

Appendix F

Brette Sasser Stephenson



brette.stephenson@yahoo.com

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Dr. Pamela R. Moran
Superintendent of Schools
Albemarle County Public Schools
401 McIntire Road, Room 345
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Dr. Moran,

I am writing to request that *A Study in Scarlet* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle be excluded from the curriculum in the Albemarle County Public Schools for any middle school grade level. This novel is currently being utilized at J.T. Henley Middle School for all advanced 6th grade Language Arts classes. While I have several objections to the use of this novel in instructing 6th grade students, my main concern is that this non-fact based novel is widely acknowledged to be an archaic example of 19th Century anti-Mormon literature, a popular genre at the time of its publication in 1887. In fact, this novel is a primary-source document modern historians cite when demonstrating anti-Mormon prejudice of the late 1800s. As such, including it in a 2011 Language Arts class for children as young as 11-years-old perpetuates bigotry and negative stereotyping against members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), a minority religion in our community.

I am not suggesting that *A Study in Scarlet* be removed from a public school library's collection or libraries in general. I do not believe that access to most books should be limited or banned, but educators teaching such curriculum to this audience encourage false and negative judgments to be made against my children, their faith and their cultural heritage. This encouragement is done with Albemarle County Public School funding through the use of J. T. Henley Middle School's facilities, materials and time.

Furthermore, the use of this book is completely unnecessary. The current children's and teen literature field is flush with excellent novels, such as the others that have been included in this year's curriculum. The fact that *A Study in Scarlet* is inequitably grouped with *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and *Fever* leads me to question why one would choose such a book. Each of these is included on lists of recommended reading for 6th grade children. *A Study in Scarlet* does not appear on any such list that I could find in my research. This novel is not a classic and maintains a reputation as a rather mediocre example of the crime genre. It only appears on a list of 100 Top Crime Novels as a portion of the entire Sherlock Holmes collection, unlike *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (also by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle), which is recommended

independently. This evidence indicates that it is hardly irreplaceable as a resource for the children of our community. In fact, from a literary standpoint, it could most likely be easily improved upon.

A Study in Scarlet contains untruthful and prejudiced content that would be difficult for 11-year-olds to independently contextualize historically and socially. Individual classroom instructors have not consistently and accurately explained this novel's negative and fictitious assessment of the Mormon faith, its culture and leaders. Teachers have suggested that Mormon students present counter arguments to the descriptions made regarding Mormon culture, history and events portrayed within *A Study in Scarlet*. (I am curious to know if other, non-Mormon students have been encouraged to do the same.) The use of this book as a curriculum resource creates a hostile environment within the public school setting where children feel their personal beliefs and heritage to be threatened, and they need to defend their religion and culture during class instruction time. ✓

The counter argument to my objection has been made that *A Study in Scarlet* is fiction, and as such, is appropriate for curriculum regardless of content and message. It is commonly known that when actual people, cultures and religions (as in this novel) are fictionalized in either literature or drama, it is very difficult for a mature adult audience to separate fact from fiction within the work. It is unrealistic to expect easily influenced 11-year-old children to be able to do so. Because of fiction's power to sway opinion and the impressionable nature of middle-school-age children, thoughtful consideration should be made regarding a source's influence on the students' perceptions, judgments and behavior toward their fellow classmates and members of a particular group, whether it is a minority race, culture or religion. As it is anti-Mormon literature, I sincerely hope that *A Study in Scarlet* will be rejected for use as curriculum in the Albemarle County Public Schools.

Please see ten attached sources defining *A Study in Scarlet* as anti-Mormon literature, the common characteristics of 1880s anti-Mormon literature (most of which define *A Study in Scarlet*) and three photocopied pages from a student copy of *A Study in Scarlet*. Also, please see additional letters from other concerned parents.

I appreciate your time and consideration. Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this issue. I would be happy to discuss them with you.

Sincerely,

Brette Sasser Stephenson

cc: Ms. Barbara Massie Mouly, Dr. Bernard Hairston

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Dr. Pamela R. Moran
Superintendent of Schools
Albemarle County Public Schools
401 McIntire Road, Room 345
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Dr. Moran,

I am writing to request that *A Study in Scarlet* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle be replaced in the middle school curriculum in Albemarle County Public Schools.

