

CENSORING OURSELVES: ANOTHER SIDE TO BOOK CHALLENGES

Michelle Tremmel, SLATE Newsletter Editor

As I thought about our attempt in this newsletter to accompany Charlie Suhor's bi-annual report on book challenges around the nation by putting a personal face on the issue of censorship, I remembered an article I'd read a couple years ago by Peggy Orenstein called "Censorship Follies, Town by Town." At the time it struck me particularly because of its unusual perspective: that of a censored author—a book Orenstein had written was challenged in an Ohio school—and because it brought attention in a succinctly effective way to perhaps the most wide-ranging, and least publicized, effect of book challenges: teacher self-censorship. Although they rarely talk about it, teachers, even tenured ones, censor themselves frequently because the ordeal of weathering a challenge is often not worth the tremendous personal stress, even if it doesn't go as far as the board of education.

In my 24-year teaching career, I've been cautious and, though I don't like to admit it, to some extent guilty of self-censorship. I've also been lucky, having had only one set of parents four or five years ago attempt to censor a book. It wasn't even a book I'd assigned, but one in my classroom independent reading library. The book in question was Stephen King's *The Dark Side*, which I acquired along with a small collection of other books when my step-mom died. Knowing that even reluctant readers will gravitate toward King, I put it on the shelf to increase the offerings for readers needing a book to meet my classes' independent reading requirement (I taught grades 7–12 at the time).

The trouble started when one of my seventh graders checked out the book and took it home. (By the way, our school library had a whole shelf of King books, though not this particular title, I think.) The next day I got a call from the student's mom and then his dad, both of whom I knew pretty well because we belonged to the same church, objecting to the book's language, condemning me for having the book on the shelf, and demanding that it be removed.

I tried to explain my rationale for the book's presence, the most important part of which was that my classroom library was meant to serve the needs of *all* my students, some of whom were 18. I suggested that their son simply return the book, if they objected to it, and pick any different one from the classroom, the library, or any other sources of which they

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FROM THE FRONT LINE Fewer Calls, More Book Bannings—Why?

Charles Suhor, NCTE/SLATE Field Representative

An odd pattern has developed since my October *SLATE Newsletter* report on censorship cases. Approximately 62 calls have come in, a reduction of about 23% when compared to the 80 calls reported for the comparable time period last year. But the *outcomes* of the current cases were decidedly more negative, with almost double the number of bannings or limitations of works studied during the current period.

It is reasonable to speculate that the drop in calls was the result of preoccupation with the September 11 terrorist attack. As with the reduction in calls during the 2000 presidential election, the concerns of the nation moved away from local matters in the wake of the World Trade Center attack. Possibly, an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity since September 11 contributed to decisions to ban or limit works that made individuals or groups uncomfortable. Self-censorship and overcautious selection of books accounted for several limitations on materials. Finally, almost all of the negative outcomes occurred in instances in which the callers declined the offer of a letter of support from NCTE. Arguably, the NCTE/SLATE program can help to tilt the scale toward retaining challenged materials.

Another factor might be the temporary shutdown of NCTE's online form titled "Record of Censorship Challenge" due to revisions on the Council's Web site. Previously, this convenient resource had been used increasingly by teachers and others reporting protests.

On the positive side I should note that, overwhelmingly, schools and districts that call NCTE have two policies or practices in place: provisions for students to read a substitute work when a student or parent objects, and an established process for orderly review of challenges that arise. Many schools also have in place formal or informal procedures through which English language arts teachers collegially select works to be studied.

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SLATE newsletters are offered as resources for dealing with current issues affecting the teaching of English language arts. **Reproduce these materials** and use them to help promote better understanding of the goals of English teaching.

JUST A CLICK AWAY!

SLATE Newsletter Will Be Sent to You by E-mail!



This is your last printed issue of the *SLATE Newsletter*!

Beginning with the September 2002 issue, the *SLATE Newsletter* will be sent to you three times a year at the e-mail address you've given to us here at NCTE. We're sure you'll appreciate less paper in your mailbox! And we'll save some trees in the process!

