

To the Muskego-Norway School Board:

I am writing to urge you to permit the teaching of Julie Otsuka's novel *WHEN THE EMPEROR WAS DIVINE* in your high school English classes. I am Julie's editor at Knopf and can speak to both the extraordinary quality of her work and its equally extraordinary impact on American culture. Julie Otsuka's novel has been course adopted in hundreds of schools throughout the country, where it has become a staple of high school English classes.

When we published the book in 2002, it was instantly hailed as a modern classic. The New York Times compared it to *Lord of the Flies* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and it was hailed by critics across the country as a major achievement. Otsuka went on to win a Guggenheim Fellowship, the American Library Association Alex Award, and the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction.

*Emperor* is ideally suited to high school English classes not only for its subject—one Japanese-American family's experience of incarceration during World War II—but also for Otsuka's exquisite style. Written in prose that is spare, taut, and masterfully restrained, it has the force of poetry and is an object lesson in the effect of syntax on storytelling and narrative.

Historical fiction has the power to open our hearts and eyes to lives far beyond our own experience. It has a unique ability to elicit deep compassion and empathy, and to transport young readers into other times and cultures. It has the power not only to edify but to transform and deepen our perspectives; it enables us to look outward, beyond the confines of our circumscribed lives, with greater sympathy and understanding.

Julie Otsuka is one of the most gifted writers at work today, and one of the most important authors on the Knopf list—a list which includes 28 Nobel Laureates and 68 Pulitzer Prize winners, including, most recently, Kazuo Ishiguro. It is not only appropriate that her work be taught in high schools, it is essential, and I urge you to incorporate her magnificent novel into your curriculum.

Sincerely,

Jordan Pavlin  
Editor-in-Chief  
Alfred A. Knopf