

FROM THE FRONT LINE Censorship Cases Up—Way Up

Charles Suhor, NCTE/SLATE Field Representative

Reversing a two-year trend of declining censorship cases, contacts with NCTE about censorship problems have skyrocketed. Since my October 1999 *SLATE Newsletter* report, approximately 80 calls have come in, almost tripling the 28 calls during the comparable time period last year.

As noted in the May 1999 *SLATE Newsletter*, four organizations—NCTE, the American Library Association, People for the American Way, and the National Coalition Against Censorship—saw a decline in censorship calls, beginning around 1996. While no new data are yet available from those groups, NCTE's dramatic increase in recent months might well be due in part to increased outreach and accessibility. Last fall NCTE's Web site added a "Censorship Incident Report Form." Many cases have been reported online. Additionally, every recent issue of *The Council Chronicle* has included an announcement headed "Censorship Problem?" Numerous callers have identified the *Chronicle* as their source of information on how to get help.

But as with the earlier decline, the reasons for the current upsurge are basically speculative. It is possible that censorship problems are simply occurring more frequently. Or teachers might be expanding their programs to include a wider variety of materials, capturing the attention of protestors. Clearly, from the number of challenges to violence in literary works, the Columbine High School disaster and other incidents have sent some parents in search of a scapegoat, and literary works are an easy target.

Whatever the causes, NCTE and SLATE will continue to be responsive. All contacts receive prompt telephone, fax, or e-mail answers, followed by other actions when requested. Because of the large number of cases, I am listing below only those for which the OUTCOME is known, and an abbreviated form has been adopted. "*Rationale(s) sent . . .*" indicates that NCTE sent the teacher one or more rationales for the protested work. Letters of support were offered in all cases; they typically go to the school board president or the superintendent.

First, though, here is an update on previously reported challenges in which the outcomes were cited as unknown. I am happy to report that *Deathwatch* by Robert White was RETAINED in the Maine challenge; *House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende was RETAINED in the California protest; *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan was RETAINED in the Arizona case; *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding was RETAINED in the Louisiana challenge; *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving was RETAINED in the Maryland case. Unfortunately, *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers was BANNED from the classroom (with library access only) in the Michigan protest.

If you are experiencing a challenge to materials or methods, or if you know someone who is, call either 800-369-6283, extension 3848 or 334-280-4758.

AFTER THE FIRST DEATH by Robert Cormier. (Grade 9 Gifted and Talented, Virginia) Complaint: Violence, lack of a "happy ending." *NCTE Censorship Packet sent. No rationale available.* RETAINED but protester might appeal the review committee's unanimously positive decision.

BELOVED by Toni Morrison. (Grade 12 Advanced Placement, Montana) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available; letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

BLESS ME ULTIMA by Rudolfo Anaya, **JOY LUCK CLUB** by Amy Tan, **FAHRENHEIT 451** by Ray Bradbury. (Grade 10, Arizona) Complaints: Profanity, witchcraft, sexual content, suicide. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent. Rationales not available.* RETAINED. Two other protests were received for **Bless Me Ultima**. (Grade 9, New York) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent.* RETAINED but the parent is appealing to the State Commissioner of Education. (Grade 9, also in New York, in a different district) Complaint: Profanity,

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sexual content, violence. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

Addendum. In the first New York case, the teacher writes, "The best defense was presented by a group of high school students. These articulate students called the author and prepared an eloquent defense." In the second case, the teacher writes, "it is more than comforting to know that the national organization is ready to support its members at a moment's notice!"

BOY'S LIFE by Robert McCammon. (Grade 12, Florida) Complaint: Profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent. Rationale not available.* RETAINED.

Addendum: The teacher writes, "We are using the information you sent to set out guidelines in our school to defend books we choose to read."

BREAKING THE CODE by Hugh Whitmore. (High school dramatic performance, Connecticut) Complaint: Profanity, homosexuality theme. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; referral to drama associations.* BANNED.

