

Censorship Challenge Report – Quarter 3 FY2014

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Of the seven challenges recorded, four occupied most of our time this quarter. Three of these focused on policies for text selection and use in schools and one focused on a challenge to a particular text.

The challenge in North Carolina against Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* being taught in a 10th grade Honors English Class began in November 2013 just as the teacher started the unit on the novel. As a result of a parental complaint, the book was forbidden to be taught and the challenge, which went through the three-stage district policy for review, finally ended on February 27, 2014, when the school board voted (3-2) to retain the text. By that time, of course, the regular time for teaching the text this school year was passed. However, the great news is the students just got their books this April and will be reading *House of the Spirits* this spring! Throughout the challenge received much local press and some national press, and author Isabel Allende was involved in the defense as [this blog entry](#) shows. In addition, in defense of the text, [a teach-in on the novel](#) was held at Appalachian State University. NCTE featured the challenge in the February 11, 2014 issue of INBOX:

NCTE Anti-Censorship Center Works with Member to Defend *House of the Spirits*

[NCTE joined the National Coalition Against Censorship, the American Library Association, and others](#) to protest the challenge as it came before the first of two school and district committees. The book will face a ruling by the Watauga County Board of Education on February 27. **See a sampling of stories on the controversy:**

"On Book Controversy at Watauga High School": Listen as NCTE member Mary Kent Whittaker defends the use of the book in her classroom. [Community Forum, WETS-FM, February 8, 2014](#)

"Dear North Carolina": Isabel Allende writes about the challenge. [My Invented Isabel blog, February 3, 2014](#)

"School Board Hears from 21 Individuals on Both Sides of Pending Book Challenge at Watauga High School": [High Country Press, February 10, 2014](#)

"The Book' Divides Parents, Students in Watauga": [Winston-Salem Journal, February 11, 2014](#)

The second big challenge this quarter grew out of a November challenge listed in the Quarter 2 report:

Selection and Distribution of Books from Classroom Library (including many from NCTE Annual Convention & ALAN Workshop) (9th Grade, PA) Teacher has decided to grieve with his union the fact that his classroom library has been restricted but not his colleagues'. Resolved for the moment.

After the first of the year and much protest by students and parents concerning the need to allow teachers to keep and stock their classroom libraries, the district decided that teachers could keep their libraries, if they filled out an inventory for each book and labeled and/or removed texts with mature,

sexual, violent, or culturally or religiously offensive content. Needless to say, teachers were not pleased with this edict because it suggests that a part of a text or an action of a character in a text is more important than the meaning and importance of the entire text. Not to mention, the district’s policy flies in the face of the [NCTE Position Statement Regarding Rating or “Red-Flagging” Books](#). Teachers have until April to comply.

Meanwhile in Virginia, some individuals who had challenged the use of a book in a classroom in the state and lost, brought their concerns about “inappropriate materials” in schools to the state board of education. The Board put out for public comment a regulatory resolution on “the use of sensitive or controversial instructional materials” that, if passed, would change the policy on curricular texts used in *all* Virginia public schools, requiring schools to “including a notice to parents about any sensitive or sexually explicit materials that may be included in the course, the textbook, or any supplemental instructional materials”—in essence, requiring a text labeling system. NCTE, many of its First Amendment Friends, and many citizens responded against the proposed resolution. We have no results yet on this issue.

The last policy issue this quarter concerned a motion by the South Carolina Legislature to cut budgets to the College of Charleston & University of South Carolina Upstate because legislators objected to the assigned freshman reading with LGBT themes and content. NCTE protested this move and signed on [a letter to South Carolina Legislature](#) with National Coalition Against Censorship and others. Unfortunately, the budget cuts passed the on March 18, 2014.

Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 3 FY2014 and the Quarter 3 FY2013 challenges and numbers of challenged texts. Below that is a list of the works challenged this quarter.

CENSORSHIP CHALLENGES COMPARISON Q3 FY14 AND Q3 FY13

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 Censorship Challenge Reports by quarter are posted on the [NCTE website](#).*

January 2014	February 2014	March 2014	Q3FY2014 Totals
2 challenges , text review policies	1 challenge /1 text	4 challenges /3texts/ 1 text review policy, 1 interview with student on censorship	7 challenges /4 texts/3 text review policies/1 interview with student on censorship
January 2013	February 2013	March 2013	Q3FY2013 Totals
2 challenges /2 texts	3 challenges /3 texts/1 request for information	2 challenges /2 texts/1 interview with student on censorship	7 challenges /7 texts/1 request for information/1 interview with student on censorship

Listing of 3rd Quarter Challenges Reported January-March, 2014

Going Bovine, Libba Bray (Grade 10, OR, 3/12/14). language, drug reference, sex, mockery of religion .

House of the Spirits, The, Isabel Allende (10th Grade Honor Class, NC, 2/28/2014 (Book to be retained in the Curriculum) (Challenge received on 10/14/2013)). Sexual excerpts MD sent rationale and resources. [Signed on letter with NCAC and others](#) and NCTE wrote an additional letter to the Board of Education. [BOOK WILL BE RETAINED IN THE CURRICULUM](#) (2/28/14)

Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, The, Rebecca Skloot (Grade 10, LA, 3/6/14). Physical and sexual abuse. Principal had teacher pull the book and substitute a different one. NCTE sent rationale and resources.

Legislative Budget Cuts to College of Charleston & University of South Carolina Upstate. (College, SC, 3/17/14). Objections to assigned freshman reading with LGBT themes and content. Signed on [letter to South Carolina Legislature with National Coalition Against Censorship and others](#). BUDGET CUTS PASSED ON MARCH 18, 2014.

District Policy Requiring Teachers to Inventory and Label Every Text in Their Classroom Libraries by Flagging "Objectionable Material." (HS, PA, 1/14/14). NCTE wrote letter to school board members. Deadline for completion of inventories is April 2014.

Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (Grades 9-10, OH, 3/2/14). Profanity. NCTE sent rationale and resources.

Two Boys Kissing, David Levithan (Grades 9-12, VA, 2/11/14). Photo on cover of two boys kissing and content (possibly objecting to homosexual characters). NCTE consulted with district leader and sent supporting material. BOOK CURRENTLY IN SECOND STAGE OF REVIEW.

Virginia Department of Education [Proposed Resolution Regarding Use of Controversial or Sensitive Instructional Materials](#) (K-12, VA, 1/15/14). NCTE wrote letter to Virginia Board of Education Members and posted the letter on the public comment website.