

Censorship Report
Quarter 1 FY2014, Including a Comparison to Quarter 1 FY2013
By Millie Davis

Two important events marked this quarter in addition to the usual work of the Anti-Censorship Office to support the Students' Right to Read. These events were NCTE's participation in [Banned Books Week](#) AND Judy Blume's winning of the NCTE/SLATE National Intellectual Freedom Award (and also the ALAN Award) and her willingness to come to the NCTE Annual Convention to receive both. In addition, the Anti-Censorship Office fielded seven challenges, three of which made national news.



NCTE social media coordinator Beth Shaum took the opportunity of Banned Books Week to arrange the first #nctechat on Twitter. This chat—[check out the archive](#)—was the #2 trending topic on Twitter from 8-9pm.ET, September 22, even over the Emmy Awards that were being given that night! More than 620 tweets (and Facebook posts) flowed in during the hour of the event and on into the next day as participants and those receiving their retweets or comments or likes Facebook continued the discussion. Guest hosts Teri Lesesne and Laurie Halse Anderson were joined by many NCTE members *and* by quite a few authors, including including Judy Blume, Stephen Chbosky, Kate Messner, Adam Rex, Tanya Lee Stone, Yvonne Ventresca, Ava Dellaira, Loretta Ellsworth, E.M. Kokie, Sarah C. Campbell, Jo Knowles, and Chris Barton.

In addition to the Twitter chat, the NCTE Anti-Censorship Center also sponsored a number of activities to support the week as well as to support NCTE's resources for handling challenges to texts. On Tuesday, September 10, 2013, NCTE ran its Banned Books Week INBOX Newsletter. We do this in advance of the week so teachers can get the information in time to plan lessons. Both the [Anti-Censorship Center](#) and the [Banned Books Week page](#) featured Banned Books Week activities. Two NCTE members, ReLeah Cossett Lent and Teri Lesesne, the current and past chair of the NCTE Standing Committee Against Censorship, did a radio interview on September 10 on Education Talk Radio: [Banned Books Week: NCTE on Censorship](#). NCTE reprinted its Anti-Censorship Bookmark which will again be given away at the NCTE Booth at the Annual Convention. In addition, the bookmarks will be placed on all the chairs in the Opening General Session at which Judy Blume will receive her Intellectual Freedom Award, and packets of 20 were given away to five tweeters who requested them as they participated in the Twitter chat.

On September 16, we sent out a [press release](#) announcing Judy Blume as the winner of two NCTE Awards. In the release ReLeah Lent, chair of the selection committee for the Intellectual Freedom Award, is quoted, "Judy Blume has done more than write unflinchingly honest books that allow her readers to explore themes and topics that raise eyebrows (and the ire) of censors. . . Tirelessly, she has responded with encouragement and support when her books were challenged or banned all across the

nation. She has written countless letters, made phone calls to both supporters and detractors, and often appeared in person to become the voice of reason not only for her own books but for the principles of intellectual freedom in general. "Lent added that in 1999, Blume rallied writers to join a project to benefit the National Coalition Against Censorship. The result was the short story anthology *Places I Never Meant to Be: Original Stories by Censored Writers* (Simon & Schuster, 1999).

From July-September of this year, we've handled seven challenges, none of them routine. One challenge to *The Duff*, a book a 9th grade student checked out of a classroom library, cost the teacher his job and another challenge resulted in an 11th grade course being divided into two sections, one for those who were allowed read *The Bluest Eye* and one for those who weren't. A challenge to *The Handmaid's Tale* in a 12th grade AP English class resulted in the student being given an alternative text to read. The challenges to [Dreaming in Cuban](#), [The Bluest Eye](#) (both on the Common Core Standards list of text exemplars), and [Invisible Man](#) all made national news.

During Quarter 1 FY2013 NCTE continued its collaboration with other freedom-to-read groups to send letters in favor of keeping [Invisible Man](#) and [The Bluest Eye](#) (the Colorado challenge) in the classroom. The groups we worked with included the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), the American Library Association (ALA), the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE), the Association of American Publishers (AAP), the PEN American Center, and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 1 FY2014 and the Quarter 1 FY2013 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>.*

July 2013	August 2013	September 2013	Q1 FY2014 Totals
1 challenge—1 text	0 challenges	6 challenges—6 texts	7 challenges—7 texts
July 2012	August 2012	September 2012	Q1 FY2013 Totals
0 challenges	4 challenges – 3 texts	4 challenges – 5 texts/1 request for rationales for curriculum writing, 1 inquiry about resources to counteract censorship on college websites	8 challenges – 9 texts / 1 request for rationales for curriculum writing, 1 inquiry about resources to counteract censorship on college websites

Listing of 1st Quarter Challenges Reported July-September, 2013

Bluest Eye, The, Toni Morrison (11th Grade, OH). Pornographic. NCTE offered advice and sent resources and rationale.

Bluest Eye, The, Tony Morrison (11th Grade, CO). Obscenity, developmentally inappropriate Course divided into to sections. NCTE sent rationale and resources and also [signed on to a letter](#) in support of keeping the book in the classroom. Two sections of course were formed: one section for those who would read the novel and one for those who wouldn't.

Dreaming in Cuban, Cristina Garcia (10th grade, AZ). Pornographic. An NCTE member attended and spoke out at the hearing about the book. Removed pending the committee's decision.

Duff, The, Kody Keplinger (9th Grade, MI). Profanity and sexual descriptions. NCTE offered advice. Teacher resigned.

Habibi, Naomi Shihab Nye (6th Grade, 9/30/2013). "Book is full of distortions, lies, and stereotypes, dehumanizes Israelis, and historically inaccurate." NCTE wrote letter in support of teaching the novel.

Handmaid's Tale, The, Margaret Atwood (12th Grade AP English, 9/4/2013). Language. NCTE sent rationale and resources. Alternative reading given

Invisible Man, The, Ralph Ellison (Summer reading list, 9/29/2013). Social and intellectual issues facing African Americans. NCTE sent rationale and resources, and [signed on a letter](#) opposing the ban and supporting keeping the book in the classroom. Book removed from school libraries and classrooms, but board reconsidered its voice and the book is back on the shelf.