

Quarter 4 FY2010 from March 24—June 31 Compared to Quarter 4 FY09

By Millie Davis

NCTE was called upon 13 times this quarter to respond to challenges to classroom and library texts. A third of these challenges involved multiple texts and two of these challenges involved six classroom books each, in one instance from an 11th grade AP class and in the other from an Honors English II Summer Reading List. NCTE has worked intensely with the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), the American Library Association (ALA) and other intellectual freedom groups on three big challenges this quarter.

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* was challenged in an Indiana 11th grade AP class for being pornographic and inappropriate for use in the class. NCTE partnered with NCAC, ALA, and others, to combat this challenge and on July 6 the school board voted 3-2 to retain the novel in the classroom! Noteworthy and instrumental to the good outcome for this challenge were the efforts of a local parent who would not accept the silence of the teachers and school district on the matter. See the history of this challenge, including the two letters NCTE signed onto, on the NCAC website (<http://www.ncac.org/Song-of-Solomon-Retained-in-Indiana-AP-English-Classes>).

A group of individuals attempted to remove several books in the Rancocas Valley Regional High School Media Center collection in New Jersey because the books appear on a list of gay and lesbian-themed booklist created by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN). (<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/booklink/7-12.html>). NCTE once again joined NCAC, ALA, and others to protest and the history is available on the NCAC website (<http://www.ncac.org/book-challenges-in-New-Jersey-school-library>).

NCTE, NCAC, ALA, and the rest of our intellectual freedom alliance have been in ongoing discussions since March concerning and with Common Sense Media (www.common sense media.org), a website that rates movies, electronic games, and books for its book ratings. Our discussions with this organization focus on the dangerous way they rate books. Brian Kinney, editor-in-chief of *School Library Journal* wrote an editorial (http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/slj/home/885494-312/fear_factor_kids_lit_style.html.csp) that captures our objections to Common Sense Media's book ratings and includes a link to the first letter we sent them.

In addition this quarter,

- I worked with a language arts supervisor with whom I'd worked before on a challenge, to offer materials and advice as he tried to quiet a request from some parents in his district who are asking that content ratings be developed for all classroom texts.
- I worked with a media specialist in Michigan who reported a teacher in the school who had marked out words and passages in a book she was assigned to teach in her class curriculum.
- I gave interviews to a community college student on banned books and to the *Indianapolis Star* concerning the *Song of Solomon* challenge.
- I responded to an individual seeking rationales but not experiencing a challenge.

Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 4 FY2010 and the Quarter 4 FY2009 challenges and numbers of challenged texts. A few things to know as you compare the numbers are the following:

- Number of challenges = number of individuals who reported challenges.
- Number of works challenged is usually higher because often challenges involve more than one work.

- The bimonthly *SLATE Newsletter* features Censorship Challenge Reports by quarter. See <http://www.ncte.org/action/slate> .

March 24-31, 2010	April 2010	May 2010	June 2010	Q4 FY2010 Totals
2 challenges / 1 interview	5 challenges / 1 advice & materials on content ratings for books	3 challenges including the book expurgation	3 challenges / 1 request for rationales	13 challenges / 18++ works / 1 request for rationales, 1 interview on banned books, 1 request for help with a parent petition to put content ratings on all texts.
March 24-31, 2009	April 2009	May 2009	June 2009	Q4 FY2009 Totals
1 challenge	5 challenges / 5 works	4 challenges / 4 works	1 challenge / 1 works	10 challenges / 12 works

Listing of 4th Quarter Challenges Reported March 25—June 31, 20104

Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie (9-12th grades all students read MO). Sent resources. Review committee recommended that it be retained in the library, but not taught in class. Board voted to completely remove it.

All Quiet on the Western Front, Enrich Maria Remarque (Honors English II summer reading list, MO). Sent resources. Not Challenged meeting with the parents went well and requested additional choices be made for all students.

Angela's Ashes, Frank McCourt (10th grade, NY). Sent resources. (MI). Sexual content. Sent resources.

Bless Me Ultima, Rudolfo Anaya, (Honors English II summer reading list, MO). Sent resources and rationale. Not Challenged meeting with the parents went well and requested additional choices be made for all students.

The Book Thief, Makus Zusak (Honors English II summer reading list, MO). Sent resources and rationale. Not Challenged meeting with the parents went well and requested additional choices be made for all students.

Brave New World, Aldous Huxley (11th & 12th AP, GA). Sexual content. Sent resources and rationale.

Common Sense Media ratings of books. Signed letter with NCAC & others and continue in discussions.

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic, Alison Bechdel (11th & 12th AP, NY). Sent resources.

Gay & Lesbian themed books in Library (high school media center collection, NJ). Signed on NCAC letter opposing removal of books.

Grendel, John Gardner, (11th grade AP, IN). Sent resources and rationale

The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood (11&12th AP English, ME). Language and graphic descriptions. Sent rationale and resources.

If On a Winter's Night a Traveler, Italo Calvino (12th grade AP, IL). Sexually explicit. Sent resources. Book pulled, teacher plans to use again, but address parental concerns before beginning.

The Jungle, (11th grade AP, IN). Sent resources.

Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini (Honors English II summer reading list, MO). Sent resources and rationale. Not Challenged meeting with the parents went well and requested additional choices be made for all students.

Master Harold & the Boys, Athol Fungard (11th grade AP, IN). Sent resources and rationale

The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri (Honors English II summer reading list, MO). Sent resources and rationale. Not Challenged meeting with the parents went well and requested additional choices be made for all students.

Poisonwood Bible, Barbara Kingsolver (Honors English II summer reading list, MO). Sent resource and rationales. Not Challenged meeting with the parents went well and requested additional choices be made for all students.

Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut, (11th grade AP, IN). Sent resources and rationale.

Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (11th grade AP, IN). Sent resources and rationale. Banned book returned to classroom.

Swimming to Antarctica, (11th grade AP, IN). Sent resources.

Unknown Text, (Middle School, MI) Teacher marked out "bad words" in assigned reading texts. Sent policy on book expurgation.