We're excited to be able

to use this new format to send you terrific articles and important details about issues that affect the teaching of the English language arts. One exciting bonus will be that in the electronic version of the newsletter you'll receive ready links to pertinent information such as bills before Congress and intellectual freedom Web sites—just a click away! And, you'll be able to access all this information both through your personal e-mail copy of the newsletter and from the NCTE Web site at <http://www.ncte.org/SLATE>, where you'll also find an archive of past newsletter issues, *SLATE Starter Sheets*, and other SLATE-related materials.

If you have any questions, please contact Millie Davis, NCTE Staff Liaison (mdavis@ncte.org or 800-369-6283, ext. 3634). Also, please send us your name and e-mail address so that we can get the newsletter off to you. Just fill out the online form at the NCTE Web site's homepage—click on "update my e-mail address"—or e-mail affsec@ncte.org with the information.

NCTE RESOLUTIONS

One of the most important ways you can make a difference is to submit a resolution on an issue of importance to English language arts education. NCTE resolutions, along with NCTE guidelines and position statements, tell the world (English language arts teachers, administrators, parents, the press, community members) what we feel is best practice (and sometimes what we feel is not) in English language arts education. These resolutions are voted on at the Annual Business Meeting for the Board of Directors and Other Members of the Council (Friday evening, November 22, 2002, Atlanta, Georgia), and they do make a difference. For example, the NCTE resolution on class size was put into practice in California elementary schools several years ago, although it's currently endangered by predicted budget cuts. The 1984 resolution condemning the use of writing as punishment is still being used today to insist that the practice be eliminated.

Submissions for resolutions are due in early November of each year. Refer to the NCTE Web site under "Resolutions" (<http://www.ncte.org/resolutions/>) to see current resolutions, which are good models for resolution format, and the rules and procedures governing the submission of resolutions.

2002 NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee

CHAIR

Agathaniki (Niki) Locklear
(Simon Kenton High School)
3010 Magnolia Court
Edgewood, KY 41017-3352
859-331-0643 (h)
859-363-4141 (o)
nlocklea@kenton.k12.ky.us

REGION 1: CT, DE, ME,
MA, NH, NJ, NY, RI, VT
Nancy A. Olson
(Brattleboro High School)
45 Pratt Road
Putney, VT 05346
802-387-5963 (h)
802-257-0356 (o)
olsonnan@together.net

REGION 2: DC, KY, MD,
OH, PA, VA, WV
Ruth McClain
(Ohio University-Chillicothe)
1069 Edgewood Drive
Chillicothe, OH 45601-2155
740-775-7494 (h)
740-774-7200 (o)
740-773-0112 (fax)
rmcclain@brighthouse.net

REGION 3: AL, FL, GA,
MS, NC, SC, TN
Maryann Manning
(University of Alabama-
Birmingham)
4344 Clairmont Avenue S.
Birmingham, AL 35222-3726
205-592-9953 (h)
205-934-8359 (o)
mmanning@uab.edu

REGION 4: IL, IN, MB,
MI, MN, ND, SD, WI
SLATE Starter Sheet Editor
Reade W. Dornan
(Central Michigan University)
1309 Daisy Lane
East Lansing, MI 48823-5146
517-351-7653 (h)
517-774-3371 (o)
517-774-1271 (fax)
reade.dornan@cmich.edu

REGION 5: AR, IA, KS,
MO, NE, OK
SLATE Newsletter Editor
Michelle R. Tremmel
(Iowa State University)
526 NE 5th Street
Ankeny, IA 50021-1913
515-965-1376 (h)
515-294-8374 (o)
515-294-6814 (fax)
mtremmel@iastate.edu

REGION 6: LA, NM, TX
Aurelia Dávila De Silva
319 Bluff Knolls
San Antonio, TX 78216
210-494-6789 (h)
210-921-0380 (fax)
aureliasilva@hotmail.com

REGION 7: AB, AK, BC, ID,
INCTE, MT, OR, SK, WA,
WY
Linda M. Christensen
2814 NE Mason Street
Portland, OR 97211-7112
503-249-8410 (h)
503-916-5840, ext. 428 (o)
503-916-2727 (fax)
lchristensen@pps.k12.or.us