You should know that I make such a request not as a general critic of the county schools; on the contrary, my wife and I have been extraordinarily pleased with the quality of education our children have received in the county school system over the past five years. We are enthusiastic and frequent volunteers in our children's classrooms at Meriwether Lewis Elementary, and actively participate in both our Parent Teacher Organization and "Music Matters," a parent-organized advocacy group supporting the performing arts in the Albemarle County Public Schools. In short, we love the county school system that serves our children so well.

Furthermore, as an educator and academic myself, I am always hesitant to insert my opinions into curriculum choices of individual teachers, or support the censoring of particular ideas or views. Indeed I am generally opposed to such actions. As such, I approach you on this issue only after much thought and careful consideration.

My understanding is that this novel is currently being utilized at J.T. Henley Middle School for all 6th grade Language Arts classes. As the parent of a rising 6th grader who will attend Henley in the fall, this issue has particular salience to me and my child. And I should emphasize that I do not advocate the removal of *A Study in Scarlet* from the public school library's collection, or the censoring or "banning" of it in any larger sense.

Rather, I recommend that the novel simply be replaced as a selection in the required middle school language arts curriculum. I recommend its replacement in the curriculum because the book is notable not so much for being an exceptional novel, but instead as a classic example of 19th Century anti-Mormon literature, a popular genre at the time of its publication in 1887. Indeed *A Study in Scarlet* typically only appears on lists of 100 Top Crime Novels as a portion of the entire Sherlock Holmes collection, unlike *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – also by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – which is often recommended independently as classic literature.

Because of the novel's reputation as a rather mediocre example of the crime genre, it would seem that, from a literary standpoint, its slot in the current middle school reading curriculum could be easily improved upon. Nevertheless, whatever its strengths as literature (or reasons for its inclusion) may be, my primary concern is that the use of *A Study in Scarlet* in the reading curriculum for 11-year-old children perpetuates bigotry and negative stereotyping against members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), a minority religion in our community to which our family belongs. Teaching the novel in the middle school curriculum potentially (and unnecessarily) encourages false and negative assumptions and judgments to be made against my children, their faith and their cultural heritage.

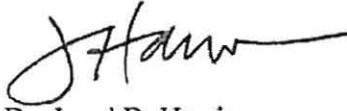
This novel is one of several quintessential, primary-source documents modern scholars cite when demonstrating anti-Mormon prejudice of the late 1800s.¹ Furthermore, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself later apologized for the sensationalized portrayal of Mormonism, and was "the first to admit that his first Sherlock Holmes novel was full of errors about the Mormons."² And therein lies the problem: while a comprehensive study of the perceptions of the young American religion (in context, and from multiple viewpoints) would be valuable and interesting, it seems more appropriate for a graduate Ph.D. seminar than a 6th grade language arts class. But as it stands – in the absence of a more balanced and scholarly examination of early 19th century religious perceptions – Henley's middle school students are currently on their own to interpret the historical meaning of the novel's portrayal of Mormons. This is unacceptable, because *A Study in Scarlet* contains untruthful and prejudiced content that would be difficult for 11-year-olds to independently contextualize historically and socially.

Although this could be remedied in a number of ways, I think it is too much to ask of our middle school teachers to use precious class time to provide such a nuanced and balanced view. After all, such a specialized inquiry into Mormon history and archaic anti-Mormon sentiment – while certainly of interest to some of us – is hardly a central learning objective of the county's middle school language arts curriculum. Nor would it be acceptable for instructors to instead shift the burden to Mormon school children (like my son) to "defend" his own faith by providing an alternative viewpoint. Any suggestion that it is somehow incumbent on Mormon students themselves to present counter arguments to the negative and misleading descriptions of Mormon culture, history and events portrayed within *A Study in Scarlet* is indefensible. Simply put, this would constitute a hostile environment within the public school setting where certain children feel their personal beliefs and heritage to be threatened. No student should feel it necessary to defend their religion and culture during class instruction time, with all eyes on them.