Addendum: The teacher is seeking advice about legal action concerning cancellation of the play. A local theater group indicated that they might provide space for performance of the play at a private venue, if he and the students wish to follow through.

CATCHER IN THE RYE by J. D. Salinger. (Grades 10 and 11, Michigan) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

THE CHOCOLATE WAR by Robert Cormier. There were four protests to this book. (Grades 6–8, Colorado) Complaint: Sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* BANNED; (Grade 9, academic track, Connecticut) Complaint: Same. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED; (Grade 11, underachieving readers, Kansas) Complaint: Same. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED; (Grade 9, Virginia) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet, rationale, and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE by Anthony Burgess. (Grade 12, college preparatory, Ohio) Complaint: Violence. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

A DAY NO PIGS WOULD DIE by Robert Peck. (Grade 8, Maryland) Complaint: Sexual content—"The breeding scene (Pinkie the pig and Sampson the boar) . . . plants ideas in students' minds about the acceptability of forced sex and rape." *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

Addendum: As in almost every book challenge reported in this issue, the concerned student and parents were offered an alternative selection by the teacher. The teacher writes "The child was assigned Steinbeck's *The Pearl* as an alternative. The parents

objected to that, and some other alternative—I can't remember what—was found that was satisfactory to the parents.

FENCES by August Wilson. (Grade 11, Connecticut) Complaint: Racial epithet. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent. No rationale available.* RETAINED.

THE FOUNTAINHEAD by Ayn Rand. (Grade 12, Quebec) *NCTE Censorship Packet sent.* INDEFINITE outcome; principal did not make a decision after promising to do so.

Addendum: This case took a heavy toll on the teacher. She writes, "I apologize for sounding so cynical, but whereas the profession of teaching is wonderful, the system we are sometimes asked to operate within leaves, to my mind at least, everything to be desired."

THE GIVER by Lois Lowry. (Grade 8, Texas) Complaint: Book endorses abortion. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE by J. K. Rowling. There were two protests to this book. (Grades 5–8, Michigan) Complaint: Witchcraft, violence. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available; letters sent to local newspaper and school board.* BANNED; (Grade 5, Indiana) Complaint: Same. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; letters of support sent.* RETAINED.

Addendum: Of several reports on the Potter book, the Michigan case is the most outrageous. Ignoring a district policy for reviewing controversial materials, the superintendent issued a directive forbidding the book to be used in classrooms, making it accessible only in the library when students bring written permission from parents. This unilateral action was supported by the board president, resulting in continuous protests by students, teachers, and citizens.

HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS by Isabel Allende. (Grade 9, California) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN by Mark Twain. (Grade 8, advanced, Pennsylvania) Complaint: Racial epithet, grade level appropriateness. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; rationale sent.* BANNED at least temporarily—suspended for one year, pending further action, which has not taken place.

INVISIBLE MAN by Ralph Ellison. (Grade 10, Advanced Placement, Texas) Complaint: Violence, nudity, religious concerns. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

THE JOYLUCK CLUB by Amy Tan. (Grade 9, pre-Advanced Placement, Arizona) Complaint: Religious concerns. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

THE ODYSSEY by Homer. (Grade 10, New York) Complaint: Level of difficulty. *NCTE Censorship*

Packet sent; no rationale available. RETAINED.
OF MICE AND MEN by John Steinbeck. (Grade 9, advanced, Oregon) Complaint: Profanity, religious concerns. *NCTE Censorship Packet, rationale, and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

ONE CHILD by Torey Hayden. (Grade 6 classroom library, New Hampshire) Complaint: Realism, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED but protesters might appeal.

ORDINARY PEOPLE by Judith Guest. (Grade 9, Michigan) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent; letter of support sent.* MOVED from Grade 9 to Grade 12 program.

