BOOKS CHALLENGED OR BANNED in 2006 - 2007

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Banned Books Week 2007 is the twenty-sixth 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 come from all quarters and all political persuasions. Even if their motivations for 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. U.S. 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 bannings, 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can lead to voluntary restriction of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy; in these cases, material may not be published at all or may not be purchased by a bookstore, library, or school district.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 2006–2007 as reported in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from May 2006 through May 2007.


Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Bantam. Retained in the Fond du Lac, Wis. High School sophomore advanced English class (2006). Parents objected to teens reading Angelou’s account of being brutally raped by her mother’s boyfriend and an unwanted pregnancy later in life. Parents will receive notification and be allowed to decide whether or not they approve of use by their children, according to recommendations agreed upon by a review committee and parents who objected to the use of the book. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 30–31.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Fawcett; Houghton; Simon; Hall. The Judson, Tex. school district board overruled (2006) Superintendent Ed Lyman’s ban of the novel from an advanced placement English curriculum. Lyman had banned the book after a parent complained it was sexually explicit and offensive to Christians. In doing so, he overruled the recommendation of a committee of teachers, students, and parents. The committee appealed the decision to the school board. Source: May 2006, pp. 154–55.


*The Veldt*. Dramatic Pub. Co.; Creative Ed. Retained on the Beaverton, Ore. School District’s reading list (2006). The short story was challenged by a middle school parent who thought its language and plot were inappropriate for students. Her biggest concern is that the story offers no consequences for the children’s actions. The short story is part of Bradbury’s *The Illustrated Man* anthology. It is twenty pages long and was published in 1951 as the first in the collection of eighteen science fiction stories. Source: Nov. 2006, p. 319.


Burroughs, Augusten. *Running with Scissors*. St. Martin. Challenged in the Howell, Mich. High School (2007) because of the book’s strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county’s top law enforcement official reviewed the books to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. “After reading the books in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors,” the county prosecutor wrote. “Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws.” Source: May 2007, p. 116.


Chomsky, Noam, and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon. The Turkish Chief Public Prosecution Office decided to prosecute two publishers that released the book because it “degrades the Turkish identity and the Turkish Republic, and fuels hatred and discrimination among the people.” The publishers could face up to six years in prison if found guilty. Source: Sept. 2006, p. 234.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Duffield; Oxford Univ. Pr.; Capricorn Bks.; Simon; Prometheus Bks. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she’d found on the Internet. Chbosky’s novel, which contains references to masturbation, homosexuality, and bestiality, got the bulk of the criticism. Source: July 2006, pp. 210–11.

Christensen, James C., Renwick St. James and Alan Dean Foster. *Voyage of the Basset*. Artisan. Retained in the Davis County, Utah Library (2006). The complainant objected to the book after her five-year-old son borrowed it from the children’s section and showed her the illustrations it contains of topless mermaids and other partially clothed mythical creatures. The author is a retired Brigham Young University art professor and cochair of the Mormon Arts Foundation. Source: Nov. 2006, p. 319.


de Haan, Linda and Stern Nijland. *King & King*. Tricycle Pr. Parents of a Lexington, Mass. (2006) second-grader protested that their son’s teacher read the fairy tale about gay marriage to the class without warning. Parents first. The book was used as part of a lesson about different types of weddings. “By presenting this kind of issue at such a young age, they’re trying to indoctrinate our children,” stated the parent. The incident renewed the efforts of Waltham-based Parents’ Rights Coalition to rid the state’s schools of books and lessons that advance the “homosexual agenda” in public schools. U.S. District Court Judge Mark Willey (2007) that when public schools are “entitled to teach anything that is reasonably related to the goals of preparing students to become engaged and productive citizens in our democracy.” Wolf said the courts had decided in other cases that parents’ rights to engage and productive citizens in our democracy. “It also was a Garden State Teen Book Award nominee. The Spoken Word Revolution: *60 Years of Japanese Comics*. Simon. Retained in the East Union High School in Manteca, Calif. (2006) senior reading list after fifth grade to the sixth-grade second semester curriculum. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 15-16.


Frank, E. R. *America*. Atheneum. Challenged in the Ravenna, Ohio schools (2007) because, “What we kept finding and going over was sexual content and profanity,” said the complaint. The book has received several awards including the New York Times Notable Book Award. It also was a Garden State Teen Book Award nominee. Source: May 2007, p. 93.

Freedom Writers. *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them*. Doubleday. Challenged in the Howell, Mich. High School (2007) because of the book’s strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county’s top law enforcement official reviewed the books to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. “After reading the books in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors,” the county prosecutor wrote. “Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws.” The best-selling book has achieved national acclaim and was made into a hit movie. Source: Mar. 2007, pp. 51-52; May 2007, p. 116.

