

Stavropol Prosecutors Seek to Ban Nabokov in Schools

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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American actress Sue Lyon starred as the titular character in Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film adaptation of Nabokov's novel.

Prosecutors in the Stavropol region have demanded that local schools dispose of books by revered early-20th-century poet Sergei Yesenin and author of the novel "Lolita," Vladimir Nabokov, alleging that their works frighten children and breed crime.

Nabokov's "mysticism" and Yesenin's "hooligan poems" are breeding "fear of the dark, ghosts, nightmares and creating problems in communication with peers," spokesman for Stavropol regional prosecutors Kurbangali Sharipov said Thursday.

"In our country today, if you look at crime reports, children aged nine to 12 commit robberies. What, in your opinion, do you think they have read a lot of?" Sharipov said, RIA Novosti reported.

The demand by prosecutors was a result of a check at regional school libraries that uncovered books that are "not compatible with the tasks of the educational process" because they contain "erotica, mysticism, horrors and hooligan poems," Sharipov said.

Apart from Russian classics, prosecutors banned works from several modern foreign writers, including U.S. author Danielle Steel, French novelist Juliette Benzoni and contemporary U.S. young adult fiction writer Sharon Creech, the Newbery Medal-winning author of "Walk Two Moons."

In addition, prosecutors have demanded that schools dispose of humorous fairy tales by Russian author Sergei Silin and modern science fiction by Ukrainian author Andrei Levitsky.

"School students are too young to read such books," Sharipov said.

The Stavropol region governor's office said it did not agree with the opinion of prosecutors, however, and said it had asked the regional education department to create guidelines on how to protect children from harmful information.

"The absence of rules in this sphere gives rise to potential misunderstandings and complaints on both sides," deputy governor Vladimir Vladimirov said at a media forum in Pyatigorsk, Interfax reported.

"I do not understand how Yesenin or Nabokov could exert a negative moral influence on children. The regional education department will develop unified norms so that things like this do not happen in the future," Vladimirov said.

The book ban met with acidic remarks from bloggers, one of whom said he wanted to measure the IQ of the prosecutors.

But prosecutors do have the legal right to ban the books under the auspices of the federal law "On Protection of Children From Information Causing Harm to Their Health and Development," which took effect last year.

Under law, information can be banned for distribution among children if it contains pornography or "can potentially elicit a desire" to take drugs, drink alcohol, smoke, gamble, engage in prostitution or beg.

Nabokov's novel "Lolita," considered a classic work of literature around the world, caused controversy after its publication in the 1950s for depicting the sexual obsession of an adult man with a 12-year-old girl, while Yesenin's work glorified drinking, playing cards and general vagrancy.

The information outlawed for minors also includes that which "prompts" them to commit suicide, justifies violence, "denies family values" or contains obscene language.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday complained that Russians are not reading books as much as they used to.

"The biggest and, I am sure, general concern is the current decline in interest in books,

especially among young people,” Putin said at a literature forum on Thursday. “Our country, once the best-read nation in the world, can no longer lay claim to such an honorable title. According to statistics, Russians on average devote only nine minutes a day to reading.”

Contact the author at n.krainova@imedia.ru

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