THE SCARLET LETTER by Nathaniel Hawthorne, **A SEPARATE PEACE** by John Knowles, **THE OUTSIDERS** by S. E. Hinton. (Grades 9, 11, Kentucky) Complaints: Profanity, sexual content, depiction of gangs. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationales sent; letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES by Ray Bradbury. (Grade 10, Ohio) *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

THIS STRANGE NEW FEELING by Julius Lester. (Grade 9, Missouri) Complaint: Racial epithet, grade appropriateness. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

A YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER by Michael Dorris. (Middle School, New Jersey) Complaint: Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

Among the recent works protested for which outcomes are as yet unknown are: *All in the Timing* by David Ives; "Bleeder" by Stephen Dobyns; *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger (two challenges); *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier; *A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Peck; *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* by Nancy Farmer; *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card; *Fahrenheit 51* by Ray Bradbury; *Galapagos* by Kurt Vonnegut; *Goodbye, Columbus* by Phillip Roth; *Grendel* by John Gardner; The Harry Potter Series by J. K. Rowling; *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou; *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan; *Native Son* by Richard Wright; *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck; *One Child* by Torey Hayden; *Outrageous Women of Ancient Times* by Stephanie Zvirin; *Rain of Gold* by Victor Villasenor; *The Red Pony* by John Steinbeck; *Rolling Stone* Magazine; *Schindler's List* (videocassette); *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson (two challenges); *Summer of My German Soldier* by Bette Greene; *Taming the Star Runner* by S. E. Hinton; and Poe's "The Telltale Heart." Information on the outcomes of these cases reported to NCTE will be part of future columns in the *SLATE Newsletter*.

CODA—OTHER CALLS FOR ASSISTANCE Censorship of films and videos (i.e., videotapes of well-known feature films) appears to be focusing not only on particular films but also on blanket prohibitions against showing *any* R-rated films. Three recent calls came from teachers whose districts were embarking on such a policy. A Wisconsin teacher and a Georgia language arts supervisor have mounted courageous efforts to keep the ratings of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) from becoming the norm in their districts. They argue that the industry ratings are made without concern for the educational value of films. Letters of support in such cases refer to the Council's booklet, "Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Nonprint Materials," which argues for inclusion of educationally appropriate films without regard to MPAA's ratings. Many a G-rated film is wholly lacking in educational value, while some R-rated films are suitable objects of serious classroom study. In short, industry ratings can indeed be useful guides to parents, but they are not authoritative guides for classroom use.

A widely publicized Virginia case involved removal of a "Read a Banned Book" pamphlet that was posted with other materials outside the room of English teacher Jeff Newton. The principal and the school board did not follow district policy on controversial materials. A letter of support was sent to the board, and a separate letter was published in the local newspaper. (See the February 2000 *Council Chronicle* for a report on this case.) After repeated attempts to move the school board from its entrenched position, the ACLU initiated legal action on the teacher's behalf. At press time a request for a preliminary injunction to re-post the pamphlet had been filed, with a full hearing set for late September.

NCTE is increasingly being viewed by media as a source for comments on matters of censorship. Recent calls from *ABC News*, *The New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and various local newspapers and radio shows have resulted in communicating NCTE's positions to wider publics. Finally, researchers from graduate schools to high schools often call for general or specific information about the Council's position statements, services, and activities.

Now Is the Time for Action!

NCTE members attending the Annual Business Meeting for the Board of Directors and Other Members of the Council during the NCTE Annual Convention in Denver last November passed five resolutions:

- On Diversity
- On Bilingual Education
- On High-Stakes Testing

- On the Intervention of AACTE in English Language Arts Programs
- On Government Intrusion into Classroom Pedagogy

These resolutions differ from many past resolutions because they offer directives to the Council (rather than “to the world”) for action. Please share these resolutions with your constituencies and let us know your suggestions for implementing strategies and making NCTE’s voice be heard.

