BOOKS CHALLENGED OR BANNED in 2006 - 2007

ROBERT P. DOYLE

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BANNED BOOKS AHoy!
TREASURE YOUR FREEDOM TO READ
Banned Books Week 2007 is the twenty-sixth annual celebration of the freedom to read. This freedom, not only to choose what we read, but also to select from a full array of possibilities, is firmly rooted in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Although we enjoy an increasing quantity and availability of information and reading material, we must remain vigilant to ensure that access to this material is preserved; would-be censors, who continue to threaten the freedom to read, come from all quarters and all political persuasions. Even if their motivations for restrictions are well intentioned, censors try to limit the freedom of others to choose what they read, see, or hear.

Sex, profanity, and racism remain the primary categories of objections, and most occur in schools and school libraries. Frequently, challenges are motivated by the desire to protect children. While the intent is commendable, this method of protection contains hazards far greater than exposure to the "evil" against which the protection is leveled. U. S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, in Texas v. Johnson, said, "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable." Individuals may restrict what they themselves or their children read, but they must not call on governmental or public agencies to prevent others from reading or seeing that material.

The challenges documented in this list are not brought by people merely expressing a point of view; rather, they represent requests that these materials be removed from schools or libraries, thus restricting access to them by others. Even when the eventual outcome allows the book to stay on the library shelves; and even when the person is a lone protestor, the censorship attempt is real. Someone has tried to restrict another person's ability to choose. Challenges are as important to document as actual bannings, in which a book is removed from the shelves of a library or bookstore or from the curriculum at a school. Attempts to censor can lead to voluntary restriction of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy; in these cases, material may not be published at all or may not be purchased by a bookstore, library, or school district.

We have reason to celebrate this year. Due to the commitment of parents, students, librarians, teachers, and other concerned citizens, more and more challenges are unsuccessful, and the reading material remains available.

It should be noted that this bibliography is incomplete because many prohibitions against free speech and expression remain undocumented. Surveys indicate approximately 85 percent of the challenges to library materials receive no media attention and remain unreported. Moreover, this list is limited to books and does not include challenges to magazines, newspapers, films, broadcasts, plays, performances, electronic publications, or exhibits.
This bibliography represents books challenged, restricted, removed, or banned in 2006–2007 as reported in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from May 2006 through May 2007.


Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Bantam. Retained in the Fond du Lac, Wis. High School district's sophomore advanced English class (2006). Parents objected to teens reading Angelou's account of being brutally raped by her mother's boyfriend and an unwanted pregnancy later in life. Parents will receive notification and be allowed to decide whether or not they approve of the use by their children, according to recommendations agreed upon by a review committee and parents who objected to the use of the book. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 30-31.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux; Simon & Hall. The Addison, Tex. school district board overruled (2006) Superintendent Ed Lyman's ban of the novel from an advanced placement English curriculum. Lyman had banned the book after a parent complained it was sexually explicit and offensive to Christians. In doing so, he overturned the recommendation of a committee of teachers, students, and parents. The committee appealed the decision to the school board. Source: May 2006, pp. 154-55.


——. *The Veldt*. Dramatic Pub. Co. Creative Ed. Retained on the Beaverton, Oreg. School District's reading list (2006). The short story was challenged by a middle school parent who thought its language and plot were inappropriate for students. Her biggest concern is that the story offers no consequences for the children's actions. The short story is part of Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man* anthology. It is twenty pages long and was published in 1951 as the first in the collection of eighteen science fiction stories. Source: Nov. 2006, p. 319.


Burroughs, Augusten. *Running with Scissors*. St. Martin. Challenged in the Howell, Mich. High School (2007) because of the book's strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county's top law enforcement official reviewed the books to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. "After reading the books in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors," the county prosecutor wrote. "Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws." Source: May 2007, p. 116.

Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Pocket Bks. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she'd found on the Internet. Chbosky's novel, which contains references to masturbation, homosexuality, and bestiality, got the bulk of the criticism. Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11.


