

BOOKS CHALLENGED OR BANNED IN 2003–2004

Robert P. Doyle

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BOOKS CHALLENGED OR BANNED IN 2003-2004

Banned Books Week 2004 is the twenty-third annual celebration of the freedom to read. This freedom, not only to choose what we read, but also to select from a full array of possibilities, is firmly rooted in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Although we enjoy an increasing quantity and availability of information and reading material, we must remain vigilant to ensure that access to this material is preserved; would-be censors continue to threaten the freedom to read still exist and come from all quarters and all political persuasions. Even if their motivations for their restrictions are well intentioned, censors try to limit the freedom of others to choose what they read, see, or hear.

Sex, profanity, and racism remain the primary categories of objections, and most occur in schools and school libraries. Frequently, challenges are motivated by the desire to protect children. While the intent is commendable, this method of protection contains hazards far greater than exposure to the "evil" against which the protection is leveled. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, in *Texas v. Johnson*, said, "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable." Individuals may restrict what they themselves or their children read, but they must not call on governmental or public agencies to prevent others from reading or seeing that material.

The challenges documented in this list are not brought by people merely expressing a point of view; rather, they represent requests that these materials be removed from schools or libraries, thus restricting access to them by others. Even when the eventual outcome allows the book to stay on the library shelves and even when the person is a lone protester, the censorship attempt is real. Someone has tried to restrict another person's ability to choose. Challenges are as important to document as actual banings, in which a book is removed from the shelves of a library or bookstore or from the curriculum at a school. Attempts to censor can lead to voluntary restriction of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy; in these cases, material may not be published at all or may not be purchased by a bookstore, library, or school district.

We have reason to celebrate this year. Due to the commitment of parents, students, librarians, teachers, and other concerned citizens, more and more challenges are unsuccessful, and the reading material remains available.

It should be noted that this bibliography is incomplete because many prohibitions against free speech and expression remain undocumented. Surveys indicate approximately 85 percent of the challenges to library materials receive no media attention and remain unreported. Moreover, this list is limited to books and does not include challenges to magazines, newspapers, films, broadcasts, plays, performances, electronic publications, or exhibits.

This bibliography represents books challenged, restricted, removed, or banned in 2003-2004 as reported in the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* from May 2003 through May 2004.

ALLENDE, ISABEL. *The House of the Spirits.* Knopf; Bantam. Challenged, but retained in the advanced English classes in Modesto, Calif. (2003). The seven-member Modesto City School Board said administrators should instead give parents more information about the books their children read, including annotations of each text. Parents can opt their children out of any assignment they find objectionable. Source: Jan. 2004, pp. 27-28.

BABBITT, NATALIE. *The Devil's Storybook.* Farrar. Challenged at the Chestnut Ridge Middle School in Washington Township, Pa. (2004). The complainants want the school district to seek parental approval before elementary and middle school students can check out books related to the occult. Source: May 2004, pp. 117-18.

BLUME, JUDY. *Deenie.* Bradbury Pr. Challenged by a parent in the Spring Hill Elementary School District in Hernando County, Fla. (2003) due to passages that talk frankly about masturbation. The board decided to retain the title, but require students to have written parental permission to access the novel. Source: Jan. 2003, pp. 8-9; Mar. 2004, pp. 48-49; May 2004, pp. 95-96.

CHBOSKY, STEPHEN. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower.* Pocket Bks. Removed as a reading assignment in an elective sociology course at the Massapequa, N.Y. High School (2003) because of its "offensive" content. Source: Jan. 2004, pp. 12-13.

CLINTON, CATHRYN. *A Stone in My Hand.* Candlewick Pr. Challenged, but retained in the Marion County Public Library System in Ocala, Fla. (2003) despite a complaint that the subject matter was too mature and the book "was written one-sidedly, specifically showing one party to be fully wrong." Reviewers noted that the book is told from a Muslim perspective and that it can be taken to be anti-Israel. An Ocala resident noted that "this book will help further hatred of Jews, anti-Semitism, and hatred of Israel, on the part of children, that target audience." Source: Nov. 2003, pp. 227-28; Jan. 2004, pp. 7-8; Mar. 2004, pp. 47-48.

