

**Censorship Report**  
**Quarter 2 FY2015, Including a Comparison to Quarter 2 FY2014**  
*By Millie Davis*

The interesting thing about NCTE's work to preserve the students' right to read is how it both stays the same and how it morphs into something different as the nature of complaints differ over time. The sameness of challenges is that they arise when someone objects to something in a text and feels their objection should govern text selection not just for their child but for the entire community. These objections are usually very specific events or language anchored on a particular page or pages of a text and the objections consider the personal values of the objector not the entirety of the text and its educational value within the curriculum. The differences seem to almost be fads that pervade challenges from all over the country—maybe a certain text is challenged repeatedly in communities across the nation (e.g. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*), maybe texts in certain courses are consistently challenged (e.g. AP), maybe certain suggested solutions to challenges come up repeatedly (e.g. using [MPAA](#) or [Common Sense Media](#) – type ratings for books or movies).

Earmarks of this quarter include the numbers of texts challenged (11) and the number of ongoing challenges carried over from previous quarters (5). Challenges that are long and drawn out are becoming more the norm as objectors and schools and districts move from the objection to one text to objections to many *and*, of late, to an attempt to institute solutions for parents similar to the Motion Picture Association of America's movie ratings, something NCTE calls "[red-flagging](#)" and against which we have a position. Two cases long and as yet unsolved have followed us through this school year:

- the Highland Park, Texas, case that began with informal challenges to 7 books, led to the district deciding to follow its own policy and require challengers to do so too, the subsequent formal challenges to 2 texts (so far), and the district's recent attempt to institute a "red-flagging" policy and then to refine its text selection policies to include community feedback; and
- the state's challenge and ultimate elimination of the Mexican-American course of study in the Tucson Unified School District and seven texts used in that course accomplished by passage and interpretation of a state department statute and threat to deprive the district of millions of dollars of state money if the course wasn't eliminated. There has been a law suit protesting the statute and elimination of the course, in which a state court upheld the state's actions but the case was recently appealed to a federal court. NCTE joined other First Amendment groups to sign on the *amicus curiae* brief for the appeal in support of reinstating the course. We're awaiting the court's decision.

The Intellectual Freedom Center often gets inquires from students, reporters and others. This quarter, in addition to fielding challenges, I provided information on text challenges to a senior student from Colorado writing her capstone paper on the topic (we had a delightful phone interview!), to a Canadian educator looking for resources just in case a challenge developed, to a Kansas librarian working to write an alternative text policy for her school, to a newspaper reporter writing about the Highland Park case, and to an individual wanting to know more about [Banned Books Week](#).

The Center continues its close work with the [National Coalition Against Censorship](#) and the [Office of Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association](#). These partnerships also ally NCTE with other First Amendment groups (you'll find the list of these on the letters in support of texts listed below).

Together we often sign on letters against a challenge and in defense of keeping the text in the classroom.

*Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 1 FY2015 and the Quarter 1 FY2014 challenges and numbers of challenged texts. Below that is a listing in alphabetical order by title of the work of the individual texts we've dealt with this quarter. A few things to know as you compare the numbers and texts 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.
- Censorship Challenge Reports by quarter are available on the NCTE website.

October 2014	November 2014	December 2014	Q2 FY2015 Totals
<b>4 challenges</b> , 6 texts, 1 request for information	<b>4 challenges</b> , 4+++ texts, 2 requests for information	<b>3 challenges</b> , 3 texts	<b>11 challenges</b> , 12+++ texts, 3 requests for information  <b>5 challenges ongoing</b> since previous quarters.
October 2013	November 2013	December 2013	Q2 FY2014 Totals
<b>4 challenges</b> , 4 texts	<b>2 challenges</b> , 2 texts; <b>1 sign on to amicus curiae</b> ; 1 request for information	<b>2 challenges</b> , 1+++ texts	<b>8 challenges</b> , 8++++ texts; <b>1 sign on to amicus curiae</b> ; 1 request for information

### Listing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Challenges Reported October-December, 2014

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Sherman Alexie (British Columbia, 10/2/2014). Teacher preparing for teaching the book and expected parental complaints. **Sent rationale and resources.**

*Almost, Maine*, John Cariani (Play, NC, 10/22/2014). Same-sex love. Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups. **School cancelled production, but the play cast organized a Kickstarter Campaign to raise money to do the play at a local playhouse. The money was raised with enough leftover to donate to local several local nonprofits and [the play went on!](#)**

*The Art of Racing in the Rain*, , Garth Stein (English II, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. *Complaints were made about seven other books as well and all were initially removed but then reinstated. This was the first book formally challenged.* 9/15/14--Sent rationale and resources. 9/29/14 -- All books were returned to the reading list, but complaining parents asked the district to "[red-flag](#)" certain books for objectionable content. 10-10-14—NCTE signed on [letter](#) of complaint with NCAC and other First Amendment groups, on 10-14-14 NCTE wrote its own letter, and on 10/29/14, NCTE signed on [letter with ALA](#). The controversy over the books continued in high gear and on 11/10/14—NCTE signed on [a second letter](#) with NCAC and others. 11/24/14--MD did interview w/ Texas Tribune reporter that made its way to [The New York Times](#). **Book was retained and the district continues to work to develop a new text selection policy.**

*Black Swan Green*, David Mitchell (Freshman English, CA, 10/29/2014). Pornographical material. 11/6/14--Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups. **Book was approved but is not being used because too much time had passed for it to be relevant to the curriculum at that point in the year.**