Chomsky, Noam, and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon. The Turkish Chief Public Prosecution Office decided to prosecute two publishers that released the book because it "degrades the Turkish identity and the Turkish Republic, and fuels hatred and discrimination among the people." The publishers could face up to six years in prison if found guilty. Source: Sept. 2006, p. 234.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Dufield, Oxford Univ. Pz. Capricorn Bks. Simon, Prometheus Bks. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she'd found on the Internet. First published in 1899, the novel so disturbed critics and the public that it was banned for decades afterward. Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11.

Christensen, James C., Renwick St. James and Alan Dean Foster. *Voyage of the Bioset*. Artisan. Retained in the Davis County, Utah Library (2006). The complaint objected to the book after her five-year-old son borrowed it from the children's section and showed her the illustrations. It contains of topless mermaids and other partially clothed mythical creatures. The author is a retired Brigham Young University art professor and cochair of the Mormon Arts Foundation. Source: Nov. 2006, p. 319.

Morgan, Melissa J. *TTYL.* Grosset & Dunlap. Challenged at the William Floyd Middle School Library in Mastic, N.Y. (2007) because the book includes “curse words, crude references to the male and female anatomy, sex acts and adult situations like drinking and alcohol and flirtation with a teacher that almost goes too far.” A speaker for the William Floyd School District said the book will remain in the library, and that the book is very popular with students across the country. The spokesperson also said unlike many books that young people read, the book deals with controversial subjects without glorifying negative behaviors. Source: May 2007, p. 92.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.* Knopf. NAL. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she’d found on the Internet. Pulled from the senior Advanced Placement English class at Eastern High School in Louisville, Ky. (2007) because two parents complained that the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about antebellum slavery depicted the inappropriately topics of bestiality, racism, and sex. Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11; May 2007, pp. 98, 121.


Paulsen, Gary. *Zero to Sixty: The Motorcycle Journey of a Lifetime.* Harvest Bks. Removed from the West Briarosa, Tex. Junior High School library (2006) because of depictions of sex acts and profanity. Books on “sensitive topics such as death, suicide, physical or sexual abuse, and teenage dating relationships” were moved to a restricted “young adult” section from which students can borrow only with written parental permission. Source: Nov. 2006, pp. 289-90.


Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.* Scholastic. The Gwinnett County, Ga. school board (2006) rejected a parent’s plea to take Harry Potter books out of school libraries, based on the claim they promote witchcraft. The Georgia Board of Education ruled December 14 that the parent had failed to prove her contention that the series “promote[s] the Wicca religion” and therefore that the book’s availability in public schools does not constitute advocacy of a religion. Source: July 2006, pp. 207-08; Sept. 2006, p. 231; Nov. 2006, p. 289; Mar. 2007, pp. 72-73.


Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.* Scholastic. The Gwinnett County, Ga. school board (2006) rejected a parent’s plea to take Harry Potter books out of school libraries, based on the claim they promote witchcraft. The Georgia Board of Education ruled December 14 that the parent had failed to prove her contention that the series “promote[s] the Wicca religion” and therefore that the book’s availability in public schools does not constitute advocacy of a religion. Source: July 2006, pp. 207-08; Sept. 2006, p. 231; Nov. 2006, p. 289; Mar. 2007, pp. 72-73.
challenging the decision to remove this book and the twenty-three other titles in the same series from the district school libraries. In granting a preliminary injunction in 2006 and ordering the removal, Judge Alan S. Gold of U.S. District Court in Miami characterized the matter as a “First Amendment issue” and ruled in favor of the ACLU of Florida, which argued that the books were generally factual and that the board should add to its collection, rather than removing books it disagreed with. Source: July 2006, p. 207; Sept. 2006, pp. 230-31; Nov. 2006, p. 288; Jan. 2007, p. 8; May 2007, p. 91-92.