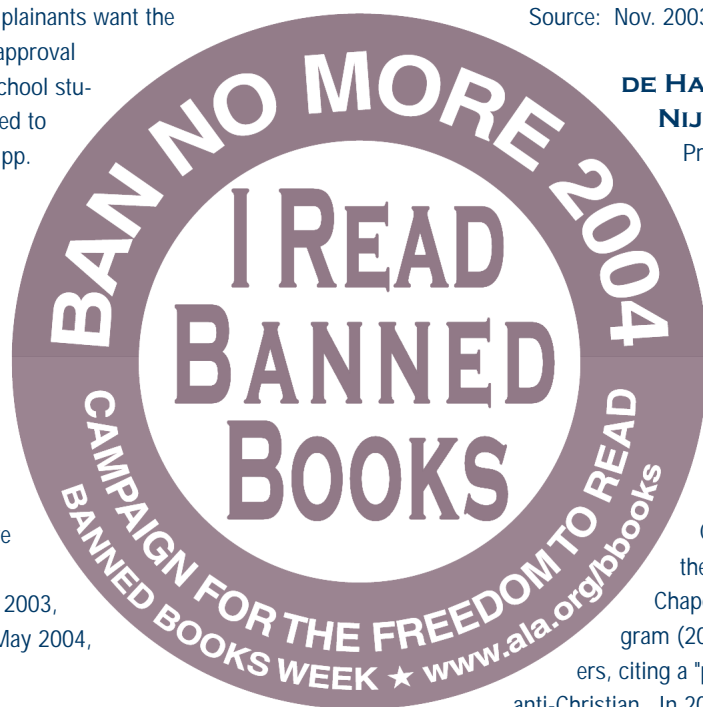
CLUTTON-BROCK, JULIET. *Horse.* Knopf. Challenged at the Smith Elementary School in Helena, Mont. (2004) because a concerned parent "believes it promotes evolution." Source: May 2004, p. 97.

CORMIER, ROBERT. *We All Fall Down.* Dell. Pulled from a Baldwin, Kans. ninth grade class (2003) by the school district superintendent because "it was clear to him it wasn't fit for his own daughter or granddaughter." The original complaint objected to fifty passages that contained profanity and sexual content. Source: Nov. 2003, p. 229; Jan. 2004, p. 12.

DE HAAN, LINDA AND STERN NIJLAND. *King & King.* Tricycle Pr. Restricted to adults in a school's library in Wilmington, N.C. (2004) because the children's book is about a prince whose true love turns out to be another prince. Source: May 2004, p. 97.

EHRENREICH, BARBARA. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America.* Metropolitan Bks. Criticized as the book chosen for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, N.C. summer reading program (2003) by Republican state lawmakers, citing a "pattern" of the university being anti-Christian. In 2002, three freshmen sued the university over its choice of *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, by Michael A. Sells. The federal lawsuit was filed on the students' behalf by the Family Policy Network, a Christian group based in Virginia. Courts later rejected the argument that the reading requirement violated the U.S. Constitution. Source: Sept. 2003, p. 182.

FRANK, MEL AND ED ROSENTHAL. *Marijuana Grower's Guide.* Red Eye Pr. Challenged at the Teton County Public Library in Jackson, Wyo. (2004) because "tax dollars are being used to purchase a how-to crime manual." Source: May 2004, p. 98.



★ ELECT TO READ

GAINES, ERNEST. *A Lesson Before Dying*. Knopf; Vintage. Removed from the college book store at Louisiana College, Pineville, La. (2004) by the college president because a love scene described in the book clashes with the school's Christian values. Source: Mar. 2004, pp. 53-54.