REGION 8: AZ, CA, CO, HI,
NV, UT
Donald Mayfield
1835 Sunset Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92103-1641
619-296-5740 (h)
619-296-5740 (f)
donmayfi@sdcoe.k12.ca.us

A TIME TO RETREAT

Ruth McClain, Region 2 Representative NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee, Chillicothe, Ohio

The hills across the road from my high school were bathed in the sunlight of a gorgeous late spring morning. After my third period class, I made my way down the corridor to my mailbox in the high school office with that beautiful sun pouring through the office windows. I felt good. The literary club anthology—an anthology of which I was proud—was finished, printed, and distributed to the students.

I pulled open the mailbox drawer and saw the note lying on top of the junk mail. It was from two colleagues who requested a meeting with me in the library as soon as possible. They had a problem with one of the entries. The student who had written the piece was a National Merit Semi-Finalist and the student editor. Her piece began,

“You’re fired.”

He looked so calm—so unaffected. He just didn’t care that he had ruined someone else’s life.

“You’re a bastard!” I told him. “You don’t care about anyone. Just your Goddamn money and that’s all.”

Obviously, what they objected to was the profanity, and they demanded that the anthologies be collected so the story could be either deleted or revised. These two faculty members and I were sponsors of a club that published student writing, art, and photography, and it was obvious to me that the fact that their names were on the credits as club sponsors was the real problem. They felt embarrassed even though the student piece had been published with the permission of both the principal and the superintendent.

I could not make this decision as I did not own the piece. And so, the following day, we met with Amy, the student author. The demands and explanations having been made, she requested some time to think about her decision, for deleting or revising the piece would mean an extra expenditure of money not to mention editing the booklet.

A week later, we met for the third time. I wanted the decision to be entirely Amy’s, and I will never forget her response as she sat across the table and explained.

“I want you to know,” she said, “that while I don’t necessarily condone this kind of language in my own personal life, it fits my character, and I won’t change the story. You do what you have to do, but I’d rather have the story taken out than have it changed just because you can’t deal with the language.” The two sponsors looked a bit taken aback.

Under the table, my hands applauded her and I wanted to stand and shout, “You go, girl.” But, this was her moment. My moment would come when I did as they asked. I collected all the anthologies I could, wrote an article about how the club had begun, took them back to the printer, and had them reworked, replacing my article with Amy’s. That task finished, I then approached my colleagues and resigned my responsibilities from that club. I had been one of the three founding sponsors and had published 11 volumes of student work, but I could do this no longer. I listened to their patronizing tone when they tried to persuade me to stay because “you do such a wonderful job with this.”

The irony of the situation came later. While I was the

editor of the club anthology, I was also, at that time, taking my composition classes to a writing retreat each spring and publishing an anthology of the work of just my own students. I published Amy’s piece just as she had written it. There were no reprisals, no complaints, no embarrassments. That same spring, I presented this controversy as a session at the spring conference of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts. Amy came and, in her presentation to those attending the session, she said, “In re-reading, I realize that it’s not really a very good story, but I wanted to see what it was like to be censored. I’m not sorry I chose to have the story deleted because more people have read it than ever would have if it had been included in the club’s anthology in the first place.”

Since that time, I have used Amy’s story in a variety of settings to illustrate one fact: we are so fearful of words and ideas. If we continue to fear ideas, one day there will be no ideas left. I haven’t seen Amy in many years, and sometimes I wonder if she ever thinks about this situation. I doubt she has forgotten it. I know that I haven’t. It has remained with me to remind me always that when we allow students academic freedom, we must be prepared to deal with the consequences and that, sometimes, it’s more important to retreat from a controversy than fight it so as not to jeopardize an entire program. We can regroup later. Creating a climate for real writing is a risky business but, then, what isn’t that’s really worth doing?

For more information about censorship and student publications, visit the Student Press Law Center Web site at <http://www.splc.org/>.

