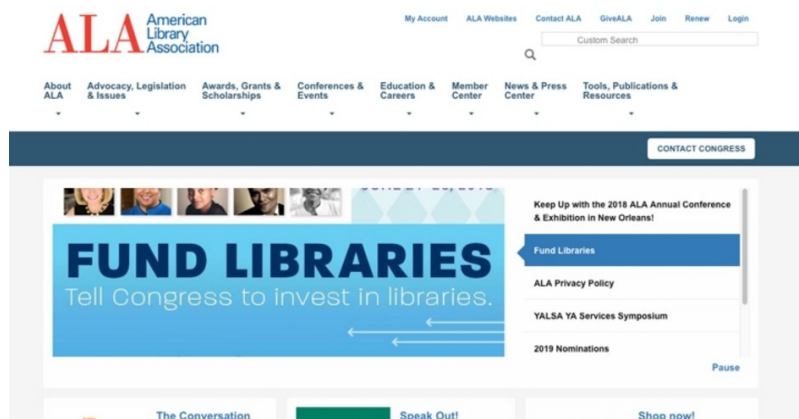




Written by [Steve Byas](#) on June 25, 2018

# Children’s Book Award Named After Wilder Changed for Political Correctness

Anyone who has read George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel *1984* can never forget the scene: The chief character, Winston Smith, a government employee in the Ministry of Truth (which creates lies for the general public), works to alter the record of the past to conform with the wishes of the socialist totalitarian oligarchical dictatorship that rules his country, Oceania.



“He who controls the present controls the past; he who controls the past controls the future” is the guiding principle to keep the public in the dark. In the book, Smith implements that principle on a daily basis. As Orwell writes, “This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound tracks, cartoons, photographs — to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance.”

When Smith had finished with each assignment, the old records that no longer fit the political purposes of the totalitarian oligarchy were destroyed by sending them down “the memory hole” — a pneumatic tube leading to a furnace.

Such alterations also occur today, though not exactly in the manner described in Orwell’s work of fiction.

The U.S. Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), has decided that *Little House on the Prairie* author Laura Ingalls Wilder is no longer a person whose name is fit to be associated with a children’s literature award. Supposedly Wilder expressed “anti-Native and anti-Black sentiments” in her classic novels of life on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century frontier. The decision made at the ALSC meeting in New Orleans on Saturday was to change the name of the award from the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal to the more politically correct Children’s Literature Legacy Award. The decision was unanimous.

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Now, it is Wilder and her works that are to be dropped down the real-world “memory hole.”

Wilder was born in 1867 and died in 1957. Her eight *Little House on the Prairie* novels have delighted audiences ever since the first one was published in 1932.

In a statement, ALSC said, “This decision was made in consideration of the fact that Wilder’s legacy, as represented by her body of work, includes expressions of stereotypical attitudes inconsistent with ALSC’s core values of inclusiveness, integrity and respect, and responsiveness.”

Wilder grew up on the frontier, and her books were inspired by her own childhood experiences as part



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of a pioneer family in 19<sup>th</sup> century Kansas. In other words, her fictional stories were based on things that actually happened.

The ALSC statement offered assurances that they are “committed to preserving access to Wilder’s work for readers,” but they explained that they also had to “consider if her legacy today does justice to this particular award for lifetime achievement, given by an organization committed to all children.”

Caroline Fraser, the author of *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder*, expressed her disappointment in the action in an article for the *Washington Post*. “The novel [*The Little House in the Big Woods*] has racist elements, and its portrayal of Indians has consequences when read uncritically and approvingly in schools.... Whether we love Wilder or hate her, we should know her. For decades, her legacy has been awash in sentimentality, but every American — including the children who read her books — should learn the harsh history behind her work.”

Fraser added, “Vividly, unforgettably, it still tells truth about white settlement, homesteading and the violent appropriation of Indian land and culture.”

Many Osage Indians have routinely condemned her novels because they describe their eviction from Kansas, to be relocated in what is now Oklahoma.

The characterization of Wilder’s children’s books is just one small part of the pattern of the readjustment of history to fit modern viewpoints. Even Mark Twain’s classic novel *Huckleberry Finn* is likewise considered not fit for reading because it uses language to describe Finn’s black friend, Jim, that is almost universally condemned today. Yet, Twain’s story makes Jim a heroic figure and certainly humanizes him a way not typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

For those who value an accurate portrayal of the past — including the preservation of literature as it was written at the time without “cleansing” it to fit into the parameters of modern political correctness — the action against Wilder’s legacy is another attempt to control that true record of the past.

*Image: screenshot of [American Library Association](#) homepage*



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