GUTERSON, DAVID. *Snow Falling on Cedars*. Harcourt; Thorndike Pr.; Vintage. Challenged, but retained in the advanced English classes in Modesto, Calif. (2003). The seven-member Modesto City School Board said administrators should instead give parents more information about the books their children read, including annotations of each text. Parents can opt their children out of any assignment they find objectionable. Source: Jan. 2004, pp. 27-28.

HADDIX, MARGARET PETERSON. *Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey*. Simon. Banned from the Galt Joint Union Elementary School District classrooms in Sacramento, Calif. (2003) and restricted to students with parental permission in the middle school libraries. The novel discusses parental neglect, sexual harassment at an after-school job, and other stresses experienced by the young adult fictional character. The novel is on the ALA Best Books for Young Adults list. Source: Mar. 2004, p. 52; May 2004, p. 98.

HARRIS, ROBIE H. *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book about Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health*. Candlewick Pr. Relocated from the young adult to the adult section of the Fort Bend County Libraries in Richmond, Tex. (2003). The same title was recently moved to the restricted section of the Fort Bend School District's media centers after a resident sent an e-mail message to the superintendent expressing concern about the book's content. The Spirit of Freedom Republican Women's Club petitioned the superintendent to have it, along with *It's So Amazing*, moved because they contain "frontal nudity and discussion of homosexual relationships and abortion." Source: Jan. 2004, p. 9.

_____. *It's So Amazing*. Candlewick Pr. Relocated from the young adult to the adult section of the Fort Bend County Libraries in Richmond, Tex. (2003). The same title was recently moved to the restricted section of the Fort Bend School District's media centers after a resident sent an e-mail message to the superintendent expressing concern about the book's content. The Spirit of Freedom Republican Women's Club petitioned the super-

intendent to have it, along with *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book about Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health*, moved because they contain "frontal nudity and discussion of homosexual relationships and abortion." Source: Jan. 2004, p. 9.

HEINLEIN, ROBERT. *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Putnam. Challenged, but retained in the South Texas Independent School District in Mercedes, Tex. (2003). Parents objected to the adult themes—sexuality, drugs, and suicide—found in the 1962 Hugo Award-winning novel. Heinlein's book was part of the summer Science Academy curriculum. The board voted to give parents more control over their children's choices by requiring principals to automatically offer an alternative to a challenged book. Source: Nov. 2003, pp. 249-50.

HUXLEY, ALDOUS. *Brave New World*. Harper. Challenged, but retained in the South Texas Independent School District in Mercedes, Tex. (2003). Parents objected to the adult themes—sexuality, drugs, and suicide—found in the novel. Huxley's book was part of the summer Science Academy curriculum. The board voted to give parents more control over their children's choices by requiring principals to automatically offer an alternative to a challenged book. Source: Nov. 2003, pp. 249-50.

JAIVIN, LINDA. *Eat Me*. Broadway Bks. Removed from the Marion County Public Library in Ocala, Fla. (2003). The library director noted that the Australian best seller was removed because the library lacks a designated erotica collection and the novel met only three of seventeen criteria used to evaluate books for acquisition. The county's Public Library Advisory Board recommended that the library director retain the novel. The board's vote was only a suggestion and the final decision went back to the library director. In Feb. 2004, the director reversed her earlier decision, reinstated the novel, and stated that her personal dislike for the book overshadowed her objectivity and adherence to policy. Source: Jan. 2004, pp. 7-8; Mar. 2004, pp. 47-48; May 2004, pp. 115-16.

KOTZWINKLE, WILLIAM AND GLENN MURRAY. *Walter the Farting Dog*. Frog, Ltd. Challenged, but retained on the library shelves of the West Salem, Wis. Elementary School (2004) despite the book's use of the word "fart" and "farting" twenty-four times. Source: May 2004, p. 118.

(CHILDREN'S LITERATURE)
CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY HOW TO EAT FRIED WORMS
(NOVELS)
FORREST GUMP INVISIBLE MAN
(PLAYS)
DOLL'S HOUSE FAUST
(TEXTBOOKS)
BIOLOGY



A BANNED BOOK ★

LEBERT, BENJAMIN. *Crazy*. Knopf. Removed from the Canyon Vista Middle School in Round Rock, Tex. (2003) by the principal who decided a parent was correct in being concerned about the book's availability. The parent called the book "vulgar; it talked about parts of the body." There was free use of the 'F-word' and several 'C-words.' The book was taken off the shelf at the district's other junior high school library. Source: Nov. 2003, p. 229.