CHALLENGE TO A SUMMER READING LIST

Lace Cassidy, recent member, NCTE Standing Committee Against Censorship, Westfield, New Jersey

Censorship is an issue that never goes away. It comes and goes in the public eye depending on the materials or actions that are being attacked and/or the celebrity status of those involved. There are many people who wish to join the frenzy caused by high-profile attempts at censorship. People, young and old, want to free Harry Potter and protect his creator, J. K. Rowling, from those critics who attempt to demonize Harry, his classmates, and professors at Hogwarts. When a minister in New Mexico burns the Harry Potter books and others, it will probably be reported on the evening news and covered in the major newspapers.

Unfortunately, not all censorship attempts receive prime-time coverage. What happens to the educators involved when it is not a high-profile case? How do they react when they are singled out locally or statewide yet escape the glare of the national media?

Douglas Felter is the Language Arts Supervisor, grades K–12, in a small town in New Jersey. Located about 45 minutes from New York City, the district was formerly part of a regional district. Students attended local schools (two elementary, one

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middle) for grades K–8, then a regional high school for grades 9–12. Five years ago the communities in this regional district voted to disband. Because the high school was already located in this town, the district went from K–8 to K–12.

Although Felter had dealt with several challenges to materials when he served as supervisor for the regional district, the biggest controversy erupted the year the district disbanded and he became supervisor for one of the original districts. It centered on summer reading lists.

Taking into account past criticisms about the scope (too broad) and academic level (not serious enough) of previous lists, Felter planned a list for each grade that offered fewer titles than previous lists yet appealed to a range of academic abilities and student interests. He checked all the usual sources administrators use when they are attempting to compile such lists, studying the annotations for books in catalogs to look for reading and interest levels. The lists were completed for all grades and approved by the board of education, and the local library was notified of the choices. As school ended, students were sent home with their respective grade-level lists, and Felter took his family off to Ohio to visit relatives.

Then came the phone calls. The Superintendent of Schools called to say there was a problem with one of the books. A former school board member, feeling there were inappropriate sex and drinking in this particular novel, had made a complaint about *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence, one book on the seventh-grade list. Unfortunately, the person he called was his local town councilman, not anyone in the school system. Suddenly, this small town was featured on the tri-state CBS-TV news. The next time Felter answered the phone in Ohio, it was to discover the newspapers had tracked him down. CN-8, the Comcast cable channel, featured the story.

Recalling the events today, Felter remembers that his first reaction was disbelief. After all, he had done his homework, checked all the experts, and trusted the recommendation in the catalog that the book had a reading level of grade 7 and an interest level of 7+. That information was there in print. He admits that, as a professional, he was devastated. Here he was in the first two months on the job in the newly realigned district, and he was up to his eyeballs in controversy. In his words, he felt “sandbagged.”

When he returned from vacation, according to district policy, the book was reviewed again. Felter agreed that it did not belong at that grade level, and it was removed from the list. It should be noted that not one other call was received about this book.

Felter views the events of that summer as a learning experience. Although he did not take the attack on *The Diviners* personally, and does not take other incidents personally, even now, he feels that the complainant should have approached him first and should have followed the established school policy. He notes that the incident reinforced the need for a district to have a challenge policy in place. He welcomes open discussion of the materials included in the curriculum and believes that a school district

should be able to justify the materials included in that curriculum. He does feel that book catalogs should provide better information about the titles they promote. If a company offers books from many publishers, it should investigate publishers’ claims for grade and interest levels and may want to make note of mature themes.

Looking back at this incident, people might say that Felter was lucky. The incident was eventually handled to everyone’s satisfaction and did not attract national attention. No other complaints were received and, eventually, all media attention, local and state, faded away.

However, questions remain, and perhaps a lesson or two can be learned. Is it always possible to separate one’s professional and private personas, to stand back and feel that having one’s professional decisions and actions challenged is not “personal”? And how universal are the designations “grade level” and “interest level” among publishers?

The importance of a district policy for dealing with challenged materials cannot be ignored, both for the structure it imposes on the proceedings and for the protection it affords those involved. This is a message that permeates the literature on censorship and, obviously, is one to which we must listen.

