

Scholastic Under Fire for Children’s Book Portrayal of Trump

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Parents and teachers aren’t angry over what the new book says about the president, but rather what it leaves out.



Authors, teachers, and parents are upset about Scholastic’s *President Donald Trump* by Joanne Mattern, saying the biography leaves out his racism, misogyny, xenophobia to the point of inaccuracy.

Photo by YES! Magazine

Lornet Turnbull posted Jun 14, 2018

“On November 8, 2016, Americans voted for president. The race was close, but Trump won. Many people were happy. They looked forward to a brand-new government. They hoped for a stronger country.”

That’s an excerpt from a 32-page book called *President Donald Trump*, published last year by Scholastic, a billion-dollar global corporation whose educational materials can be found in 9 out of 10 U.S. classrooms. The book, by children’s author Joanne Mattern, is included in Scholastic’s Rookie Biography series, aimed at first- and second-graders, kids ages 6 and 7.

It weaves a simple narrative of how Trump made his fortune in real estate, gained fame as host of a reality TV show, and became a president “millions of Americans are counting on to

improve their lives.”

Maybe if it were about any other U.S. president, this might be the end of the story. But Scholastic is being taken to task by a growing army of educators, librarians, and parents not for what the book says about Donald Trump, but for what it omits.

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This past weekend, [Teaching for Change](#), a nonprofit that builds social justice around education, posted a [critical review](#) of the book and invited others to join in sending a message to Scholastic. The social media campaign, [#StepUpScholastic](#), urges the publishing company to pull the book and issue a version that tells the truth about the president.

This isn't the first time Teaching for Change has been part of a campaign against the world's largest publisher of children's books, with titles that include J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. In 2016, a coalition of groups persuaded Scholastic to [halt distribution](#) of the children's picture book *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* because it promoted a “happy slave” stereotype.

So far, [#StepUpScholastic](#) has generated about 530 letters of protest to Scholastic from teachers, parents, librarians, and others across the country, said Deborah Menkart, executive director of Teaching for Change.

The organization calls the book, by children's author Joanne Mattern, an incomplete story that “omits facts, glosses over context, and ignores opposing perspectives.”

Its fantastic description of the 2016 election results, for example, ignores the feelings and opinions of the majority of voters, who were left feeling alienated and abused by Trump's rhetoric and a presidency that has emboldened White supremacists and triggered protests across the nation.

“His buildings reached into the sky.

His businesses just grew and grew.

Then Trump became our president—

People wanted something new.”

The book doesn't even hint at the human toll of some of Trump's business deals, Teaching for Change points out, lauding the majesty of his buildings but omitting any reference to government scrutiny over [discriminatory housing practices](#) that took place there.

It does not mention his denigration of immigrants, women, Muslims, or political leaders—anyone, for that matter—who disagree with him.

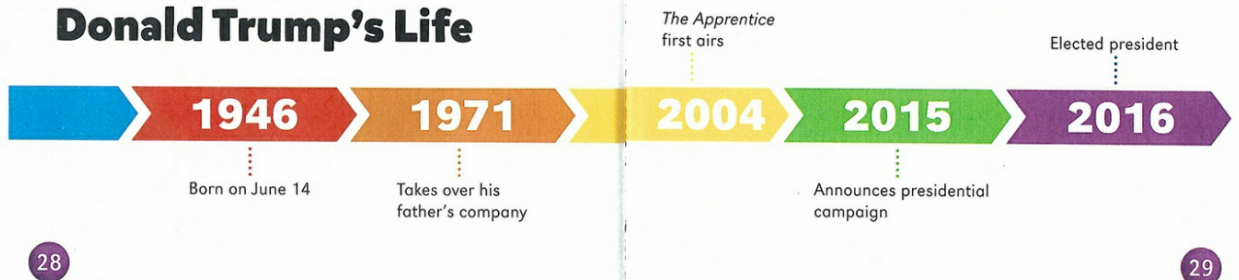
“Our concern with the text is not the accuracy of the statements and events included, but rather

with the extensive omissions that undermine a truthful, nuanced, and informative account,” Teaching for Change said in its online review.

Donald Trump inspired his supporters to try something new. He promised them a better future. Millions of Americans are counting on him to help improve their lives.



Timeline of Donald Trump's Life



“These partial truths construct a false narrative. Scrubbing away any trace of complexity or nuance from an account about an elected official stunts the quintessential democratic freedom and responsibility of questioning and critiquing those in positions of power. We find this book to be dangerous from a democratic standpoint.”

Another Scholastic book on Trump by Mattern, this one in its True Book series for grades 3–5, does acknowledge the strong feelings surrounding his candidacy and presidency. It includes a page on “Campaign Statements”: “Trump made several statements during his campaign that were concerning to some people.”

In an interview with [The New York Times](#), Mattern said that for a young audience, the mandate is to provide unbiased facts with a dusting of the context required to maintain accuracy. The author of about 250 children’s titles, Mattern has written more balanced pieces about Trump for other children’s book publishers.

Scholastic’s nonfiction editor Joana Costa Knufinke responded in the same Times piece, “We make an effort to show both points of view.”

But the educators behind the #StepUpScholastic campaign believe an important view is definitely missing, one that would show a 6-year-old the side of President Trump that chooses to divide Americans among the deserving and not, along cultural and racial lines. One that shows Trump’s lying and name-calling and bullying in ways valuable for young children to understand.

“Presenting uncomplicated glory stories of public leaders—whether they be about Nelson Mandela, Susan B. Anthony, or Donald Trump—does a disservice to children’s understanding of leadership and social change,” TFC wrote.

“Not acknowledging the failings or limits of leaders teaches young readers that those with power are without flaws and capable of creating change on their own.”

Here’s what parents, librarians, teachers, and other educators are saying on social media about *President Donald Trump*:

So, I run the Book Fair at my nine year old's school. I will not continue to do so if this the type of book that [@Scholastic](#) stands behind. [#StepUpScholastic](#)

Scholastic Tells Children: Trump is Great <https://t.co/PIIPQHYJEH>

— 🧠 Kelly J. Baker 🧠 (@kelly_j_baker) [June 11, 2018](#)

Please join [@teachingchange](#) in calling out this propaganda being presented as "literature" to our school children via a FOR PROFIT corporation - [#StepUpScholastic](#) <https://t.co/uOhyDCdFsX>

— LeslieMac (@LeslieMac) [June 9, 2018](#)

Books are so important but not books like this one. Read the review, as a parent & teacher lets demand better. Show our discontent by withholding our \$\$\$ [#StepUpScholastic](#) <https://t.co/bqIh36QRmn>

— Bonnie Dani (@Adalinc3) [June 12, 2018](#)

As publishers, we have to know where our work fits into (or works against) the status quo. In this world, if our children's books aren't anti-bias, they act as propaganda.

This is what Scholastic is normalizing through their Rookie Biography series. [#StepUpScholastic](#) pic.twitter.com/LdwzCxyA1x

— Phil Stamper 🦋 🦋 🦋 (@stampepk) [June 14, 2018](#)