LEE, HARPER. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lippincott/Harper; Popular Library. Challenged in the Normal, Ill. Community High Schools sophomore literature class (2003) as being degrading to African Americans. Challenged at the Stanford Middle School in Durham, N.C. (2004) because the 1961 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel uses the word "nigger." Source: Jan. 2004, p. 11; May 2004, pp. 98-99.

LYNCH, CHRIS. *Extreme Elvin*. HarperCollins. Removed from the Crawford County, Ga. Middle School library (2003) because the book deals with complex issues teenagers confront. Source: Jan. 2004, p. 9.

MORRISON, TONI. *The Bluest Eye*. NAL. Challenged, but retained at the Kern High School District in Bakersfield, Calif. (2003) despite complaints of the book's sexually explicit material. Source: Mar. 2004, pp. 50-51; May 2004, pp. 118-19.

MYERS, WALTER DEAN. *Fallen Angels*. Scholastic. Banned at the Franklin Central High School in Indianapolis, Ind. (2003) because of concerns about the book's profanity. The book was assigned in English classes for sophomores. Source: Jan. 2004, pp. 11-12.

PECK, M. SCOTT. *The Road Less Traveled*. Touchstone Bks. Removed from the college bookstore at Louisiana College, Pineville, La. (2003), by the college president because "profane language in the book clashed with the school's Christian values." Source: Mar. 2004, pp. 53-54.

PILKEY, DAV. *The Adventures of Super Diaper Baby*. Blue Sky Pr. Challenged, but retained in the Riverside, Calif. Unified School District classrooms and libraries (2003), despite a complaint of the book's "inappropriate" scatological storyline. Source: Sept. 2003, p. 201.

RODRIGUEZ, LUIS J. *Always Running*. Curbstone Pr. Challenged, but retained in three Beyer High School classrooms in Modesto, Calif. (2003) despite complaints that the book is "pornographic." The decision reversed the actions of district administrators who had removed the book in early November 2003. The book won the *Chicago Sun Times* Carl Sandburg Literary Award and was designated as a *New York Times* notable book. Source: Jan. 2003, pp. 27-28; Mar. 2004, pp. 51-52.

ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Scholastic. A federal judge overturned restricted access to the Harry Potter book after parents of a Cedarville, Ark. (2002) fourth-grader filed a federal lawsuit challenging restrictions, which required students to present written permission from a parent to borrow the book. The novel was originally challenged because it characterized authority as "stupid" and portrays "good witches and good magic." Challenged, but retained in the New Haven, Conn. schools (2003) despite claims the series "makes witchcraft and wizardry alluring to children." Source: May 2003, p. 95; July 2003, pp. 137, 159.

_____. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Scholastic. A federal judge overturned restricted access to the Harry Potter book after parents of a Cedarville, Ark. (2002) fourth-grader filed a federal lawsuit challenging restrictions, which required students to present written permission from a parent to borrow the book. The novel was originally challenged because it characterized authority as "stupid" and portrays "good witches and good magic." Challenged, but retained in the New Haven, Conn. schools (2003) despite claims the series "makes witchcraft and wizardry alluring to children." Source: May 2003, p. 95; July 2003, pp. 137, 159.

_____. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Scholastic. A federal judge overturned restricted access to the Harry Potter book after parents of a Cedarville, Ark. (2002) fourth-grader filed a federal lawsuit challenging restrictions, which required students to present written permission from a parent to borrow the book. The novel was originally challenged because it characterized authority as "stupid" and portrays "good witches and good magic." Challenged, but retained in the New Haven, Conn. schools (2003) despite claims the series "makes witchcraft and wizardry alluring to children." Source: May 2003, p. 95; July 2003, pp. 137, 159.

