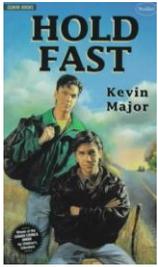

Books on Trial: *Hold Fast*



Major, Kevin. *Hold Fast*. Toronto, ON: Stoddart Kids, 1997. 170 pp.
ISBN 0-7736-7438-1.

Even though it was first published in 1978, Kevin Major's *Hold Fast* remains a popular title in book sales and on lists of challenged books. The story is set in Newfoundland and centres around fourteen-year-old Michael who has just lost his parents in a car crash caused by a drunk driver. Despite his protests, Michael is sent across the province to live with an uncle he hardly knows, leaving his younger brother behind. Things get even more difficult for Michael as he tries to adjust to his new life. His abusive uncle and a bully at school add to his frustration. Eventually, he runs away, accompanied by his cousin. The story follows Michael as he learns to deal with the problems in his life, by running away to facing them head-on.

Hold Fast has been challenged for a variety of reasons including sexuality, violence, and crime. Michael fantasizes about his girlfriend and has a wet dream. This tends to upset some parents who apparently believe that teenagers aren't sexual beings. On the contrary, sexual fantasies and even wet dreams are normal parts of adolescence. Major isn't afraid to write about these issues, or issues related to abuse and violence. Michael's uncle is abusive and Michael himself resorts to fighting when he is bullied. Crime comes into play when Michael and his cousin steal a car, trespass in a national park, and hunt rabbits illegally. All these features add to the realism of the story. Most teens can handle reading about the issues and have likely thought about and discussed them before reading the novel.

This is a great book by one of Canada's first true young adult fiction authors. The story is still relevant and teens, particularly boys, can identify with the main character's emotions and experiences.

Books on Trial: *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging*



Major, Kevin. *Hold Fast*. Toronto, ON: Stoddart Kids, 1997. 170 pp.
ISBN 0-7736-7438-1.

Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging is our first introduction to 14-year-old Georgia, who many readers have since revisited in Rennison's subsequent novels. This book captures the life of a teenaged girl who is like the majority of teenagers today; she hates school, experiments with make-up and ways of hiding aspects of her physical appearance that she doesn't like, and obsesses over boys.

Georgia's misadventures make for a fun and entertaining read; however, this book has experienced much criticism for its sexual language and homosexual references that many adults feel are inappropriate for young readers. Some also find concern in Georgia's general negative attitude and defiant behaviour towards authority. The characters are certainly blunt in the expression of their feelings on topics such as kissing, their bodies, and homosexuality. One of the most commonly referred to examples of this is when Georgia is practicing yoga in front of her gym teacher: "Well, I was upside down with my bottom sticking up in the air. Not something you want to do in front of a lesbian. So I quickly went into cobra position but that made it look like I was sticking my breasts out at her." This is a good illustration of the candour that is so characteristic of Georgia; yet it is written with such playfulness that there seems little reason for alarm. While adults may be shocked at some of the book's content, it would be naïve to think that this is far from the reality of today's teenaged girls.