As such, I believe the most judicious solution is to simply replace *A Study in Scarlet* in the Albemarle County Public Schools' middle school curriculum with a different work of fiction. There is no shortage of alternative books that might be used, and an abundance of selections that contain all the learning benefits of having students read a 19th century mystery, without the downsides of implicitly endorsing a fictional view of a minority group's history that is sensationalized and untrue.

Thank you for your consideration of this sensitive issue. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or would like any further clarification, as I would be more than happy to discuss the matter further.

Best Regards,



Dr. Jared D. Harris

Cc: Barbara Massie Mouly, school board representative for White Hall District
Eric Strucko, school board representative for Samuel Miller District
Dr. Patrick McLaughlin, Principal, J.T. Henley Middle School

¹ Many references demonstrate *A Study in Scarlet's* widely acknowledged status as early anti-Mormon literature. For instance, Ken Black's 2005 book review for the American Library Association refers to "the anti-Mormon literature that was prevalent, including Arthur Conan Doyle's *Study in Scarlet...*" (*American History Through Literature 1870-1920*, Gary Schamhorst and Tom Quirk eds., 2005 Charles Scribner and Sons, New York).

See also Gallagher, Eugene and Michael Ashcraft, eds. *History and Controversies: Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, 2006 Greenwood Press, Westport CT, p.229: "...Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) wrote the most famous anti-Mormon/anti-polygamy novel of all time, *A Study in Scarlet...*"

"One of the most prominent nineteenth century anti-Mormon authors was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, penman of the lurid anti-Mormon novel, *A Study in Scarlet*." (p.241) Givens, George W. *500 Little-Known Facts in Mormon History*, 2002 Bonneville Books, Springville, UT.

"By the time Conan Doyle wrote in the 1880s, anti-Mormon fiction was a well-known literary device in both the United States and England." (p.245) Gordon, Sara. *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in 19th Century America*. 2002 University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC.

"Still the majority of the novels continued to be anti-Mormon sensationalism such as John Hansen Beadles' *Life in Utah...* Even the respected Arthur Conan Doyle relied on the sensational when he wrote his first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887)." (p.850) Hunsaker, Kenneth. "Mormon Novels," in *A Literary History of the American West*, J. Taylor and Thomas Lyon eds. 1987 Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, TX.

² Quoting the author's daughter, Dame Jean Conan Doyle. Reported in Harold Schindler, "Conan Doyle's Tale of Mormonism Had Utah Faithful Seeing *Scarlet*," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 10 April 1994, D1.

Emily C. Evans
4763 Dick Woods Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903
434 295 3414

Sunday May 8, 2011

Dr. Pamela R. Moran
Superintendent of Schools
Albemarle County Public Schools
401 McIntire Road, Room 345
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Dr. Moran,

I am writing in support of the request for removal of *A Study in Scarlet* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle from the Language Arts curriculum in the Albemarle County Public Schools for any middle school grade level.

I am a parent of three daughters who will attend J.T. Henley Middle School and have been made aware of the use of this book in the curriculum, and the concern that it is anti-Mormon by friends and neighbors with children attending the middle school currently. At first consideration of the issue I was doubtful that any public school Language Arts curriculum in this country would include literature commonly accepted as "anti-" any religion. I was shocked to review portions of *A Study in Scarlet* that portray Mormons as forceful, threatening, intolerant and even dangerous. Certainly propaganda that could move a young person's (if not adult) mind to prejudice and bigotry. I found myself wondering if literature portraying a more dominant religion in a negative light would be accepted into the curriculum as readily as this novel has been.

Although the work is known as fiction, actual persons are used in the story and represented in a libelous way (Brigham Young, Mormon prophet from 1847-1877). It is sensational to expect young readers to tease out the fact from fiction in this work, especially when presented with no discussion of cultural, religious or historical context. I could find no mention of the over 50,000 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that emigrated west between 1847 to 1877 in the Albemarle County School History and Social Science curriculum for 2007. The lack of education about the factual events surrounding the Mormon migration and settlement of the west makes misconceptions about members of this faith even more likely, and the use of this novel even more irresponsible and dangerous in creating an atmosphere of hostility toward our children.

