Directions:

1 – Highlight areas which confuse you and about which you want clarification.

2 – Demonstrate evidence of a close reading, by providing reactions, questions, and mini-summaries

**Northville school board reviews controversial novel**

Danielle Alexander, Hometown Life 9:59 a.m. EDT April 9, 2016

Northville Public Schools’ Board of Education met Tuesday to review Toni Morrison’s novel “The Bluest Eye” after a complaint about the text being taught in Northville High School’s AP English Literature and Composition course.

Morrison’s 1970 novel is about a young black girl, Pecola, who develops an inferiority complex because of her eye color and skin appearance. The novel addresses racism, incest and child molestation.

Parents, concerned about the content of Morrison’s novel and its use in a high school class, filled the board room. They are expected to return at next Tuesday’s meeting when board members will consider a recommendation on the novel’s use. The board requested administrators consider making some adjustments to the original recommendation.

According to board policy, when a parent or community member has a criticism of a textbook, library book or instructional material, there is a four-step material review process followed. Due to the fact that the book has been part of the course since the early 90s and that the book is slated to be used again this month (approximately April 18), it was decided that the review process should move directly to level three, a committee review, which was led by Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services Deanna Barash.

On March 23, a committee comprised of an NHS administrator, the district media specialist, an elementary teacher, a parent, two English teachers and the district’s director of instruction, met to discuss the book in its entirety, and the team unanimously decided to recommend continued use of “The Bluest Eye,” but also agreed that students should still be provided the choice to select an alternate text: William Faulkner’s “The Sound and the Fury” or Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice,” depending on text availability.

The board has requested that administration consider making some adjustments to the original level three review recommendation. Meanwhile, Barash said she will request information from neighboring districts concerning this book and possible replacements.

According to collegeboard.org, the AP English Literature and Composition course is intended to give students the “experience of a typical introductory level literary analysis course in college” and also includes that the class “concentrates on works of recognized literary merit.” At Tuesday’s meeting, Barash said the committee decided the book meets both requirements.

Nevertheless, Barash also said the committee came to the conclusion that the district does need to be more overt to both students and parents about several items concerning this class: the course’s overall purpose, the fact that students will occasionally read tough themes, the many opportunities for advance text review and also the process on how to go about requesting an alternate text.

Since 2003, Northville High School English teacher and department chair, Christopher Cronin, has been teaching Morrison’s text to his AP English Literature and Composition classes, which is comprised of 12th graders who select to take this course. This year, approximately 150 out of 600 seniors are enrolled.

Parents and residents expressed concerns about the text, including:

• A lack of positive messages in the district’s overall English curriculum

• The district not being proactive in getting feedback from the community

• A fear for the next generation of government

• The possibility of deviant behavior occurring after reading Morrison’s text

• The district’s “ghettoization” of African Americans

• Negative references within the text against the Christian faith

• The district losing parents’ trust

• The vague information presented to parents by the district

• An unwillingness to spend tax dollars on this text

• Why the district chose this text when there are others to choose from

• The district’s past allowance of Cronin teaching the material without another adult in the room

• Whether the opportunities that will be provided to students who do select an alternate text will be equal to those who do not

• The developmental stage differences between a high school and college student

• The embarrassment students may feel by selecting an alternate text

•Morrison’s overall intentions while crafting the text

The board of education said a better mechanism for feedback and more transparency is needed, however, their opinions of the text taught in the course varied.

Treasurer Matthew Wilk and trustee Sarah Prescott said although they understand the concerns, it is a difficult decision because the goal of the class is to prepare students for the AP exam, so they can earn college credit. Wilk suggested the possibility of students reading a portion of the novel in the future.

Trustee James Mazurek said he is worried about the idea of banning books and asked, “Where do you draw the line?”

Vice president Cynthia Jankowski said a long-term goal could be to create a 12th grade English course that includes more positive texts. She added that the board is “overly willing to make parents comfortable and give kids the push they need to be successful.”

Although he found the text to be a “wonderful literary work,” while discussing the concerns about developmental stages, secretary Roland Hwang asked, “Are students up to digesting that sort of content?”

President Adam Phelps said he was “absolutely appalled” and felt “deeply troubled” after reading the novel. He said that there has to be other books available that teach the same points.

Trustee Ann Kalass, however, said she is open for an alternative but comfortable keeping the book in the curriculum since she does not believe that “putting something out there for children to read is the same as promoting it.”

Directions for reflections:

Write three one-paragraph reflections, each one placing the issue in a different context. Label each paragraph according to its context. Choose from the list of contexts below:

Cultural Health & Safety Social

Academic Generational Economic

Historical Religious Environmental

Political Moral Medical

Gender Legal Self-expression