And if stretched beyond capacity, the tender, young psyche could collapse, which could lead to chronic fears and phobias through life."

For example, "Inside My Feet," from the fourth-grade teacher anthology, tells the story of a monster who bewitches his boots so that they slip onto the feet of his victims, who are carried away to be devoured. The boots kidnap a father, then the mother, and finally come for the child, who narrates the story:

The boots kicked and clomped, twisted, turned and in mad, frantic frustration banged me this way and that against the fence, until I was bruised and crying from the pain, holding on for life and in despair that there would be no end to the contest until my arms were torn from my body and I was carried off a horrible broken and bleeding stump to greet my mother and father without even the arms to hug them before we were brought to our end.

Teachers point to the story's positive resolution as a lesson in how persistence pays, but Klippenes says this kind of frightening imagery overwhelms the moral of the story.

In the end, the monster shares his love of poetry with the child. He explains that he eats people when they can't answer a question: "What became of the child that I was," a child everyone liked. The boy promises to look down the giant's throat for the child but instead throws in a lantern and some bullets and the giant explodes. His parents are saved, but the boy is troubled that he killed a poet who was just trying to find himself.

The father tells him he did a good job; the mother tells him to pretend it did not happen. The boy goes to bed wondering "what was going to become of the child that I was."

"They are asking kids to deal with issues that they are not equipped to handle," says Linda Rawson, a child abuse prevention specialist with Family Service Agency in San Bernardino, California, which serviced 17 school districts until July, when state funding was cut. "They just don't have the ability to deal with those abstract issues. Some adults have difficulty dealing with abstracts."

Witchcraft and the occult

Experts are especially troubled by *Impressions*' overtly occultic messages. "I work very closely with people who are involved in reports of ritualistic crime, and when children are desensitized, it is easier for them to move into that realm," said Rawson.

San Jose, California, police officer Thomas C. Jensen, who investigates occult crimes and is considered an occult crime specialist, said he sees the result of children who are exposed to the kind of violence and fear portrayed in *Impressions*.

"This does affect children," he said. "I see how it affects them when they get older in criminal activity." Jensen said *Impressions* contains rituals and symbols used in Wicca, a witchcraft religion; Satanism; and Santeria, a blend of the Aruba religion of Africa and Catholicism.

"By having the children sit in a circle and chant or prepare a spell that would send them somewhere or change them into something else, kids are participating in ritualistic activities in the classroom," Jensen said.

One practicing Wiccan priest says spells are an integral part of the Wiccan religion. What prayer is to a Christian, a spell is to a practicing Wiccan priest or witch, said the priest, Gwydion, who currently practices at the Assembly of Wicca in Sacramento, California.

In an interview with *Citizen*, Gwydion said the Assembly of Wicca is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt religious organization. The assembly is listed in the Sacramento phone book.

"Prayers, magic, spells are all interrelated terms," Gwydion said. "You cannot separate them out. In a prayer, they are complaining, wanting their God to do something for them. In a spell you are calling upon another deity in another framework, asking them to intercede and help you, and that is one type of worship-magic."

Gwydion had not seen the curriculum; a reporter read the teacher's instructions to him. When asked his opinion of the exercise that asked children to write a chant or spell that might have caused objects to move about the room, Gwydion said:

"That sounds good to me. I'd rather have children recognize that this is something within them that they can do. That they have the power to make their lives better, that they are in control rather than telling them some outside force makes things happen."

Why use it?

If *Impressions* is so bad, why is it used? Some teachers say *Impressions* is effective in teaching language arts. Even some Christians defend *Impressions*. They include a parent, Cheryl Hamner, and a teacher, Sandy Brooks, both of Yucaipa, California.

Brooks, who teaches fourth and fifth graders with learning disabilities, said some *Impressions* stories mention "church," "congregation," "pastor," and "baptism." She says these references open classroom discussion of spiritual matters. More importantly, after using the books for a year, Brooks said some of the students' writing skills improved.

