

SpeakLoudly

Submitted by Wendy Glenn on behalf of the ALAN Anti-censorship Committee

In response to the writings they create, authors are often targets of censorial attacks. In response, many YA authors are speaking loudly about their experiences and sharing advice and suggestions for teachers and librarians who might deal with challenges associated with their titles. In this issue, we highlight a few YA authors whose comments on the topic are particularly well developed, insightful, and useful.

Chris Crutcher provides a Censorship tab on his website:

<http://www.chriscrutcher.com/censorship.html>. Here you'll find descriptions of challenges to several of his titles and the resulting outcomes. Additionally, the site includes links to free speech support, videos, and other resources, including images of Banned Book Week posters.

Laurie Halse Anderson provides a Censorship and Book Banning tab on her website:

<http://madwomanintheforest.com/teachers/censorship-book-banning/>. She describes challenges to two of her novels, *Twisted* and *Speak*, and support for the classroom use of these titles offered by the Kids' Right to Read Project. The site also contains links to several sister organizations (ALA, NCTE, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and the Cooperative Children's Book Center) that support anti-censorship measures and provide resources for educators facing challenges.

John Green's video commentary, "I am Not a Pornographer"

(<http://johngreenbooks.com/i-am-not-a-pornographer/>), offers a passionate, well reasoned, and thoughtful response to a challenge to *Looking for Alaska* at Depew High School outside of Buffalo, New York. Censors described the book as "pornographic" and "disgusting" and advocated for its removal from the eleventh grade curriculum; John disagrees.

Matt de la Peña offers his thoughts in response to the recent removal of *Mexican WhiteBoy* (and several other titles) from classroom shelves in Tucson Public Schools. In a three-part interview by Amy Bolland (author of the "Writers Against Racism" blog on the *School Library Journal* site), de la Peña explains the results of such banning on kids as readers and as people.

Interview, Part 1

<http://blog.schoollibraryjournal.com/bollansblog/2012/04/03/writers-against-racism-matt-de-la-pena-and-tucson-school-district/>

Interview, Part 2

<http://blog.schoollibraryjournal.com/bollansblog/2012/04/03/writers-against-racism-matt-de-la-pena-and-tucson-schools-part-2/>

Interview, Part 3

<http://blog.schoollibraryjournal.com/bollansblog/2012/04/03/writers-against-racism-matt-de-la-pena-final-segment/>

In a blog entry (<http://cherylrainfield.com/blog/index.php/2012/10/02/cheryl-rainfield-on-scars-being-challenged-and-the-need-for-dark-books-for-banned-book-week/#.ULZCu4U1aC0>), **Cheryl Rainfield** posts a video in which she describes a challenge to her novel, *Scars*, her reason for tackling difficult subject matter in the story, and her advocacy of dark books for teens. This is followed by a list of quotations related to the dangers of book banning and censorship.

Ellen Hopkins published a blog entry, “Banned Books Week 2010: An Anti-Censorship Manifesto” on the *Huffington Post* site:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ellen-hopkins/banned-books-anticensorship-manifesto_b_744219.html. She shares the highly emotional response of readers to her novels and her subsequent belief that writing about difficult topics is both necessary and lifesaving. She concludes the piece with a manifesto in poem form that ends with the following stanza:

A word to the unwise.
Torch every book.
Char every page.
Burn every word to ash.
Ideas are incombustible.
And therein lies your real fear.

Sonya Sones’ essay entitled, “Musings of a ‘Sexually Explicit’ Author,” was published as part four of the “Getting Banned” series in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*: <http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/post/24379226314/getting-banned-part-4-sonya-sones-musings-of-a>. Sones discusses the questionable accusations often launched at her titles, advancing her faith in young people to make sense of controversy and discover the value of stories despite attempts by adults to “stifle the voices of [her] characters.”

In an interview with *School Library Journal*, **Lauren Myracle** explains why she is proud to appear regularly on the ALA lists of most challenged books:

<http://www.slj.com/2012/10/censorship/interview-why-lauren-myracles-proud-to-top-alas-list-of-most-challenged-books/#>. Although challenges to students’ freedom to read and educators’ freedom to teach are frustrating and sometime incomprehensible, there might be hope through dialogue. As Myracle says, “I am sad that we silly humans can’t get our acts together and sing in harmony. But I’m an eternal optimist. We’ll figure it out, and conversations about tough topics—like censorship—inevitably lead to growth.”

We appreciate each and every YA author who challenges the challengers with wisdom, grace, and courage in the attempt to ensure that readers have access to titles that enrich and expand their world.