*Bless Me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya (9th Grade, ID, 12/2/2013). Religion, Religious Practices, Witchcraft. 12/2/13 Sent rationale and resources and letter.12/9/13--**Book suspended and then reinstated with an apology from the superintendent after letters from NCTE, ALA, NCAC and others.** The district then began developing a policy for red-flagging books and sending home parental consent forms for these texts. 10/10/14 Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups about the parental consent forms being drafted. 10/16/14 **School Board decided not to move forward with the consent form plan.**

*Chinese Handcuffs*, Chris Crutcher (School library, WI, 8/4/2014). Sexual Content. *This was one of three books challenged in the district—the other two were Kite Runner and Looking for Alaska.* 8/19/14 Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups. **Reconsideration committee recommended keeping the book in the library.** Complainant then asked that the libraries put content warnings on these books. 10/07/14--Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups against the "[red-flagging](#)" proposal for this book. **Book retained in library with no red-flagging.**

*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer (Grade 9 Literature Circle, IA, 10/29/2014). Sexual Content. 10/29/14 -- Novel has been pulled from shelf. 10/29/14 -- Sent rationale and resources. 10-30-14--Signed on a letter with ALA emphasizing that the school should follow its own policy for handling book challenges.

*The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green (Middle School library CA, 10/2/2014). Objectionable content; not age appropriate. Reconsideration committee voted to remove the book from the library. 10/2/14 Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups. The district amended its challenge policies to require the board to approve decisions made by reconsideration committees. 12/8/14 Signed on a second [letter](#) to board. **12/9/14--Board voted to retain the book (3-2)**

*The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini (School library, WI, 8/4/2014). Sexual Content. *This was one of three books challenged in the district—the other two were Chinese Handcuffs and Looking for Alaska.* Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups. NCTE's [rationale](#) for Kite Runner was included in the letter endorsing the teaching of the novel. **School Board voted to keep the book in the district's libraries.** Complainant then asked that the libraries put content warnings on these books. 10/07/14--Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups against the "[red-flagging](#)" proposal for this book. **Book retained in library with no red-flagging.**

*The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini (Grade 9, VT, 12/8/2014). Sexual violence. 12/15/14--Sent rationales and other materials.

*The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini (English 10, KS, 10/24/2014). Sexual Content. 10/24/14 -- 10/24/14 -- Librarian seeking language for the ELA dept to include in course catalog or write up a policy. Offered suggestions on writing a policy for alternative texts.

*Looking for Alaska*, John Green (School library, WI, 12:00:00 AM). Sexual Content. *This was one of three books challenged in the district—the other two were Kite Runner and Chinese Handcuffs.* 08/19/14-- Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups. **Reconsideration committee recommended keeping the book in the library.** Complainant then asked that the libraries put content warnings on these books. 10/07/14--Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC and other First Amendment groups against the "[red-flagging](#)" proposal for this book. **Book retained in library with no red-flagging.**

*McGraw-Hill Textbooks*, (Grade 4, AK, 11/18/2014). Complaints from an Alaska Native educator about the way texts may misrepresent the experiences of Alaska Natives. 11/18/14--Sent information about how other localities have successfully handled this issue. This was an informational inquiry and not a formal challenge.

*Mexican-American Studies Program in Tucson Schools*, (High School, AZ, 11/12/2013). This case began in January 2012 when a very successful Mexican American Studies program in the Tucson Unified School District was eliminated, along with most of the books used in it. The state of Arizona, shortly after passing Senate Bill 1070, the law that caused NCTE to pull its 2012 convention out of Phoenix, the state passed another law, House Bill 2281, which contains language prohibiting any courses that “advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.” With this new law the Arizona Department of Education ruled that the Tucson Unified School District had to dismantle its Mexican American Studies program and cease using what were considered “suspect” books or forego \$15 million dollars in state aid annually. The district dismantled the program. NCTE joined with over 30 other groups and organizations in a “[JOINT STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO BOOK CENSORSHIP IN THE TUCSON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT \(January 30, 2012\).](#)” On November 25, 2013, NCTE joined with several other organizations to file an *amicus* brief for [Maya Arce, et al. v. John Huppenthal, et al.](#) in support of the students' First Amendment claims to have the Mexican-American course and to read the books within it. **On January 12, 2015, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in the case. We’re awaiting the results.**

*The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, Emily M. Danforth (, DE, 12/12/2014). Profanity and Sexual themes. 12/12/14--Signed on letter with NCAC and other First Amendment Groups. 12//16/14--BOE decided to keep book on shelf--parent withdrew appeal to remove

*Monster*, Walter Dean Myers (, PA, 11/10/2014). 11/10/14--working with ALA, sent rationale. 11/14/14—**Reconsideration committee unanimously voted to keep the book in the curriculum.**

*Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck (Grade 10 English, PA, 11/6/2014). Language, sexual innuendos, etc.. 11/6/14 -- Sent rationale and other materials -- 12/15/14--MD sent letter to school board -- 1/7/15 -- Resent letter to school board. **The high school administration sent the community members a letter explaining the curriculum review committee's rationale for keeping the book in our curriculum and they have never come back to the school board to challenge it any further.**

*The Secret Lives of Bees*, Sue Monk Kidd (, GA, 11/4/2014). Seeking information in case of a possible challenge. 11/4/14--Sent rationale.