Gaines, Ernest J. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. Bantam. Challenged as an eighth-grade district-wide reading assignment in the Puyallup, Wash. schools (2006) because “racial slurs and stereotyping are used throughout the book, as well as scenes of sex, rape, and impregnation.” The Puyallup School Board voted to uphold an earlier decision by a district committee requiring eighth-graders to read the novel. In explaining their vote, each board member recounted the difficulty of balancing valid concerns on each side of the debate. “It wasn’t a solely a delinquent issue,” said the “n-word.” “But it is our hope by giving them an explanation of the word and where it came from they’ll understand it’s inappropriate to use it in the future.” Source: Jan. 2007, pp.11-12; Mar. 2007, pp. 74-75.

Going, K. L. *Fat Kid Rules the World*. Putnam. Removed from the Pickens County, S.C. middle- and high-school library shelves (2007) because “the language, the sexual references, and drug use are not appropriate for middle school students.” In 2004, the book was named a Michael Printz honor book for excellence in young adult literature by the Young Adult Libraries Services Association. Source: May 2007, pp. 93-94.

Gordon, Sharon, *Cuba*. Benchmark Bks. Removed from all Miami-Dade County school libraries (2006) because a parent’s complaint that the book does not depict an accurate life in Cuba. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida has been in favor of the ’n-word’...But it is our hope by giving them an explanation of the word and where it came from they’ll understand it’s inappropriate to use it in the future.” Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 11-12; Mar. 2007, pp. 74-75.


Hedayaat, Sadegh. *The Blind Owl*. Grove Pr. The widely acclaimed Iranian classic, written in the 1930s, was banned in Iran (2006). “The new government intends to take positive steps for reviving neglected values and considering religious teachings in the cultural field.” Source: Jan. 2007, p. 35.

Hedges, Peter. *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape*. Simon. Banned by the superintendent at the Carroll, Iowa High School (2006) because of parental concerns about an oral sex scene. In response, students started an Internet protest on the social network Facebook. Hundred joined the group—“Un-ban Gilbert Grape! Censorship is Wrong!” and categories say they need signatures and licensing for a formal review. “Parents were already notified of its content, and had to sign a permission slip for their child to read it.” Later, the Carroll school board voted to overturn Superintendent Rob Cordes’ decision to ban the book from the high school’s literature-to-film class. The author said, “the district shouldn’t let those larger themes be obscured by the relatively few pages with sexual content that he intended to drive plot!” Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 12-13; Mar. 2007, p. 73.


LeGuin, Ursula K. *A Fisherman of the inland Sea*. HarperPrism. Removed from the West Brazosia, Tex. Junior High School library (2006) because of inappropriate language. Books on “sensitive topics such as death, suicide, physical or sexual abuse, and teenage dating relationships” were moved to a restricted “young adult” section from which students can borrow only with written parental permission. Source: Nov. 2006, pp. 289-90.


Mathabane, Mark. *Kaffir Boy*. NAL. Retained at the East Union High School in Manteca, Calif. (2006) senior English class. The controversial autobiography was challenged as inappropriate because a passage uses the words “penis” and “anus” to describe a scene in which a group of young boys are about to prostitute themselves to a group of men for food. Source: July 2006, pp. 209-10.


Mitchell, Stephen. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*. Free Pr. Challenged in the Clearview Regional High School in Harrison Township, N.J. (2006) because the modern translation of one of the oldest known pieces of literature was considered sexually descriptive and unnecessarily explicit. The work itself dates back to about 1700 B.C., some one thousand years before the writings of Homer. Source: Jan. 2007, p. 10.

Morrison, Toni. Beloved. Knopf;NAL. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she’d found on the Internet. Pulled from the senior Advanced Placement English class at Eastern High School in Louisville, Ky. (2007) because two parents complained that the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about antebellum slavery depicted the inappropriate topics of bestiality, racism, and sex. Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11; May 2007, pp. 98, 121.

... The Bluest Eye. NAL. Challenged in the Howell, Mich. High School (2007) because of the book’s strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county’s top law enforcement officials reviewed the books to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. “After reading the books in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors,” the county prosecutor wrote. “Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws.” Source: Mar. 2007, pp. 51-52; May 2007, p. 116.

Myers, Walter Dean. Fallen Angels. Scholastic. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she’d found on the Internet. Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11.