Finally, I express my great love for the experiences my children have had in this school district, and specifically at Virginia Murray Elementary School. Upon moving to Charlottesville 4 years

ago, we quickly found that the education and support our children received at school was above and beyond what we had expected for them. At school, my children feel safe, respected and valued as an integral part of their community. It is my sincere hope that this sense of security and support that allows them to achieve and grow so exceptionally, will continue throughout their years in middle and high school. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily C. Evans

Thursday, May 12, 2011



Cheryl M. Thompson
823 Filly Run
Charlottesville, VA 22903
4343-823-5424

Dr. Pamela R. Moran
Superintendent of Schools
Albemarle County Public Schools
401 McIntire Road, Room 345
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Dr. Moran,

It has come to my attention that the sixth grade at Henley Middle School is adopting an Anti Mormon book for the students to read. I am a "Mormon", which is a nickname; our real name is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I take exception, to the use of this book as a reader for the students. I have already had one daughter (Elizabeth Thompson) come through your school and one will be there in the fall (Esther Thompson). I request that you pick another book of high esteem to replace this one. I myself had never heard of this book, until recently and have enjoyed the 'Sherlock Holmes' adventures. I have read several of his books and watched several movies. I will now be rethinking my praise of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for using the prejudice of the times to sensationalize his novel. This novel is of no consequence and is not widely read (most likely for good reason). As a devote Christian, I have noted a tendency to 'Political Correctness' in many areas except when it comes to the "Mormon Faith". I would ask that you use discretion in this matter and take this book off your list of approved reading material for your county and Henley Middle School. It would not be proper to help perpetuate the fictional and erroneous character assassination of a church with more than 14,000,000.00 million members. It would not be right to any legitimate church no matter how many members, to further perpetuate falsehoods. I am surprised that a Public School of the quality of Henley would allow their teachers to pick a book with such bigotry.

Sincerely


Cheryl Thompson

Cc: Ms. Barbara Massie Mouly, Dr. Bernard Hairston, Dr. Patrick McLaughlin

To: Pam Moran
Subject: Study in Scarlet

Pam,

I hope you are well. It was fun to see you at the Phantom of the Opera. I always love to see how engaged you are.

I am writing to follow up on, and to offer my support to, the letter that Brette Stephenson sent requesting that A Study in Scarlet be removed from the curriculum at Albemarle County Public Schools. I am familiar with and agree with all of the points that Ms. Stephenson has made. I do not have new information to add, just an emphasis that we are NOT asking that the book be banned or removed from libraries, only that it be removed from the curriculum. It is an offensive work that demeans members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints using patent untruths that are well documented.

I am happy to answer any questions or to be involved in any discussions that would be helpful with regards to this decision. I know this is a small thing compared to many of the issues on your plate, and so I apologize for adding to them. I do believe that this is an important issue, though, and would appreciate you supporting Ms. Stephenson in her request.

Thanks,
Ryan Quinn

Ryan W. Quinn
Assistant Professor of Business Administration University of Virginia Darden School of Business Mail Address: P.O. Box 6550 Charlottesville, VA 22906-6500

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Personal web page: <http://faculty.darden.virginia.edu/quinnr/index.htm>
The LIFT Blog: <http://www.leadingwithlift.com/blog/>
The LIFT Book: <http://tinyurl.com/lhbz3s>

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Myra Johnson
5604 Park Road
Crozet VA 22932

May 11, 20011

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the parent of children currently attending Albemarle County Public Schools and who will be attending J. T. Henley Middle School in the future. It has come to my attention that the novel *A Study in Scarlet* is required reading material for Henley Middle School Literature curriculum. Although *A Study in Scarlet* is known as the first novel in the Sherlock Holmes series, the grossly-false depictions of Mormons (or members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) counter-act any merit this novel may have. It is my recommendation that this novel be removed from the Language Arts curriculum countywide.

In the Albemarle County School's Policies and Regulations it states: "Each individual child is capable and has the right to safety, mutual respect, and learning" (School Division Goals and Objectives, page 4). Furthermore, the same policy states, "We treat all individuals with honor and dignity" (pg 4).