The final and probably most difficult lesson is not to let challenges like this one become personal. Those faced with challenges must be committed, follow procedures, and get support if they need it.

BANNED BOOK WEEK SURVEY

*Wisconsin State Reading Association Intellectual Freedom Committee:
Chris Baumgartner, Aimee J. Jahns, Cheryl Lueneburg,
and Andrea Manderle*

To stir awareness of books that have been either challenged or banned, our committee—Intellectual Freedom—decided to survey the staff members of the school where we all teach, Shepard Hills Elementary School in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, using the American Library Association’s (ALA’s) Top 100 Challenged Books List. We introduced the idea at a staff meeting right before Banned Book Week last September. Then we passed out copies of the list and asked those interested to mark books that they either had read to students or had read themselves. Out of 35 staff members, 20 surveys were returned. From those surveys, we compiled our own top-ten challenged books list:

1. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
2. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
3. *To Kill a Mockingbird*
4. *James and the Giant Peach*
5. *A Light in the Attic*
6. *The Outsiders*
7. The Harry Potter series
8. *Where’s Waldo?*
9. *Of Mice and Men*
10. *Blubber* and *A Wrinkle in Time*

Both *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the Harry Potter books were also on the ALA top-ten list.

In addition to marking the books they had read, people felt compelled to make comments. Below are some of the more telling ones:

“Give me back the list so I can read more of these books.” N.S.

“I love these ### books. Maybe I should start an Art Freedom Sheet—Who has viewed *David* by Michaelangelo?” D.B.

“I read and I knowingly let my children read.” M.E.

What surprised and pleased all of us on the committee was how offended people in the building were by some of the titles on the list. Also, the list was a topic of conversation in the teachers’ lounge and around the building for a few weeks. The level of awareness had risen, and people were asking questions. As a result of this, we have decided to make the survey an annual event, targeting different groups in the district. Try surveying the people in your school building, and see what happens!

If you’d like to see what books made the list of 100, contact the American Library Association or access its Web site at <http://www.ala.org/bbooks/index.html> or <http://www.ala.org/bbooks/top100bannedbooks.html>.

WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO TO ENABLE STUDENTS TO HAVE GREATER ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

Margaret T. Sacco, member, NCTE Standing Committee Against Censorship, Associate Professor, Miami University of Ohio

Most educators agree that preparing students for a lifetime of computer use is just as important as learning the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The Internet is a logical educational tool because it offers expert opinions, worldwide connections to schools and other cultures, specialized instruction, technological proficiency, and exposure to new knowledge that the student may not have an opportunity to learn. However, the Internet is a constantly changing dynamic communication medium that includes, e.g., books, newspapers, documents, manuscripts, maps, movies, music, chat rooms, e-mail, adult bulletin boards, virtual visits, advertising, and shopping opportunities. Additionally, the Internet is unmanaged, unsupervised, and unedited which means anyone can post information online that may advertise itself as hard fact. Also the Internet can be dangerous for the naïve and uninitiated.

Therefore, public concern for the safety of minors has led to the passage of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and Neighborhood Children’s Internet Protection Act (NCIPA), which requires schools and libraries receiving special federal funding to block or filter certain material deemed harmful to children from the Internet. The American Library Association and The American Civil Liberties Union have filed a suit claiming that this law violates the First Amendment rights of children

and adults. Research findings indicate that blocking or filtering devices can easily be circumvented and do not protect minors from objectionable material. Instead these devices block access to harmless and needed information.

Educators have an obligation to ensure that the Internet continues to be a great democratic institution providing equal access to books and resources to users of all ages and economic backgrounds. Users and parents need to be reminded that institutions are not responsible for what is on the Internet. Parents need to sign permission forms for their children to use the Internet and participate in chat groups. Only parents can say what their child can or cannot access or participate in on the Internet and not what other people’s children can or cannot do.