NCTE resolutions dating from 1970 to 1999 can be found on the NCTE Web site (<http://www.ncte.org/resolutions/date.html>). Please print or copy and paste these texts to use in your own communications with teachers, administrators, parents, and policy-makers.

The next issue of SLATE Newsletter will include the call for resolutions for the 2000 Annual Convention. November 1 is the deadline.

See the resolutions insert in the February 2000 *Council Chronicle*.

Muggles for Harry Potter

Harry Potter books are a publishing sensation but they are also the most challenged books in the country. NCTE has joined “Muggles for Harry Potter” coalition to sponsor a Web site www.mugglesforharrypotter.org to protest censorship attacks against these and other books. Travel to this Web site from the NCTE Web site.

FROM THE EDITOR

What Is Mandated Testing Doing to Instruction?

—V. Pauline Hodges, Region 5 Representative, NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee

You, like I, are probably overwhelmed with mandated testing to prove that we as teachers are really doing our job! I have determined that so far I have lost five teaching periods for testing. And I am due to lose another seven days before we are finished with the spring testing. Of course, because we are so busy meeting mandates from the state legislatures, during this time no instruction takes place, nor can we even give our own forms of evaluation to see how well our students have learned what we have taught in our classrooms this term. And what will the legislators learn? How good our students are at test taking? How frustrated we can make stu-

dents and teachers alike? How well we can play the game?

Now, don’t take this wrong. I do not think standardized tests are not valuable. It is just that we as classroom teachers need to have some input into when and how much we need to test to determine how much knowledge our students have accumulated as a result of our teaching. We should also be able to help determine how much others’ cumulative teaching, how much parental input have played in the students’ “competencies.” We should be able to impart the role the student’s apathetic attitude played as he played tic-tac-toe with the answer sheet while managing not to read one question. We should point out that as we test all students and count the scores of special education and ESL students, along with our average and gifted students, to indicate that our students have mastered content, we do not have a true picture of either student achievement or of teacher competency. When students cannot read the science or social science tests, we are not testing content, but, rather, whether the student can read English well enough to understand the question. Yes, we need to know whether the student can read, but we do not determine whether he understands content by a reading test alone. And that is just what mandated tests do.

In my state, it seems that mandated testing has become the tool of an anti-public education governor to punish teachers and schools alike. In other states it appears to be a political platform for candidates seeking office. Ironically, the majority of these candidates do not understand the development, the norming, or the proper statistical interpretation of standardized tests. Often they interpret “percentile rank” as “percentages” of those who have passed the test. Or they expect all students to exceed the fiftieth percentile, not understanding the impossibility of that happening statistically. But it sounds good as soapbox rhetoric when lawmakers try to impress their constituents that they are being diligent and “policing” us professional educators.

What, then, do we teachers and administrators, as well as college professors, need to do? It is most important for us to educate our local and state representatives and senators. That is our responsibility.

Don’t forget to check the July issue of *The Council Chronicle* for information, registration, and hotel forms for the NCTE Annual Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 16–22, 2000. Come help us recognize SLATE’s 25th Anniversary at the Opening General Banquet, Thursday, November 16, when we award this year’s NCTE/SLATE National Intellectual Freedom Award.

ity. I am appalled at the number of teachers who refuse to get involved in informing the public about what we are doing. Who do we think will do this for us? We cannot sit back and depend on teachers' unions to do our job locally. And, it is far more effective when we make personal contact ourselves with people we know in our communities and states. One tactic I have found effective is to get myself and my superintendent on the speaker circuit at meetings of local civic groups such as Kiwanis, Lions Club, PTA, and Chamber of Commerce to talk about the successes of our students. These groups are looking for speakers and welcome us. Another tactic is to write articles for your local news media. I found, again, that these people were looking for stories. Our local paper included a special section on testing, which I was willing to write, just to inform the public what the scores really meant for our own children in our community. I invited these community leaders into my classroom as speakers to my students. There is nothing like personal contact with kids to wake up our critics.