It goes directly against Albemarle County School's own policies when a middle school aged Mormon student is required to read material that depicts their personal beliefs in such a negative, and untruthful light. That child's beliefs are not being held with dignity. Furthermore, when that child must then sit in a classroom and listen to their faith being ridiculed by lies, they are not being treated with mutual respect. Teaching falsehoods about students' personal beliefs goes directly against Albemarle County Schools policies.

A Study in Scarlet depicts Mormon polygamists as the villains in the novel. While this is a work of fiction, the genre depicts these villains as exaggerated caricatures derived from preconceived notions of a group of people (in this case, Mormons). And, while even during his own time Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's depiction of Mormons was grossly false, it is even more false to assert that current Mormons are anything similar to the caricatures depicted in this novel. To say as such would be to assert that all Catholics are like those depicted in *The Da Vinci Code*, or all Orthodox Jews don't speak to their children as depicted in *The Chosen*, or all southerners are racists like Huckleberry Finn's father in *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We would never ask sixth graders to read and discern the truth from fiction from these books. They are too young to process the truths from the lies. And to place the burden of separating the truth from the lies on the shoulders of those students who are Latter-day Saints is **disrespectful and undignified**.

It is not fair for these young Latter-day Saint students to be placed in a position that would bring them ridicule or shame for their beliefs. *A Study in Scarlet* comprises the policies of the Albemarle County Public School District. Therefore, I formally request the removal of this book from the course curriculum, and that it be replaced with a book that better follows the school district's own guidelines.

Thank you,

Myra Johnson

Brette Sasser Stephenson

[REDACTED]
brettestephenson@yahoo.com
[REDACTED]

Tuesday, April 26, 2011

Dr. Patrick McLaughlin
Principal, J. T. Henley Middle School
5880 Rockfish Gap Turnpike
Crozet, Virginia 22932

Dr. McLaughlin,

I am writing to request that *A Study in Scarlet* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle be excluded from the curriculum at J. T. Henley Middle School for any grade level. While I have several objections to the use of this novel in instructing 6th grade students, my main concern is the fact that this non-fact based novel is widely acknowledged to be an archaic example of 19th Century anti-Mormon literature, a popular genre at the time of its publication in 1887. As such, including it in a 2011 Language Arts class for children as young as 11-years-old perpetuates bigotry and negative stereotyping against members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a minority religion in our community. I am not suggesting that *A Study in Scarlet* be removed from a public school library's collection or libraries in general. I do not believe that access to most books should be limited or banned, but educators teaching such curriculum encourage false and negative judgments to be made against my children, their faith and their cultural heritage. This encouragement is done with Albemarle County Public School funding through the use of J. T. Henley Middle School's facilities, materials and time.

A Study in Scarlet contains untruthful and prejudiced content that would be difficult for 11-year-olds to independently contextualize historically and socially. It is concerning that this novel's negative and fictitious assessment of the Mormon faith, its culture and leaders has not been consistently challenged and accurately explained by individual classroom instructors. It is my understanding that previous Mormon students have been encouraged to present counter arguments to the negative and untruthful descriptions made regarding Mormon culture, history and events portrayed within *A Study in Scarlet*. (I am curious to know if other, non-Mormon students have been encouraged to do the same.) The use of this book as a curriculum resource creates a hostile environment within the public school setting where children feel their personal beliefs and heritage to be threatened, and they need to defend their religion and culture during class instruction time.

Furthermore, the use of this book is completely unnecessary. The current children's and teen literature field is flush with excellent novels, such as the others that have been included in this year's curriculum. The fact that *A Study in Scarlet* is inequitably grouped with *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and *Fever* leads me to question why one would choose such a book. Each of these is included on lists of recommended reading for 6th grade children. *A Study in Scarlet* does not appear on any such list (other than the 100 Top Crime Novels and only as a portion of the entire Sherlock Holmes Series) that I could find in my research. This evidence indicates that it is hardly irreplaceable as a resource for the children of our community. In fact, from a literary standpoint, it could most likely be easily improved upon.