"I have not found anything harmful in those books," she said.

Brooks was asked what she thought of the teachers' resource books that instructed teachers to conduct spells. She said she did not use those books. A reporter read three excerpts on spells from *Impressions*' teacher resource books, including:

Tell the children that a magician has cast a spell on some children...Have them work in pairs to write the magic spell the magician used. Have each pair write another spell to reverse the first spell. Have them chant their spells.

Having heard the excerpts, Brooks first said she was uncomfortable with spells, but then reconsidered. "I guess I'll have to do some more research and call you back," she said.

Brooks called back to say that spells were akin to pretending and can be found in legitimate fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty.

Hamner, who holds a bachelor's degree in family and child development, agrees. "Spells are just encouraging children to pretend. Mary Poppins can be taken to be levitation. Because children pretend does not mean they are being indoctrinated with the occult. I understand that parents want children to have a clear message that the occult is not a good choice in life and the mention of spells does not contradict that message. It is totally unfair to say the books are morbid and satanical."

In *Impressions*, however, teachers are not advised to treat spell-casting as "pretend." Instead, students are encouraged to believe they have occultic power.

Critics point out that the curriculum does not meet some states' standards. Two of three California state review panels of experts recommended rejection of *Impressions* curriculum for grades one through three, the only grades submitted for adoption by the publisher. California school districts may use material for the upper grades, but only if they follow certain guidelines.

The two panels commented that *Impressions* lacked sophistication and clarity of purpose. They also said it has no unifying structure and no application of skills that stimulate higher-level thinking. There is an overall weakness in strategy development, and the program does not directly teach the writing process and thought organization, the panels said.

One panel concluded, "...the weaknesses delineated above cause many concerns. The program is not recommended for adoption."

Still, an estimated 80 of 1,012 California school districts are using *Impressions*, said Judy Stuki, the state manager of instructional materials and fiscal services.

The state of Oregon also scored *Impressions* low. The curriculum's kindergarten through third-grade series finished last or next to last in two separate reviews in 1986.

Barbara Wolfe, language arts specialist for the state of Oregon, said *Impressions* was judged against other kindergarten through third grade curricula and against criteria and goals for the state's language arts program.

The "C" word

Do parents want to "censor" the curriculum, as its defenders allege? Many say no. The parents simply argue that *Impressions* should not be required reading, and that it does not meet minimal standards.

Paul Kowalenko of Calgary, Canada, said his parents group attacked *Impressions* because of its failure to meet the Alberta province's goals of education.

Kowalenko said the parents asked the school district to find out why the material was so morbid. In a letter, Holt of Canada said it had surveyed teachers and children about what kind of material they enjoyed. The majority of children said they preferred frightening stories.

"I said, 'Are you actually telling me that you allow the children to establish their own curriculum?'" Kowalenko said. "I told them, 'Children like chocolate, too, but you don't let them eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner.' They didn't answer me. They just looked a little sheepish. What could they say?"

The Calgary group — Parents for Quality Education — now has more than 600 supporters.

"We want government to remove its approval of *Impressions* for

COUNTERFEIT CLASSICS

Critics of *Impressions* are sometimes accused of attempting to censor classic literature included in the curriculum. What defenders of *Impressions* fail to mention is that some classic stories were extensively rewritten to include graphically violent imagery.

One example is *Anne of Green Gables*, the highly regarded story by Lucy Maud Montgomery about a lively child whose insatiable curiosity and taste for adventure caused trouble for everyone.

Consider Montgomery's original prose:

But those red roads are so funny. When we got into the train at Charlottetown the red roads began to flash past. I asked Mrs. Spencer what made them red and she said she didn't know and for pity's sake not to ask her any more questions. She said I must have asked her a thousand already. I suppose I had, too, but how are you going to find out about things if you don't ask questions? And what does make the roads red?

"Well now, I dunno," said Matthew.