Institutions must have written policies ensuring appropriate user access to the Internet that include the NCTE’s *Students’ Right to Read* (<http://www.ncte.org/censorship/>) and ALA’s *Access to Electronic Information Services and Networks* (<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/electacc.html>). They need to educate all users on how to effectively use the Internet, how to select and evaluate information, and how to be safe and not give out any personal information. Educational institutions must not use filtering or blocking software and/or customized card systems to limit user access to the Internet. Instead the honor system should be used requiring users to sign written contracts agreeing to abide by specified rules and regulations to limit institutional liability. Parents must sign for minors. Users should be denied usage and/or receive disciplinary actions if they violate rules: for instance, accessing pornography, violating copyright laws, engaging in any illegal activities, playing games, advertising products, using profanity, participating in hate sites and/or sending threatening messages, sending and/or preparing chain letters, and engaging in other inappropriate behavior. Users need to be warned that e-mail and all their computer activities will be vigilantly monitored for their safety.

Note that the National Coalition Against Censorship’s Free Expression Policy Project has recently published Internet Filters: A Public Policy Report that is available on their Web site <http://www.ncac.org>. The survey finds Internet filters to be flawed.

NCTE ANNUAL CONVENTION IN ATLANTA!

The NCTE Annual Convention will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, November 21–24, with workshops and the CEL conference on November 25–26. When your *Convention Preview* arrives this summer (it’s the July issue of *The Council Chronicle*), don’t forget to sign up for the free SLATE Workshop on Monday, November 25 (“Organizing for Change: Creating Alliances of Teachers and Parents”). Other SLATE sessions include “Intensive and Systematic Phonics Instruction: Legislative Mandates and Research” and “Professional Readiness: Cute Ideas Are Neat, But They Won’t Count If We Teach to a Test.” The Standing Committee Against Censorship is sponsoring sessions on “Self-Censorship in the Classroom: Sound Teaching Practice or...?” and “If Fiction Is Make-Believe, Why Do Censors Hate Me?” (with Orson Scott Card).

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approved. He could even read the Bible to fulfill his independent reading if that's what they wished.

That didn't satisfy the parents, though, and they went beyond me to two principals and the media center director, finally withdrawing their complaint before it went out of the school, probably because the district has an extensive process with quite a bit of paperwork for challenging educational material. Still, being dragged into an attempt at censorship even as small as this one caused me a lot of anxiety, and if I were still teaching secondary English, I might think twice about having that King book around. However, I'm also proud that I stood up for its presence in my classroom, not caving in and banning it myself.

From this experience I learned the importance of two things in weathering such challenges: 1) administrators who trust and support teachers and the choices they make in their classroom and 2) sound, well-established procedures that those who would seek to limit students' access to reading and other educational materials must follow in order to pursue a censoring agenda. In my small personal brush with censorship, I was fortunate to have these. If anything, these help teachers muster the courage to stand fast if challenged. On the other hand, standing alone makes more probable what Orenstein says she fears: that teachers will "think twice before assigning their students anything controversial or even material that depicts real-life events."

Policies and procedures both for adopting reading materials for the English language arts classroom and for challenges against such materials are available in the NCTE policy statements Guidelines for Selection of Materials for Use in English Language Arts Programs and The Students' Right to Read, both of which can be found with other helpful resources at the NCTE Anti-Censorship Center <http://www.ncte.org/censorship/>.

Fewer Calls, More Book Bannings—Why?

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All calls received prompt telephone, fax, or e-mail responses, followed by other action when requested. Listed alphabetically below are some of the cases that deal with censorship of particular works. Actions taken are italicized. "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. OUTCOMES (when known at press time) are reported. An asterisk (*) before a title indicates that it was previously reported but the outcome was then unknown.

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; or visit www.ncte.org/censorship/ and click on the "Report a Censorship Incident" option.

***ATHLETIC SHORTS** Chris Crutcher (Ungraded class, 9–12, Missouri) Brutality, homosexuality, AIDS. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* BANNED.