The counter argument to my objection has been made that the Albemarle County Public School approved reading list for 6th grade students includes *A Study in Scarlet*. While I hope this is a mistake that will soon be set right, I assert that just because a particular resource is permitted, it shouldn't necessarily be used. Thoughtful consideration should be made regarding a source's influence on the students' perceptions, judgments and behavior toward their fellow classmates and members of a particular group, whether it is a minority race, culture or religion. I sincerely hope that *A Study in Scarlet* will be rejected for use as curriculum at J. T. Henley Middle School.

Thank you for your consideration regarding this matter. Please contact me if you have any questions about this request.

Sincerely,

Brette Sasser Stephenson

Cc: Dr. Pamela R. Moran, Dr. Bernard Hairston, Ms. Kimberly Warnick, Ms. Sarah Walter, and Ms. Jane Webb

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

As parents of children in Albemarle County Schools, we are writing to express our concern that *A Study in Scarlet* is on your approved reading list for six graders. Our child will be entering six grade in one year and we believe that this book may create a hostile environment that will inhibit her personal and intellectual development. We submit that this reading material is highly inappropriate and should be removed from the approved reading list immediately.

It is troubling to us that this book is chosen on the merits of it's being a mystery novel while the overarching anti-religious theme of the book is overlooked. Not only is this book weak in terms of literary value, it is also widely known as one of the most popular anti-Mormon novels ever written. With so many excellent sources of great literary value available to fill the genre of a mystery novel, it is concerning that such a book has been chosen by Henley Middle School and furthermore is on the County's approved reading list.

We are also concerned for the potential atmosphere this will create for our children. There are many misconceptions about the Mormon faith, and for our children to be faced with so many falsehoods depicted in *A Study in Scarlet*, exposing young and malleable minds to the book can be seen as a dereliction of duty because it can lead to a environment of discrimination and prejudice in a class room. Our children will be faced with peers who all they know about Mormons they gain from reading this book.

In light of the potential dangers associated with this book, we request that it be removed immediately from the approved reading list. We have been pleased with the training and education our children have received though ACPS and hope that they will continue to thrive in and environment that allows them to feel safe.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

Bret and Emily Crane
1107 Autumn Hill Ct.
Crozet, VA 22932
434-823-1163

May 10, 2011

Dr. Pam Moran
Superintendent
Albemarle County Public Schools
401 McIntire Road
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902

RE: A Study in Scarlet

Dr. Moran,

I am writing to request that A Study in Scarlet, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, be removed from the list of approved books for Albemarle County Public Schools. It contains anti-Mormon beliefs that are as inaccurate as they are offensive. I have had three children required to read this book, and because of this book each has suffered from large amounts of teasing. One such instance happened on the school bus. My son was singled out by another student sitting in the back of the bus, who loudly proclaimed, "Hey Ben, how many moms do you have?" and continued to laugh loudly and point. This student's peers also joined in on the teasing and continued to taunt him the whole ride home. This is just one example of many such instances, not only to my children, but to the children of other LDS families throughout the area.

In order to correct the false information in this novel, my children have prepared presentations to the class with factual documentation to refute the anti-Mormon sentiments contained within its pages. We were hopeful that this would eliminate the false notions generated by this novel, but unfortunately these presentations seemed to have little effect. Throughout the rest of my children's middle and high school years they have been continuously teased by other students. When questioned where these ideas about our religion came from, they all say that it comes from this book, A Study in Scarlet. Even though the teachers try to point out the novel's false information, students still take its contents to be fact.

