BOOKS CHALLENGED OR BANNED IN 2003–2004

Robert P. Doyle

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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 protestor, the censorship attempt is real. Someone has tried to restrict another person's ability to choose. Challenges are as important to document as actual banning, 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can lead to voluntary restriction of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy; in these cases, material may not be published at all or may not be purchased by a bookstore, library, or school district.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.


**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.


**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.


**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.


Elect to Read


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 superintendent 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.


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.

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.


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
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Source: May 2003, p. 95; July 2003, pp. 137, 159.


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 degrades 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.
Campaign for the Freedom to Read

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