_____. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic. A federal judge overturned restricted access to the Harry Potter book after parents of



a Cedarville, Ark. (2002) fourth-grader filed a federal lawsuit challenging restrictions, which required students to present written permission from a parent to borrow the book. The novel was originally challenged because it characterized authority as "stupid" and portrays "good witches and good magic." Challenged, but retained in the New Haven, Conn. schools (2003) despite claims the series "makes witchcraft and wizardry alluring to children." Source: May 2003, p. 95; July 2003, pp. 137, 159.

SCHOUWEILER, THOMAS. *The Devil: Opposing Viewpoints.* Greenhaven Pr. Challenged at the Chestnut Ridge Middle School in Washington Township, Pa. (2004). The complainants want the school district to seek parental approval before elementary and middle school students can check out books related to the occult. Source: May 2004, pp. 117-18.

SILVERSTEIN, CHARLES, AND EDMUND WHITE. *The Joy of Gay Sex.* Crown; Simon & Schuster/Fireside. Challenged, but retained in the Marple Public Library in Broomall, Pa. (2004) along with several sexual instruction manuals including: *Sex Toys 101: A Playfully Uninhibited Guide*, by Rachel Venning; *Great Sex Tips*, by Anne Hooper; *Ultimate Guide to Fellatio*, by Violet Blue; and *The Illustrated Guide to Extended Massive Orgasm*, by Steve Bodansky because the books are "seriously objectionable in text and pictures due to the sexually explicit material." Source: Mar. 2004, p. 50; May 2004, p. 117.

SMITH, PATRICK. *A Land Remembered.* Pineapple Pr. Challenged, but retained in the Indian River County Schools in Vero Beach, Fla. (2003) despite two parents' complaints about racially offensive language. One of the parents said the book's use of the 'N-word' created a hostile learning environment for his children. Source: Jan. 2004, p. 28.

SONES, SONYA. *What My Mother Doesn't Know.* Simon. Removed from the library shelves of the Rosedale Union School District in Bakersfield, Calif. (2003) because of discomfort with Sones's poem, "Ice Capades"—a teenage girl's description of how her breasts react to cold. Source: Nov. 2003, p. 227.

STEINBECK, JOHN. *Of Mice and Men.* Bantam; Penguin; Viking. Challenged in the Normal, Ill. Community High Schools (2003) because the book contains "racial slurs, profanity, violence, and does not represent traditional values." An alternative book, Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, was offered but rejected by the family challenging the novel. Source: Jan. 2004, p. 11.

STINE, R. L. *Double Date.* Scholastic. Removed from the Crawford County, Ga. Middle School library (2003) because the book deals with complex issues teenagers confront. Source: Jan. 2004, p. 9.

TAYLOR, MILDRED D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.* Bantam; Dell. Challenged, but retained as a part of the Seminole County, Fla. school curriculum (2004) despite the concerns of an African American couple who found the book inappropriate for their thirteen-year-old son. The award-winning book depicts the life of a African American

family in rural Mississippi in the 1930s and uses the word "nigger."
Source: Mar. 2004, pp. 75-76.

TRUEMAN, TERRY. *Stuck in Neutral.* HarperCollins. Challenged, but retained on the reading list for eighth-graders at the Evansville, Wis. High School (2003) despite concerns about profanity, sexual imagery, and violence. Source: Jan. 2004, p. 13.

TWAIN, MARK [SAMUEL L. CLEMENS]. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Bantam; Bobbs-Merrill; Grosset; Harper; Holt; Houghton; Longman; Macmillan; NAL; Norton; Penguin; Pocket Bks. Challenged in the Normal, Ill. Community High Schools sophomore literature class (2003) as being degrading to African Americans. Pulled from the reading lists at the three Renton, Wash. high schools (2004) after an African American student said the book degraded her and her culture. The novel, which is not required reading in Renton schools but is on a supplemental list of approved books, was eventually retained for classroom usage. Source: Jan. 2004, p. 11; May 2004, p. 91.



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