In 2001, Ben was being taught Language Arts by Ms. Jones. They read the book as a class, and by winter break had completed the first half of the novel, which does not contain any anti-Mormon beliefs. Over the break, Ben got a Brigham Young University sweatshirt from his grandmother, and proudly wore it to class the first day back. When Ms. Jones saw his sweatshirt, she immediately pulled Ben aside and told him he did not have to read the rest of the novel, but could go to the library and work on other assignments instead. Ben was confused when he got home, and told us about what Ms. Jones had said. So that night we read the second half of the book to figure out what was wrong. The following day we talked with Ms. Jones. She was very embarrassed and apologized, saying she would understand if we did not want Ben to read the rest of the book. We left that decision up to Ben. He decided to read it and present the truth in a report to the class, correcting the false information and anti-Mormon sentiments in the book. Even the Principal Don Vale was present at the presentation to ensure that it remained factual and not sermonic. But, as we said before, it had little effect. After the presentation, Ms. Jones continued to apologize for having assigned the book. She even suggested that we petition the school board to remove it from the approved curriculum. Following her advice, I talked to the principal, Mr. Vale, but not action resulted from this discussion.

We would like to formally request that this book be replaced with another novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. During his lifetime he wrote many other novels and short stories, many of which could serve as a replacement for this novel. A good replacement could be The Hound of the Baskervilles.

I have a rising sixth grader this coming school year that will be attending Henley Middle School and taking Honors English. We hope that she will not have to endure the teasing caused by this novel.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennie Carter', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the left.

Jennie Carter
2808 Barracksdale Lane
Charlottesville, VA 22901
434-823-8361

October 24, 2006

Michael and Mary Ann Schill
5791 Sugar Hollow Road
Crozet, VA 22932

Ms. Jane Webb
Henley Middle School
Crozet, VA 22932

Ms. Webb,

We have so appreciated all that you bring to the classroom at Henley. We believe that your class is truly 6th grade English at its finest. Because of our respect for you, we have been quite surprised by the choice of a recently assigned novel, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*.

Throughout history, literature has frequently had a powerful effect for both good and bad on the treatment of different groups of people. Examples are many. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, or Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* are texts that altered the public consciousness in a way that helped society promote the welfare of black slaves, factory workers, and Native Americans, respectively. In contrast, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is a particularly striking example of a piece of literature that was instrumental in altering public opinion in a way that was devastating to the Jewish and Slavic communities. It is clear that novels can represent or misrepresent certain groups of people in such a way that frame one's affinity to that group. This is particularly true for young people.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* vividly communicates the numerous widespread 19th century misconceptions of the lifestyle of those in the Mormon faith. These misconceptions played an important role in the widespread brutality against members of this community in the United States and abroad.¹ The following quotes from Chapter 3 of Part 2 of the book provide some examples of the many salacious falsehoods that I fear are likely to beguile impressionable 6th grade minds:

¹ The state of Missouri went so far as to pass an "extermination order" in the state legislature in 1838 stating that, "The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary, for the public peace-their outrages are beyond all description." This legislation led to the slaughter of hundreds of men, women, and children. In 1976 the governor of Missouri rescinded the extermination order and formally apologized on behalf of the state of Missouri for the suffering it had caused the Latter-day Saints. My daughter has a great-great-great grandmother whose husband died from wounds inflicted by those in Victorian England that shared Conan Doyle's misunderstanding of Mormonism. The appendix contains excerpts from her autobiography.

Not the Inquisition of Seville, nor the German Vehmgericht, nor the Secret Societies of Italy, were able to put more formidable machinery in motion than that which cast a cloud over the State of Utah. (p. 92)²

The supply of adult women was running short, and polygamy without female population on which to draw was a barren doctrine indeed.... Fresh women appeared in the harems of the Elders—women who pined and wept, and bore upon their faces the traces of an unextinguishable horror. (p. 93)

We Elders have many heifers, but our children must also be provided. Herber C. Kimball, in one of his sermons, alludes to his hundred wives under this endearing epithet. (p. 95)³

We are fortunate to live in a day when society is sensitive to the fair representation of communities. Our public schools are places that promote the understanding of peoples of different cultures, color, beliefs, or background. It is because of these shared values that I find it astonishing that Henley would disseminate a book that so maligns the heritage of members of the Henley community. Since Conan Doyle had no first-hand experience with Mormons in Utah it is understandable that he relied on the pulp fiction descriptions of polygamist Mormon relationships and government that raged through 19th century England.⁴

² The portrayal of Brigham Young as a ruthless dictator who coerced his followers with threats and violence grossly misrepresents the character of this man and the movement he led. I believe the following quote from Brigham Young better represents his views on personal choice and retribution: "I am not going to drive a man or a woman to heaven. A great many think they will be able to flog people into heaven, but this can never be done... People are not to be driven and you can put into a gnat's eye all the souls of the children of men that are driven into heaven by preaching hell-fire." *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 64.