I am the director of the Alternative Education Program in my school. When we began the program, thanks to a state mandate, there was so much negative feeling in the community, that my superintendent invited parents and the general public in for a reception and information meeting one evening. At that meeting the superintendent, the high school and junior high principals spoke, as well as I. Two years later those who were negative about the program now think it is a great idea. But they would not have if we had not taken steps to inform them. And, yes, our students are expected to perform as well as the others on our state-mandated tests. In fact, they have to take two additional tests, as though more tests would improve the problem which put them into Alternative Education in the first place!

Unless we are willing to take action ourselves, we shall just have more and more testing since that is "visible proof" to our critics whose real agendas are not to improve public education but to do away with it in favor of private schools and vouchers. We cannot afford to play into their hands.

NOTES FROM REGION 3 (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee)

—Sharon Chaney, Region 3 Representative,
NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee

Funding concerns top the list of political issues in many Region 3 states. The situation revolves upon

itself: In understaffed schools, class sizes rise as accountability increases. To meet the demands of their jobs, teachers (who are not always appropriately trained to do so) struggle with mainstreaming special needs students into the traditional classroom settings, with maintaining a safe environment for learning, with keeping themselves informed about best theory and practice through professional development activities. To bolster revenues for education spending, the possibility of a state income tax has been discussed—and rejected thus far—in the Tennessee legislature. Alabama educators find themselves lobbying each year for money to fund their writing project. Citizens across the states get reports that huge expenditures for education are insufficient and that student achievement is likewise and relatively low.

Across Region 3, standardized testing to determine levels of student achievement and teacher competency continues to be a political football. In North Carolina, where schools receive ABC money (through the ABCs of Public Education plan), based on student test performance, teachers feel compelled to prepare students for specific tests. End-of-grade and end-of-course tests too often drive the curriculum. Alabama state lawmakers are heavily involved in the reading issue, having established teacher-training centers at key schools. A test for teachers is being discussed and developed but has not yet been implemented. In Florida and Tennessee, comprehensive assessment tests are used as graduation markers. Teacher competency heads the list of Georgia concerns, where the House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly for a bill to end tenure for teachers.

In October 1999, Sharon Chaney, Region 3 Representative to the NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee, received a \$25,000 Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award. This award program provides public recognition and financial rewards to elementary and secondary school teachers, principals, and other education professionals who are furthering excellence in education. Educators who receive the awards are making children's lives more secure and worthwhile—by cultivating their minds, their characters and, in many cases, by protecting their essential welfare. The Milken Family considers the award to be their soundest investment in the future, and confirmation of the crucial role and exponential impact of education and educators.

In June 1999, Chaney, Local Arrangements Chair for the NCTE Nashville Annual Convention, was also elected to serve on the NCTE Secondary Section Steering Committee.

NOTES FROM REGION 6 (Louisiana, New Mexico, Texas)

—Ellen Swain, Region 6 Representative,
NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee

Money for Education Is the Issue in New Mexico!

Two years ago, I think, the New Mexico legislature passed a bill for a lottery to help fund state tuition for students. This has been working really well, but the money soon was depleted. In this year's session, the legislature passed a short-term financial fix for college scholarship programs funded by the state lottery, providing for a 50-50 division of lottery proceeds between scholarship and school construction. However, this awaits the governor's signature. He will probably sign. In the past, the lottery has helped many New Mexico students attend college.

This year the legislature also passed a school budget which included an additional \$93 million for public schools, including a 6.25 percent pay raise for teachers. The bill also awaits the governor's action. Getting these funds is a must, but the governor may not sign. Teachers in New Mexico are hurting financially and any increase in pay seems to include additional responsibilities and duties.

However, the governor's voucher plan failed. We have six charter schools in New Mexico, and next year the Rio Rancho schools will be a charter district.

