A Statement on Questions over *A Fine Dessert* Texas Library Association

We, our state and nation, are facing difficult and challenging times in realizing the dreams of a truly equal and non-prejudiced environment. The members of the library community offer our work, will, and longstanding commitment to advancing these causes. Our focus is not to assign blame, but rather to look honestly at the issues before us and determine how we, within our own sphere of action, can be an agent for progress.

The Texas Library Association (TLA) affirms our full commitment to supporting racial sensitivity, equality, and justice for all members of our communities and schools. Our intent is to serve a means for supporting positive discussions, however difficult, within our profession and within the broader public.

Given this context, we first express our regret that a book on the current Texas Bluebonnet Award List – *A Fine Dessert* by Emily Jenkins – is of concern to some librarians and readers alike. The book, which has also been praised widely in professional and public forums, has elicited condemnation about its depiction of slavery.

Emily Jenkins, the book's author, issued an apology, which in part reads: "I have come to understand that my book, while intended to be inclusive and truthful and hopeful, is racially insensitive. I own that and am very sorry." She has donated the fee she received for the book to the non-profit "We Need Diverse Books."

TLA holds strongly to the principles of intellectual freedom. As anyone in the education and literary fields understands, no single book will please everyone. By their nature, books are products of individuals' own imagination, experiences, and insights which express different world views and perspectives on particular circumstances of the world. The library community understands and must operate under the knowledge that individual tastes and perceptions will differ. It is our job to respect those differences, support reading for all individuals, and allow ourselves to learn through the experiences of those we serve.

We applaud the individuals who have made their concerns known. We respect Ms. Jenkins for taking a positive stance on this matter. We will use this discussion as a teaching moment in our work crafting TLA reading lists and in expanding the learning opportunity to the public.

TLA is grateful for the hard work of the Texas Bluebonnet Award Selection Committee members who volunteer extraordinary time to identify, review, and evaluate hundreds of books. The goal of this program is to design a list of varied titles to help promote a love of reading within the very diverse young population of our state and nation. TLA and our members take this work very seriously, and we strive for excellence and diversity. Part of our ongoing work is to seek and implement ways to identify books that are culturally rich and are sensitive to and reflective of the great diversity of readers.

It is with the skill, commitment, and expertise of our members that the Texas Library Association will highlight the difficult questions and concerns that have been raised over *A Fine Dessert*. We believe that any librarian, teacher, parent, or student who wishes to read the book should be provided with information about why individuals have found the book racially insensitive. The TBA Program List Committee will provide study information and references to other works that can offer a fuller study of the agonizing conditions of slavery, its impact, and the ongoing struggles of African Americans.

TLA will further sponsor a series of programs for librarians and libraries. We will work with publishers and authors to continue our discussions about the need for more diversity in literature. TLA inaugurated one of the first-ever summits on this issue in 1998 and followed up last year with a powerful symposium examining cultural issues in literature today.

TLA will also invite commentary and suggestions from the public and thought leaders as to how libraries and the Association can partner to increase positive and progressive community dialogue. As a direct result of the important discussions brought about by *A Fine Dessert*, TLA is contacting publishers to partner in bringing programming to libraries to foster meaningful community conversations.

We fully understand that no response will please everyone or address all concerns. We stand firmly by our principles and our commitment to keep improving, learning, and growing. We will explore practices and strategies to help us achieve these goals. We welcome anyone to participate in the Association, to join our ranks and help us set the course for our actions, to provide us with suggestions, and to make book recommendations for our reading lists. We invite you to help keep TLA, libraries, and library services strong and responsive.