



September 15, 2006

Becky Rosales  
Chair, Curriculum Advisory Committee  
San Rafael Unified School District  
310 Nova Albion Way  
San Rafael, CA, 94903

Dear Ms. Rosales and Members of the Curriculum Advisory Committee,

Having read *The Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare, I am writing to insist that it is inappropriate for a public school curriculum and violates the Criteria for Evaluating Instructional Materials in History-Social Science, Kindergarten through Grade Eight adopted in 2003 by the California Department of Education Criteria which states in Category 1 Criteria # 10:

"Materials on religious subject matter remain neutral, do not advocate one religion over another, do not include simulation or role playing of religious ceremonies or beliefs, do not include derogatory language about a religion or use examples from sacred texts or other religious literature that are derogatory, accusatory or have instilled prejudice against other religions or those who believe in other religions."

*The Bronze Bow* is a compelling and moving story, told from a Christian perspective, about the triumph of love, compassion, and forgiveness, as associated with the character of Jesus, over violence, anger, and revenge, portrayed as Jewish characteristics, through the character of Daniel. This is obviously not a "neutral" tale; "one religion is advocated over another." In the last few pages, Daniel, the Jewish main character, finds peace, wholeness, and salvation in finally knowing Jesus (pp. 252-253). In contrast, in his experience with Judaism, he only becomes more angry and violent. The author portrays Judaism and the rabbis as being uncaring to the poor (pp. 88, 162), obsessed with matters of cleanliness (p. 62) and "the Law" (p. 105, 219) at the expense of compassion and kindness (p. 55, 63, 64).

As a rabbi and teacher of the Jewish tradition, I find this book insulting to "the Law" (Speare's unfortunate translation of "the Torah"), to our tradition, and to our ancient sages, for the values of compassion, kindness, and love are our highest and most central teachings. As a spiritual leader in Marin County who works closely with middle school students, among others, I am certain that seventh graders of any religion do not have the sophistication of analysis nor the background in ancient religious thought to see that Speare's depiction of Judaism is misinformed and biased. Furthermore, seventh grade teachers are not scholars of rabbinic notions of purity or of the Torah's instructions for treating the poor, for example, and are not equipped to bring the book's slanted distortions to light. More importantly, such a partial religious perspective has no place in a public school classroom.

Please do the right thing and remove *The Bronze Bow* from your reading list. It advocates one religion over another in a public school, it promotes distorted understandings of Judaism, and it fosters anti-Jewish sentiment. At this time, as much as ever, we need our students to learn the message of love, understanding, and peace through literature that actually promotes love, understanding, and peace.

Thank you and Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rabbi Chai Levy".

Rabbi Chai Levy  
Congregation Kol Shofar