Addendum: *After initially receiving administration support for teaching the book, the teacher was required to withdraw it "due to the VERY VOCAL minority who objected. . . . I could try to teach this book again in a few years, and I most likely will, but the wounds from the frontal assaults by those parents from last year are still too fresh for me to try it again just now."*

***BLUBBER** Judy Blume (Grade 4, North Carolina) Profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

THE BLUEST EYE Toni Morrison (Grade 11 honors, Ohio) Sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; rationale and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

Addendum: *The teacher writes, "I really cannot tell you how much your support means to me. . . . My department is thrilled that there is an organization meeting these needs."*

BRIAR ROSE Jane Yolen (Grade 8, Florida) Reference to homosexuality. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

CEREMONY Leslie Silko (Grade 12, Advanced Placement, Pennsylvania) Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent.* BANNED.

CHILD OF THE OWL Laurence Yep (Grade 7, Ohio) Profanity, depiction of gambling and prostitutes. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

THE CHOCOLATE WAR Robert Cormier (Grade 8, Florida) Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* LIMITED to Grade 10 Honors.

Addendum: *The teacher notes that this is a DE FACTO BANNING because grade 10 teachers are not interested in teaching the book. She was not permitted to speak before the review committee.*

***THE DEATH OF ARTEMIO CRUZ** Carlos Fuentes (Grade 11, International Baccalaureate course) Profanity, sexual content, religious objections. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

DETOUR FOR EMILY Marilyn Reynolds (Grade 9, California) Sexual content. *NCTE informed after banning; follow-up letter sent concerning future prevention.* BANNED.

***DRAMA ACTIVITIES** (Grades 9–12, Nevada) Profanity, sexual references in student-authored and other dramatic scenes. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent.* TEACHER'S CONTRACT RENEWED after grievance procedure.

FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON Daniel Keyes (Grade 8, Texas) Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* SELF-CENSORED by teacher after parent conference.

"GETTING A JOB" (short story) Maya Angelou (Grade 10, Washington) Objection to the phrase "stupid whites." *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

THE GIRL WHO OWNED A CITY O. T. Nelson (Grade 6, New York) "Deadly virus" brings terrorism to mind. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE (The movie—field trip) J. K. Rowling (Grades 6–9, Missouri) Sorcery, religious objections. *NCTE Censorship Packet*

and rationale sent. RETAINED.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Grade 7, Maryland) “Too difficult.” *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS Maya Angelou (Grade 11, Advanced Placement, North Carolina) Profanity, sexual content. *NCTE Censorship Packet, rationale, and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

JULIE OF THE WOLVES Jean Craighead George (Middle School, Pennsylvania) *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

KAFFIR BOY Mark Mathabane (Grades 9–12, World History/Literature, North Carolina) “Offensive to whites,” reference to homosexuality, other sexual content, profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent; no rationale available.* BANNED.

Addendum: *Against the recommendation of the district review committee, the board voted 3–2 to ban the book, without discussion of the motion.*

THE LEARNING TREE Gordon Parks (Grade 9, North Carolina) Profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* BANNED.

Addendum: *The teacher writes, “We are no longer allowed to teach this text at our school. Some teachers push the envelope and teach it.”*

***LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE** Laura Esquivel (Grade 12, Advanced Placement, California) *NCTE Censorship Packet, several reviews, and other support material sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

Addendum: *The teacher writes, “The board voted 5–2 to keep the book despite the fact that the parents of the student who complained read excerpts aloud during the board meeting. Our system worked . . . none of my students second semester asked for an alternative assignment, although several wrote essays in a subsequent assignment critical of the conduct of the characters in the book.”*

LORD OF THE FLIES William Golding (Grade 10, Indiana) Violence, pessimism. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

MISSISSIPPI BRIDGE Mildred Taylor (Grade 5, North Carolina) N-word, “racially motivated.” *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

Addendum: *The review committee wrote an excellent rationale for the book and has made it available to NCTE for future use.*

ORDINARY PEOPLE Judith Guest (Grade 12, College Preparatory, New Jersey) Suicide, profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet, rationale, and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY! Mildred Taylor (Grades 9–12, Illinois) Racial content. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* BANNED.