Merit pay has raised some interest lately, but that bill failed. All-day kindergarten and early childhood literacy programs passed and are waiting for governor's action, but most expect this bill will fail due to its budget of \$11 million.

I've written letters to our senators and representatives concerning funding for libraries.

In 1999, Ellen Swain, Region 6 Representative to the NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee, received one of six New Mexico Golden Apple Foundation Awards. The foundation housed at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, provides outstanding classroom teachers with an Intel personal computer, \$1,500, professional development opportunities for themselves, and encouragement to continue their work for better educational opportunities for their students. Applications for the award require a letter of nomination, a letter from a former student, interviews with parents and colleagues, visits to the nominee's classroom, and numerous written responses to questions. Swain, along with the other 1999 awardees, attended the International Literacy Conference in Oxford, England, this spring.

Book Offers Clear and Calm Lesson on Learning . . .

—Connie Weaver, Board Member,
Michigan for Public Education (MPE)

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"Book offers clear and calm lesson on learning," so writes Michele Landsberg of the *Toronto Star* (9-18-99). Landsberg is referring to Alfie Kohn's newest book, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards"* (Houghton Mifflin). Here is an excerpt from Landsberg's review:

"Calmly, clearly, with humor and zest, Kohn has assembled the available evidence, analyzed it, and sliced through the rhetoric of the education conservatives.

"'When people talk about school success or achievement, what criteria are they using?' Kohn asked. 'If it is temporary retention of facts and low-level skills, then you can achieve it with competition, rewards, drills or tests.'

"You can call that success, Kohn says—but only if you don't care if children ever develop critical thinking, a zest for learning, creativity, and a real understanding of ideas. The mania for 'basics' and for standardized testing, as Kohn documents in his lively book, is the enemy of these truly important capacities."

Landsberg then asks her readers, "How did so many of us get the idea that the schools are in chaos and the only way to make them more 'successful' is to adopt these ruinous remedies? We have been suckers for conservative propagandists who bad-mouth the public education system precisely because it is public. We're being hyped and hustled toward a state of mind so frantic that we'll beg for charter and voucher schools. . . .

"As for testing and the naïve faith that tests will somehow improve learning, Kohn offers an analogy: 'Suppose we decide to raise the standards of hospital care by taking patients' temperature on a regular basis. Just before inserting the thermometers, nurses run around—administering huge doses of Aspirin and cold drinks. Voila! The temperatures are down—hospital care is improving!'

"We wouldn't be that stupid, would we? Especially not when our children's future is at stake?"

Kohn's book shocks us into seeing how close we've come to that state of unreason, Landsberg comments, in suggesting that we all need to read Kohn's book *The Schools Our Children Deserve*. (P.S. The scholarship of MPE Board members Connie Weaver and Ellen Brinkley is cited in the book too!)

For more information, check Kohn's Web site—<http://www.alfiekohn.org/standards/standards.htm> or

contact the Michigan Coordinator at rgibson@pipeline.com or (313) 577-0918.

Information You Need—and Where to Get It!

Reprinted with permission from *Michigan for Public Education*, Fall 1999 Newsletter

Have you been reading Gerald Bracey's annual reports on public education in the October *Phi Delta Kappan*? The reports that debunk disinformation about public schools and provide the actual information?

Now you can receive such information throughout the year by email. Bracey has started an email group and a Web page to expose disinformation and provide accurate information about the state and successes of public education.

You can join this email group by going to Bracey's Web page and following his links to subscribe to EDDRA, which stands for "Education Disinformation Detection and Reporting Agency": www.americatomorrow.com/bracey/

Happy debunking!