Schwartz, Alvin. More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark. Harper; Lippincott. Retained in the Greater Clark County, Ky. elementary school libraries (2006) despite a grandmother’s request to ban the Scary Stories books written by Alvin Schwartz. She wanted all four or five volumes in the series banned because, she said, they depict cannibalism, murder, witchcraft and ghosts, and include a story about somebody being skinned. Source: Nov. 2006, pp. 317-18.

Sedgefield, Alice. The Lovely Bones. Little. Challenged at the Coleytown Middle School Library in Westport, Conn. (2007). The school superintendent acknowledged that the book is “for mature readers” and acknowledged that “the book is appropriate to be part of a middle-school library collection serving students from ages 11-14, many of whom possess the maturity level to read this book.” Source: Mar. 2007, p. 21.


Shafak, Elif. The Bastard of Istanbul. Viking. Prize-winning novelist went on trial in Istanbul, Turkey (2006), accused of belittling Turkishness. The novel had been at the top of Turkish bestsellers lists since its publication, but its treatment of the mass murder of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 angered government officials. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 33-36.

Silverstein, Charles, and Edmund White. The Joy of Gay Sex. Crown; Simon & Schuster/Fleis. Challenged, but retained at the Tampa, Idaho Public Library (2006) along with seven other books, including The Joy of Sex despite the complaint that, “they are very pornographic. In nature and they have very explicit and detailed illustrations and photographs which we feel doesn’t belong in a library.” Source: July 2006, p. 183.


Steinbeck, John. Of Mice and Men. Bantam; Penguin; Viking. Retained in the Greenspoint-Anti-J, Pa. tenth-grade English classes (2006). A complaint was filed because of “racial slurs” and “profanity used throughout the novel. The book has been used in the high school for more than thirty years, and those who object to its content have the option of reading an alternative reading. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 29-30.


Vonnegut, Kurt. Slaughterhouse-Five. Dell. Dial. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the book she had found offensive. Challenged in the Howell, Mich. High Schools (2007) because of the book’s strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county’s top law enforcement official reviewed the book to bring another title against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors who had been broken. “After reading the book in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors,” the county prosecutor wrote. “Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws.” Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11; May 2007, p. 116.

Watkins, Yoko Kawashima. So Far from the Bamboo Grove. HarperTeen. Removed from the sixth-grade English curriculum at Dover-Sherborn, Mass. Middle School (2006) due to sensitivity of the book’s treatment of rape, violence against women by Korean men, and a distorted presentation of history. It is part of the state’s recommended reading list for the grade level. The book is based on the real-life experiences of Watkins, whose father was a Japanese government official. In the reversal of its decision made, the Dover-Sherborn Regional School Committee voted unanimously to keep the book as part of a sixth-grade language arts unit on survival. The school is exploring other texts to bring another title against the book by some parents and community members. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 13-16; Mar. 2007, pp. 73-74.

Wood, Maryrose. Sex Kittens and Horn Dawgs Fall in Love. Delacorte. Removed along with nine other titles from a library order at the Hernando County, Fla. (2006) schools. Among the other books culled from Nature Coast Technical High School’s order were Barbara Kingsolver’s first novel, The Bean Trees; The Glass of the Cane Bears, by Jean Auel; Boy’s Life, by Robert McCammon; and the abridged young-adult version of The Power of One, by Bryce Courtenay. A board member led the charge against those books, reading pro-life passages and castigating the school officials who placed the order. Other books the school system wants to have reviewed are: Are You in the House Alone?; Rainbow Boys: Rats Saw God; and The King Must Die. Source: July 2006, p. 182.

Wright, Richard. Black Boy. Harper. Challenged in the Howell, Mich., High School (2007) because of the book’s strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county’s top law enforcement official reviewed the book to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. “After reading the book in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors,” the county prosecutor wrote. “Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws.” Source: Mar. 2007, pp. 51-52; May 2007, p. 7.
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