

NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center Report – Quarter 4 FY2015

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Last year at this time I suggested that, “Oh, my!” would be an appropriate response to the number of challenges handled during Quarter 4. This year I need to raise that response again because we fielded even two more challenges in Quarter 4 of 2015 than in Quarter 4 of 2014, a total of 16. This makes a total of 64 challenges that the NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center responded to this year, as opposed to 34 from last year.

All year the challenge in Highland Park, Texas, has been ongoing. A number of titles and both the original book selection process and the newly developed process have been the source of complaints from parents, community members, and educators. This challenge popped up in [national news](#) in the fall of 2014 and has continued to make news, even appearing as a factoid in the December 2014/January 2015 issue of *Road & Track* magazine because one of the challenged books was Garth Stein’s *Racing in the Rain*. This quarter saw the newly developed book selection process requiring community reaction forms on texts teachers and the English department had already vetted play out while a number of English teachers as well as the superintendent turned in their resignations to the district. NCTE has remained in frequent contact with the department chair and with a key member of [HP Kids Read](#), an organization of parents and community members who support having their children ready widely and relying on teacher expertise in selecting texts for students to read. As of this writing one quarter of the English department have resigned along with the superintendent and several administrative level people.

A most interesting challenge this quarter was to a graphic novel course at Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa, California. The [complaining student and her father disliked the texts selected for the course: *Persepolis*, *The Last Man Vol. 1*, *Fun Home* \(authored by Tony Award winner Alison Bechdel who’s speaking at the NCTE Annual Convention this year\), and *The Sandman Vol. 2: The Doll’s House*. The \[student noted\]\(#\), “It was shocking...I didn’t expect to open the book and see that graphic material within. I expected Batman and Robin, not pornography.” She and her father called for a disclaimer on the course, a trigger warning. NCTE joined the National Coalition Against Censorship and other intellectual freedom organizations, including the American Association of University Professors \(AAUP\) \[to speak out against a college course disclaimer\]\(#\).](#)

Every quarter this year featured a challenge to Sherman Alexie’s [Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian](#) and this quarter was no exception.

Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 4 FY2015 and the Quarter 4 FY2014 challenges and numbers of challenged texts. Below that is a list of the works challenged and worked on this quarter.

CENSORSHIP CHALLENGES COMPARISON 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.
- If new developments in a particular challenge from a previous quarter require a response during the current quarter, that challenge is counted again.
- The Censorship Challenge Reports by quarter are posted on the [NCTE website](#).

April 2015	May 2015	June 2015	Q4FY2015 Totals
5 challenges/5 texts	6 challenges/7 texts	3 challenges/9 texts	16 challenges/21 texts
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 5 challenges/5works

Listing of 4th Quarter Challenges Reported April-June, 2015

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie (Grade 6 and 7, IA, 3/31/2015). Inappropriate for age. NCTE sent rationale and other supporting material and [wrote a letter](#) to Superintendent for board meeting. **The Board pulled the book from all middle school classrooms but copies left in library. There have been many concerns that the board did not follow its own procedure for handling the challenge.**

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain (Grade 11, PA, 4/23/2015). Offensive, degrading, racism throughout whole book. **NCTE defended the teaching of the book by phone to the challenging parent who thoroughly disagreed.**

The Art of Racing in the Rain, Garth Stein ; *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, Davis K. Shipler (HS, Highland Park, TX, since 9/27/14). This quarter began with determinations on these books—**both retained**. With the new district policy, both *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, which had just been accepted as text in March after a three-step appeal, and *The Working Poor* were adopted by teachers as a text for the next year and then sent to a parental review committee according to the [new literature selection policy](#)! NCTE has consulted extensively with [HP Kids Read](#) as they prepared to serve on various committees and speak out at Board meetings.

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison; *Beloved*, Toni Morrison; *Dreaming in Cuban*, Cristina Garcia; *Killing Mr. Griffin*, Lois Duncan (Middle & HS Libraries, FL, 6/5/2015). Graphic and sexual content, violence against women. [ALA wrote a letter](#) to School Board and NCTE offered help if needed, especially with a

handbook on text selection and reconsideration for parents and teachers. The [Board considering removing books from the libraries](#) but has not since no formal complaint forms have been submitted.

Fun Home, Alison Bechdel; *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi; *The Last Man, Vol. 1*, Brian Vaughan; *The Sandman, Vol. 2: The Doll's House*, Neil Gaiman (Crafton Hills College, CA, 6/26/2015). Pornographic, contains pedophilia, rape jokes, murder, graphic violence. [College was considering putting a disclaimer \(trigger warning\) on the course.](#) NCTE signed on letter with [NCAC and others](#), including the AAUP, against this.

The House of the Spirits, Isabel Allende (10/15/13, 10th Grade Honors Class, NC). Sexuality. In April, the governor of North Carolina nominate Todd Chasteen to the North Carolina Board of Education. Chasteen was a chief challenger of *The House of the Spirits*, saying at one public meeting, "It glamorizes promiscuity, it trivializes rape, it trivializes prostitution."

King and King, Linda De Haan (Grade 3, NC, 4/23/2015). Gay characters. NCTE consulted with the teacher by phone. **The [teacher resigned](#) but the [book has been retained](#).**

The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini (English II Honors class, NC, 5/7/2015). Language and some of the themes. NCTE [signed on letter](#) with NCAC and others to **Board of Education which voted to keep the book on the reading list.**

Night, Elie Wiesel (HS Nonfiction, MS, 6/16/15). Parent objected to text as being untrue based on website "[Elie Wiesel's Tattoo](#)." NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center and many members offered help and suggestions through [discussion on NCTE Connected Community](#).

Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck (Grade 9, ID, 5/7/2015). Too much profanity and negative. 5/27/15-- NCTE [signed on letter](#) with NCAC and others. **The Board voted to keep in the 9th grade curriculum for whole class instruction.**

The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Stephen Chbosky (Freshman English, CT, 3/19/2015). Sexual content. NCTE [signed on a letter](#) with NCAC and others. **Book [was removed](#) but later [was reinstated](#) into the curriculum.**

Please Master (poem), Allen Ginsburg (AP English, CT, 4/17/2015). Explicit sexual content. **After much community controversy and local and national news, [the teacher resigned](#).**

Role of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Mildred Taylor (Grade 7, PA, 5/11/2015). Racially offensive and degrading. NCTE sent rationale and other supporting information.

Seedfolks, Paul Fleischman (5th Grade, NV, 5/6/2015). Parental concern about a chapter about a pregnant teenager. Through this [discussion on NCTE's Connected Community](#) the Intellectual Freedom Center and many NCTE members offered support if needed.