³ Those familiar with Mormon history know that the man's name was actually Heber C. Kimball, he did not have a hundred wives, and this comment is complete fiction. I understand that the quote is a distortion from a talk Heber C. Kimball gave in 1857. In the talk he refers to the trials to be faced by the leadership of the church. The term 'heifer' in this talk refers to the animal and has nothing to do with women.

⁴ It is worth noting that in 1923, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made his first trip to Utah with several members of his family. The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that Conan Doyle apologized for his characterization of the Mormon community in *A Study in Scarlet*. In later years, Prof. Young, in casual conversation with a Salt Lake Tribune reporter, was asked how Conan Doyle could have been so well received in Utah in light of *A Study in Scarlet*. "He apologized for that, you know," Young replied. "He said he had been misled by writings of the time about the Church." Harold Schindler, Conan Doyle's Tale of Mormonism had Utah Faithful Seeing Scarlet, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 10, 1994, page D1.

It is my understanding that Henley has continued to assign the reading of *A Study in Scarlet* despite several attempts from parents and students in years past to raise this same concern. We would appreciate some explanation from the faculty or administration on the decision to assign this text. We suspect that it was an innocent error in judgment. Approximately one percent of the students at Henley are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It concerns us that these students will continue to be put on the defensive, to justify their faith against a false characterization that the student body will assume to be accurate. It seems to us that the assignment of this book perpetuates an injustice to these good children that has no place in the values we believe are embraced at Henley.

This letter is written in a spirit of concern but not of outrage. We fully recognize the outstanding efforts to which you go to ensure our young people with a rich and enlightening educational experience. Out of your interest in the fair treatment of the students at Henley, we expect that you will share our concern. We appreciate your sincere consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael and Mary Ann Schill
Tel. 434-823-5141

c.c. Anne Coughlin

Appendix

Excerpts from the Journal of Mary Ann Weston Maughan (1817-1901)

I became engaged to Mr. John Davis. He lived at Tirley, was a cooper and carpenter by trade, and a young man of much promise...we were married in Gloucester...We both had good trade and plenty of work and were very happy. The Elders [of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] soon called to see us...Brother Richards counseled us to open our house for meetings. We did so and [at] the first held in our house a lot of Roughts led by an apostate Methodist came and made a disturbance. They threatened the preacher with violence, but we surrounded him and slipped him through a door upstairs. When the preacher was gone, the mob dispersed. Notice was given for a meeting in two weeks...the mob came again. But we succeeded in hiding the preacher, and one of the brethren took him away. The mob then turned on my husband, knocked him down and kicked him...

My husband did not suffer much pain but grew weaker every day. He was confined to bed on the 14th of February and I did not leave him by day or night or lie down to sleep during his illness. The last few days some one or two kind friends stayed with us, but he would not take anything from any hand but mine. I will pass by part of this trying time. He passed peacefully away on the 6th day of April 1841. That was the day on which the foundation stone of the Nauvoo Temple was laid. He was a good kind husband and a faithful Latter-day Saint. I wished his funeral to take place on the Sunday, but that being Easter Sunday, his grandmother did not wish buried on that day or on Good Friday, so he was laid to rest on Saturday, the 10th of April 1841.

We lived near the church, so there was no need of a hearse. He belonged to a club, but I do not remember the name of it. The members all attended the funeral. They were a fine lot of noble looking men, dressed in black with long crape hat bands and a morning badge on their arm. Each one carried a long staff trimmed with crape. They marched together with a steady step. I had not heard anything about them, and when I saw them coming I thought my heart would break. His will was read by a lawyer by the side of the coffin. His friends disputed the will, and this made me feel worse than ever, but the Lord sustained me in all my grief and sorrows. When all had taken their last farewell of their loved one, and the coffin closed, the club took charge of his remains, and I was alone in the wide world.