

Censorship Challenge Report – Quarter 4 FY2014

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“Oh, my!” would be an appropriate response to Quarter 4 of FY14 when NCTE’s Intellectual Freedom Office fielded one and a half times the number of challenges we fielded a year ago in FY13.

Two of these challenges bled over from Quarter 3. One ended happily as David Levithan’s *Two Boys Kissing* was retained in the school libraries of a Virginia district. The other, a first in the history of NCTE’s Intellectual Freedom Center, ended badly for two South Carolina Colleges, for teachers and readers of LGBT literature in that state, and for academic freedom. In June, the South Carolina legislature passed a bill which was signed by the governor to punish the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina Upstate for sponsoring summer one-read programs that featured [Fun Home](#) and [Outloud: The Best of Rainbow Radio](#), respectively. The bill dictated that the colleges had to spend the money for the summer reading programs to give “instruction in the provisions and principles of the United States Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federalist Papers, including the study of and devotion to American institutions and ideals” before any other summer reading choices were required. In addition, each summer read much provide alternative readings to those who request them and allow students to opt-out of the readings if they object to them (see the entire statute below).

This quarter NCTE defended an entire YA Course proposal that featured nine texts and the course was approved! Other challenges included two more to Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and a still ongoing challenge to *Paper Towns* by John Green, whom I predict will rise to the top of the list of most challenged authors this year. And, the challenge and our signing onto a letter objecting to the challenge to Cory Doctorow’s *Little Brother* helped us land him as the Secondary Luncheon speaker at the NCTE Annual Convention!

Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 4 FY2014 and the Quarter 4 FY2013 challenges and numbers of challenged texts. Below that is a list of the works challenged this quarter.

CENSORSHIP CHALLENGES COMPARISION Q4 FY14 AND Q4 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](#).*

April 2014	May 2014	June 2014	Q4FY2014 Totals
7 challenges/20 texts / 2 reporter interviews	1 challenge	4 challenges/6 texts/1 reporter interview/1 request for rationales for choosing books for curriculum	12 challenges/23 texts/ 3 reporter interviews/1 request for rationales for choosing books for curriculum
April 2013	May 2013	June 2013	Q4FY2013 Totals

1 challenge/1 work	2 challenges/2 works	2 challenges/2 works	5 challenges/5works
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Listing of 4th Quarter Challenges Reported April-June, 2014

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie (HS, NC, 6/3/2014). Contains material that offends religious beliefs. [Signed on letter](#) sent to Superintendent.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie (Grade 10, ID, 4/9/2014). Sexual content, profanity, anti-Christian theme. Spoke with reporter contacted school. **School board temporarily removed book from curriculum.**

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, Jonathan Safran (Grade 10, OH, 5/13/2014). Sexual content. Sent rationale and resources.

Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock, Matthew Quick (Grade 8, MA, 4/14/2014). Profane Language. Sent rationale and resources. **District ELA Supervisor removed book.**

Hate List, Jennifer Brown (Grade 8, MA, 4/14/2014). Inflammatory Content (Caucasian Male shooter in a school). Sent rationale and resources. **District ELA Supervisor removed book.**

The Lesson, Toni Cade Bambara (Grade 8 and 9, MN, 4/9/2014). Obscenity, sexual content, the phrase "white folks crazy." Sent resources. Caller said there's no information in public record and nobody seems to know about this issue in the community other than the parents who complaints motivated the banning in the first place.

Little Brother, Cory Doctorow (Grade 11 Honors, FL, 6/6/2014). Principal concerned parents might protest--book was removed. [Signed on letter](#) to principal.

Looking for Alaska, John Green (Grade 10, KY, 4/15/2014). Sent rationale and resources. No decision has been made yet,

My Sister's Keeper, Jodi Picoult (Grade 8 and 9, MN, 4/9/2014). Obscenity, sexual content, the phrase "white folks crazy." Sent resources. Caller said there's no information in public record and nobody seems to know about this issue in the community other than the parents whose complaints motivated the banning in the first place.

Paper Towns, John Green (8th Grade summer reading list, FL, 6/24/14). [Interviewed with reporter](#) about the incident. Signed on letter with NCAC and other intellectual freedom groups.

South Carolina Legislative Budget cuts to College of Charleston & University of South Carolina Upstate for including Fun Home and Outloud: The Best of Rainbow Radio in their respective summer reading programs. (College, SC, 3/17/2014). [Objections to assigned reading with LGBT theme and content](#), Signed on [letter](#) with NCAC & Others AND subsequent [statement to Governor and legislature](#). A group called [Writers Speaking Outloud](#) has organized to protest this. The legislative ruling reads as follows:

(CHE: Required Reading Material Reporting) (A) From the revenue appropriated or authorized by this act, the University of Charleston must utilize at least \$52,000 and USC Upstate must utilize at least \$17,000 to comply with the provisions contained in Section 59-29-120, related to instruction in the provisions and principles of the United States Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federalist Papers, including the study of and devotion to American institutions and ideals. The instruction that must be given pursuant to this provision may be satisfied by providing or assigning reading materials related to the subject matter.

(B) A public institution of higher learning that conducts a non-elective reading program, other than as part of an instructional class, must provide alternative reading materials to a student who finds the required reading material objectionable based on a sincerely held religious, moral, or cultural belief. A student who requests alternative materials must not be subjected to any negative consequences or disparate treatment by any officer, official, faculty member, or other employee of the institution as a result of making the request.

(C) A public institution of higher learning that conducts a mandatory lecture, seminar, or other similar type presentation or program, other than as part of an instructional class, must allow a student who finds the program objectionable based on a sincerely held religious, moral, or cultural belief to decline to attend or otherwise participate in the program. A student who declines to attend or otherwise participate must not be subjected to any negative consequences or disparate treatment by any officer, official, faculty member, or other employee of the institution as a result of making the request.

*Two Boys Kissing, David Levithan (Grades 9-12, VA, 2/11/2014). Photo on cover of two boys kissing and content (possibly objecting to homosexual characters). Spoke with and sent supporting material. 4/14-book in second stage of review. NCTE [signed on letter to superintendent](#) with NCAC and others. NCTE signed on with others. School-based comm approved book--parent dissatisfied--going to another comm. **Administrative Review Committee decided contested [book should remain](#) in district libraries.***

UnWholly, Neal Shusterman (Grade 7, KY, 4/9/2014). Book is too "dark" for 7th grade. Sent resources. No one has actually read the book (principal, superintendent, nor complainant). Decision was based on the book's cover and perhaps the summary on the back.

*Young Adult Literature Course, (HS, CO, 4/16/2014). Objection to some books listed on the course proposal. Sent letter to Strasburg BOE. **YA curriculum was approved with a 3-2 vote.***