

FROM THE FRONT(LINE)

Hit List Update—SLATE Responds to Censorship Calls

November 1996

Late spring and summer often bring a slowdown in censorship calls to NCTE, but since the report on books under attack in the April *SLATE Newsletter*, SLATE has responded to dozens of calls at NCTE Headquarters. SLATE provided information and advice, censorship packets, rationales defending challenged books, letters of support, and testimony in a court case. NCTE Executive Director Miles Myers gave a deposition in the highly publicized Cissy Lacks case in the Ferguson School District in the St. Louis area. (See the September *Council Chronicle* for an article on the Lacks case and an article by Charles Suhor on NCTE/SLATE activities.) A brief description of some recent cases follows.

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson. A Utah teacher reported a challenge to use of the book in grade 5, requesting from SLATE a letter that she could bring to the review committee and to other involved individuals and groups. *Rationales and letter sent.*

Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger. An experienced Wisconsin teacher was mentoring a new teacher who was using the book in class and was interested in dealing with protests. *Censorship packet and rationales sent.*

Always Running by Luis J. Rodriguez. A retired teacher in Illinois, calling because the school board had hinted that there might be "repercussions" if teachers got involved in the case, reported a challenge to this book. *Censorship packet and rationale sent.*

View from the Cherry Tree by Willo D. Roberts. A Maryland middle-school teacher had an initial complaint about the cat named "S. O. B." in the book. She believed that no formal complaint would be lodged and indicated she would call back if further help was needed.

Trout Fishing in America by Richard Brautigan. An English supervisor in a Connecticut district reported a challenge to this book. *Censorship packet and letter sent.*

The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank. NCTE received a query from the Holocaust Survivors Educational Center in New York about censorship of this book. *Censorship packet and rationales sent.*

Beloved by Toni Morrison. A department chair in a Virginia high school reported a parent's protest based on "Biblical references" and "bestiality." The book was on a grade 11 honors reading list and was not required. *Censorship packet and letter of support sent.*

Additionally, an Iowa Advance Placement English teacher reported a parental protest against *Beloved*, indicating that this was her first experience with censorship and asking for guidance. *Censorship packet sent.*

My Brother Sam Is Dead by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier. A California school district librarian reported that a parent objected to the reading of parts of this book in a middle-school classroom. *Censorship packet and rationales sent.*

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. A teacher in New York requested a rationale for teaching this book after a parental complaint about racial epithets in the text. Reading of an alternate work is an option in the school, but the complaint came in during the summer after school was out. *Rationales sent.*

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolph Anaya. The book was on a summer reading list and was the subject of a complaint, according to a Texas high school teacher. *Censorship packet and NCTE booklist entry sent.*

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien. In Texas, a parent of a student in an advanced grade 7 English program challenged the book. Her child was permitted to read an alternate text. *Rationale and SLATE Starter Sheet on how to write rationales sent.*

One Fat Summer by Robert Lipsyte. A high-school teacher at a Catholic school in Georgia reported that a parent's complaint directly to the archbishop resulted in the principal's decision to

immediately remove the book from the curriculum, despite the practice of permitting alternative readings when individual parents complain. *Rationale sent.*

I Boggart by Susan Cooper. A parent's objection to use of this book in a Wisconsin grade 5 class focused on violence, disrespect for authority, profane language, and depiction of a "spirit" as the main character. The teacher issued an e-mail call on "NCTE Talk," requesting help in devising selection criteria that could be used as a backdrop for choices of books. *NCTE/SLATE Guidelines for Selection of Materials in English Language Arts Programs sent, and information about its availability posted on "NCTE Talk."*

Ordinary People by Judith Guest. An Indiana high-school principal called for immediate help regarding a protest about teaching this book in a grade 12 class, stating that he needed to defend the book at a board meeting that night. *Rationales and entry from NCTE's Books for You faxed.*

The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier. A Louisiana teacher expressed concern about a parent who was going straight to the school board to protest this book rather than following established policy. *Censorship packet and rationales sent.*

The same book was the subject of a protest in California. *Rationale faxed.*

The Silver Kiss by Annette Klause. A Virginia teacher preparing to add this book to her program expressed concern about a potential protest. *Censorship packet and rationale sent.*

The Color Purple by Alice Walker, ***Native Son*** by Richard Wright, ***Old Gringo*** by Carlos Fuentes. A North Carolina media coordinator at a senior high school was called upon to justify the selection of these three books at a meeting with the superintendent and a principal. Concern had been expressed about profanity and sexual references. Information about NCTE's various stances was requested. *Letter, available rationales, and NCTE/SLATE Guidelines for Selection of Materials in English Language Arts Programs sent.*

Additionally, *The Color Purple* was the subject of a protest in an Arkansas high school. *Rationales sent.*

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain. A grade 10 teacher in Illinois was teaching the book and, while not receiving a protest outright, was concerned about the prospects of a challenge. *Censor-ship packet and rationales sent.*

An Oregon high school teacher was also faced with a challenge to *Huckleberry Finn*, based on racial epithets in the work. *Censorship packet and rationales sent.*

Goosebumps and ***Fear Street*** series by R. L. Stine. A high-school librarian called indicating that a parent wanted these books removed from the library. *Censor-ship packet sent, with recommendation to contact American Library Association.*

Outcomes/Further Needs

Cases above involving *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Beloved*, *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, and *Bless Me, Ultima* resulted in the books being RETAINED. The outcomes of other pending cases are uncertain; NCTE continues to seek information on the results.

Despite the fact that NCTE sent out numerous rationales in many of the above cases, rationales were not available for several works. We especially need rationales for Rudolf Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and Pat Conroy's *Prince of Tides*. If you would like to volunteer to submit a rationale for these or other works, contact Charles Suhor, SLATE staff liaison, at 800-369-6283 (ext. 219) to request a guide for writing rationales. Also, if you are involved in or know of a case involving challenges to materials or methods in English language arts, please call for possible assistance in fighting censorship.