Here is the *Impressions* version of the same passage, written by Donald Harron, in *Wherever You Are*:

Anne: "But why are your roads red?"

Matthew: "Well now...I remember a fellow telling me once it was the iron in the soil getting rusty. But I don't think he could have meant it."

Anne: "Do you suppose that it could be the wounds of tragic destiny dripping from a bloodstained family Tree? An evil spell that did compel the founders of this island to meet their doom and perish horribly. Picture now the vicious strife that started way back in the olden days of yore...family with family in feuds engaging, drenching all your local soil with gore!"

Another rewritten classic is *Beauty and the Beast*, the French fairy tale written by Madame de Villeneuve in 1740 to amuse a young bride. Here is a portion of the traditional text:

"And now I have something to ask you, Beauty," said the Beast. "The only thing I shall ever ask you: Can you love me?"

"Alas poor Beast," said Beauty — for already she pitied him. "How could I love such a one as you?" At that the Beast gave a great sigh and shambled away.

The next day he came at the same time with the same question, and Beauty gave him the same answer; and every day after that."

As *Beauty and the Beast* is retold in *Impressions* by Eva Martin, Beauty is a man. It reads, in part:

"Tell us, do you like to play games? We do, and today we feel like having a game of football, but we haven't a ball. So you will be our football." The giants picked up the prince and, using him as a football, they kicked him around with great glee until he became unconscious. Then the giants grew bored and disappeared...

The next night:

"Tonight, we feel like playing baseball...We've brought our bats, and since we don't have a ball, you shall be our baseball"...The giants picked him up and they had a great time batting him about. Finally the prince lost consciousness...

"We have just the thing for you," roared the giants. "All day long we have been digging a pit just for you. And so that you won't be bored, we have stuck sharp knives and razors into the sides of it. So here goes."

They flung the prince into the pit. By the time the prince reached the bottom, he was cut into a thousand pieces.

HOW TO ARGUE YOUR CASE

Parents from Canada to California tell similar stories about the arguments used against them in the battle to keep *Impressions* out of the classroom. Here's a sample:

Argument: Parents who oppose *Impressions* are censors who are trying to impose their views on others.

Responses: It's not a matter of censorship; it's a matter of selection. If selection is censorship, then school districts would be censoring all the books they didn't buy.

Are parents censors when they don't allow their child to see PG-13 movies? Some stories in *Impressions* are just as violent as films rated PG-13.

Argument: Children like frightening, gory stories.

Response: Some children don't, and others suffer from nightmares and other problems.

Argument: Some negative stories in *Impressions* have positive resolutions; children can learn from them.

Response: Many teachers think otherwise. They say children learn best through positive stories.

Argument: Impressions gives children a sample of classic literature.

Response: Some of the classics in *Impressions* have been rewritten to include gore and violence that were not in the originals. Examples include *Anne of Green Gables* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

Argument: This is stimulating literature that stretches children's imaginations.

Response: Some psychologists say this material could stretch young psyches beyond the breaking point and lead to chronic fears and phobias through life.

Argument: Children are bored with classic literature; writing by contemporary authors stimulates them.

Response: Only teachers are bored with classic literature. It is new to the children.

Argument: Stories in *Impressions* depict real-life situations.

Response: Death, dismemberment, torture, violence and witchcraft are not common in most neighborhoods. Besides, not all "real-life situations" are appropriate for children. Where violence is commonplace, the children are often most deeply affected.

Argument: Casting spells is the same as pretending.

Response: Repeatedly, *Impressions* teacher resource books direct the teacher to have the children sit in circles and create and chant spells, but the children are never told that spells are "pretend."

Police officers and other occult-crime experts say the spell-chanting in *Impressions* is consistent with practices in Wicca, the witchcraft religion.

Argument: Parents who oppose *Impressions* are right-wing religious fundamentalists who are controlled by conservative, anti-education groups. They want to impose their morality on others.

Response: The ranks of parents opposed to *Impressions* include Jews, Mormons, agnostics and atheists.