Addendum: *As with Mississippi Bridge (above), the previous book by Mildred Taylor (a black author), the challenge here came from black parents. The teacher writes, “The district had another racial incident early in the year . . . and I think the administration is very hesitant about reinstating this book. The curriculum committee is trying to find African American parents who will support the book, but my personal belief is that the district wants this shelved for a while. I don’t agree with it, but as a new, nontenured teacher I am going to sit this one out.”*

A SEPARATE PEACE John Knowles (Grade 10, Mississippi) Profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED.

SONG OF SOLOMON Toni Morrison (Grade 12, International Baccalaureate program and Advanced Placement, Washington) Profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

***TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD** Harper Lee—(three cases)—(Grade 10, Kansas) N-word, “creates racist feelings.” *NCTE Censorship Packet, rationale, letter of support, and linkage to other materials sent.* RETAINED. Second case (Grade 9 honors class, Louisiana) N-word. *NCTE Censorship Packet and rationale sent.* RETAINED. Third case (Grade 9, Oklahoma) N-word. *NCTE Censorship Packet, rationale, letter of support, and other materials sent.* RETAINED.

Addendum: *In the difficult and protracted Kansas case, the teacher writes, “We couldn’t have done it without you! You opened paths to materials which allowed us to follow up on suggestions [and] allowed us to have an inservice with our English (and other) teachers.”*

***UNCLE TOM’S CABIN** Harriet Beecher Stowe (Grade 10 gifted class) N-word, depictions of slavery. *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

VARIOUS BOOKS (International Baccalaureate program, Washington) “Pornographic material.” *NCTE Censorship Packet sent; CD-ROM of rationales recommended.* RETAINED.

VARIOUS VIDEOS of excellent movies (Grade 9, Michigan) Violence, sexual content, negativity. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent.* RETAINED.

Addendum: *At issue here was the showing of videos of R-rated movies in the context of the instructional program. NCTE endorses thoughtful and integral use of such films. They are now permitted in the district on an “opt-in” basis, i.e., with parental consent via permission slips.*

A YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER Michael Dorris (Grade 9, Virginia) Profanity. *NCTE Censorship Packet and letter of support sent; no rationale available.* RETAINED.

CODA 1—Huge victory, little fanfare

In 1999 a protest by a group of parents in the Bedford, New York, school district received national attention. They claimed that many classes, including English language arts, were conspiring to teach “New Age Religion” through mythology, relaxation exercises, etc. I presented written testimony on behalf of NCTE. An initial judgment dismissed most of the complaints but upheld others. The judgment was appealed. Subsequently, the higher court dismissed the parents’ claims in their entirety. The good news received little attention in the press but was a clear triumph for the freedom to teach and learn.

CODA 2—Generic “Anti-Profanity” Ban Averted in Georgia

NCTE enlisted the aid of the American Library Association, People for the American Way, PEN, and the American Civil Liberties Union in combating a proposal in a Georgia district that would have resulted in the banning of hundreds of books. A protest of the F-word in *Catcher in the Rye* prompted a board member to suggest that all books with any profanity be banned. Numerous letters, phone calls, and other contacts later, the matter came to a head at a public meeting in which a motion to effect the ban was not seconded.

JOIN THE NCTE EDUCATION ADVOCACY NETWORK!

As Congress considers education legislation, local educators like you have an important opportunity to give your legislators the benefit of your knowledge and experience.

Please take a moment to sign up as part of the NCTE Education Advocacy Network. (And feel free to photocopy this form for your colleagues.)

As part of this network, you will be notified **most often by e-mail** of pending legislation and NCTE's positions on that legislation. Please send completed forms to Millie Davis, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801 or fax: 217-278-3760; e-mail the following information to mdavis@ncte.org.

Name _____
Position/Grade Level _____
Home Address _____
City _____
County _____
State _____ Zip _____
Phone (H) _____ (O) _____
(Essential) E-mail _____
Fax _____

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
- Invite a legislator to school
- Advise a legislator on educational issues

I have expertise on the following issue(s):

Please list _____

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Editor: Michelle Tremmel

NCTE Staff Liaison: Millie Davis

NCTE Staff Editor: Ellen Clark

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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