Help for Teachers Under Attack

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The book *Caught Off Guard: Teachers Rethinking Censorship and Controversy*, recently published by MPE board member Ellen Brinkley (Allyn & Bacon, 1999) grows out of the author's awareness of a climate of public distrust that exists in relation to public schools. *Caught Off Guard* examines the slippery definitions of "censorship" and describes belief systems that put pressure on classroom teachers. The book also addresses some of the perpetually hot issues—science and creationism, sex education, religion, teaching reading and writing—that are frequently the focus of challenges by parents and community protestors. Included in the book are suggestions for appropriate ways to teach character and moral values and a blueprint to help educators and school board members establish school policies and procedures that will protect academic and intellectual freedom. The final chapter of the 300-page book includes a call to educators and all citizens to take action to support and strengthen public education, based on the assumption that, "If we want to make a positive difference, we need as much energy and passion for preserving intellectual freedom and for supporting and strengthening public education as our opponents have for fighting it." For more information, visit www.abacon.com or call 1-800-278-3525.

CALL FOR SLATE STARTER SHEETS

SLATE invites you to submit *Starter Sheets* on sociopolitical aspects of education and in support of NCTE positions on the teaching of the English language arts (NCTE position statements and resolutions can be found on the NCTE Web site www.ncte.org). Some recent topics have included grouping and tracking NCTE resolutions and position statements on teaching the English language arts, student achievement, and the teaching of grammar.

SLATE Starter Sheets are intended as action-oriented information sources for English and language arts professionals. *Starter Sheets* run 2,000–4,000 words in length. The format for *Starter Sheets* should include the following:

- Presentation and background of the issue/topic
- General discussion, including NCTE positions
- Recommendations for action or further examination
- Brief list of references and/or core resources.

Starter Sheets manuscripts will undergo a blind review by at least two outside referees who have expertise in the area. Please submit four copies of the manuscript, typewritten and double-spaced on 8 ½" × 11" margins. Use your name and affiliation on a title page only. Send manuscripts to *SLATE Starter Sheets*, c/o NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096, or to Millie Davis via e-mail at mdavis@ncte.org or fax at 217-278-3760.

SLATE NEWSLETTER

SLATE Newsletter is looking for short articles (250–500 words) on issues related to the teaching of the English language arts. Send your contribution to Editor, *SLATE Newsletter*, c/o NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096, or to Millie Davis via e-mail at mdavis@ncte.org or fax at 217-278-3760.

CALL FOR PERSONAL OPINION PAPERS

You are invited to submit a Personal Opinion Paper (POP) for possible publication in the *SLATE Newsletter*. The focus can be on any sociopolitical issue that is related to teaching and learning (recent topics have included the teaching of reading and the awarding of grades). Send POPs (maximum length 500 words) to Editor, *SLATE Newsletter*, c/o NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096, or to Millie Davis via e-mail at mdavis@ncte.org or fax at 217-278-3760.

JOIN THE NCTE EDUCATION ADVOCACY NETWORK!

Please take a moment to sign up yourself (and others) as part of the NCTE Education Advocacy Network. As Congress considers education legislation, local educators like yourself have an important opportunity to give your legislators the benefit of your knowledge and experience. As a part of this network, you will be notified of pending legislation and NCTE's positions on that legislation. Please send completed forms to Field Network Specialist, National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; fax the form to 217-278-3760; e-mail the information to rbowling@ncte.org; or phone the information to Rachel Bowling at 1-800-369-6283 ext. 3630.

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I would be willing to do the following:

- Call Write Visit
 Invite a legislator to my school
 Advise a legislator on English language arts education issues
 Speak to the media on English language arts education issues

Urge others to:

- Call Write Visit

On one of the following issues:

- Literacy Teaching
 Funding Professional Development
 Writing Other

SLATE Newsletter is sent to individuals who contribute \$15 or more per year to support SLATE. Send your contribution to NCTE/SLATE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096.

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SLATE TO YOU—The function of SLATE is to influence public attitudes and policy decisions affecting the teaching of English language arts at local, state, and national levels and to implement and publicize the policies adopted by NCTE. As part of its charge, SLATE is officially recognized as NCTE's intellectual freedom network.

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