Myacle, Lauren. TTLY. Grosset & Dunlap. Challenged at the William Floyd Middle School library in Mastic, N.Y. (2007) because the book includes “curse words, crude references to the male and female anatomy, sex acts and adult situations like drinking alcohol and flirtation with a teacher that almost goes too far.” A spokesman for the William Floyd School District said the book will remain in the library, and that the book is very popular with students across the country. The spokesperson also said unlike many books that young people read, the book deals with controversial subjects without glorifying negative behaviors. Source: May 2007, p. 92.


Oppie, Iona Archibald, and Peter Opie, eds. I Saw Esau: The Schoolchild’s Pocket Book. Candlewick Pr. Challenged at the Cedar Grove Elementary School in Murfreesbоро, Tenn. (2007). The complainant stated, “I understand that it is a book of poetry, but there is a fine line between poetry art and porn and this book’s illustrations are absolutely offensive in every way.” The book is a collection of schoolyard jokes, riddles, insults and jump-robe rhymes and is illustrated by Maurice Sendak. Source: May 2007, p. 94.


Parks, Gordon. The Learning Tree. Fawcett; Harper. Challenged on the summer reading list at LeFlore High School in Mobile, Ala. (2006) because the author frequently used inappropriate words, such as “niggas,” “bitches,” “bastards” and “ass.” Source: Nov. 2006, p. 290.

Paulsen, Gary. Zero to Sixty: The Motorcycle Journey of a Lifetime. Harvest Bks. Removed from the West Brazoria, Tex. Junior High School library (2006) because of depictions of sex acts and profanity. Books on “sensitive topics such as death, suicide, physical or sexual abuse, and teenage dating relationships” were moved to a restricted “young adult” section from which students can borrow only with written parental permission. Source: Nov. 2006, pp. 289-90.


Schwartz, Alvin. More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark. Harper; Lippincott. Retained in the Greater Clark County, Ky. elementary school library (2006) despite a grandmother's request to ban the Scary Stories books written by Alvin Schwartz. She wanted all four or five volumes in the series banned because, she said, they depict cannibalism, murder, witchcraft and ghosts, and include a story about somebody being skinned. Source: Nov. 2006, pp. 317-18.


Shafak, Elif. The Bastard of Istanbul. Viking. Prize-winning novelist won trial on in Istanbul, Turkey (2006), accused of belittling Turkishness. The novel had been at the top of Turkish bestsellers lists since its publication, but its treatment of the mass murder of Ottoman Armenians in 1915 angered government officials. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 35-36.

Silverstein, Charles, and Edmund White. The Joy of Gay Sex. Crown; Simon & Schuster/Fireside. Challenged, but retained at the Nampa, Idaho Public Library (2006) along with seven other books, including The Joy of Sex despite the complaint that, "they are very pornographic in nature and they have very explicit and detailed illustrations and photographs which we feel doesn't belong in a library." Source: July 2006, p. 183.

Steinbeck, John. Of Mice and Men. Bantam; Penguin; Viking. Retained in the Greenacres-Antrim, Pa. tenth-grade English classes (2006). A complaint was filed because of "racial slurs" and "foul language and内容的不合适" throughout the novel. The book has been used in the high school for more than thirty years, and those who object to its content have the option of reading an alternative reading. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 29-30.

Thompson, Craig. Blankets. Top Shelf. Challenged in the Marshall, Mo. Public Library (2006) because the book was deemed "pornographic" by some members of the community. The book was moved to the adult book section, rather than the young-adult area where it had been shelved before. Source: Nov. 2006, p. 289; Jan. 2007, pp. 9-10; May 2007, p. 115.


Vonnegut, Kurt. Slaughterhouse-Five. Dell; Dial. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill. (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. In a reversal of its decision made in 2005, the board decided to keep the books, reading profanity-laced passages and castigating the school officials who placed the order. Other books the school system wants to have reviewed are: Are You in the House Alone? Rainbow Boys; Rats Say God; and The King Must Die. Source: July 2006, p. 182.

Wright, Richard. Black Boy. Harper. Challenged in the Howell, Mich. High School (2007) because of the book's strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county's top law enforcement official reviewed the books to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. "After reading the books in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors," the county prosecutor wrote. "While these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of the criminal laws." Source: July 2006, pp. 210-11; May 2007, p. 116.

Watkins, Yoko Kawashima. So Far from the Bamboo Grove. HarperTeen. Removed from the sixth-grade English curriculum at Dover-Sherborn, Mass. Middle School (2006) due to scenes hinting at rape, violence against women by Korean men, and a distorted presentation of history. It is part of the state's recommended reading list for the grade level. The book is based on the real-life experiences of Watkins, whose father was a Japanese government official. In a reversal of its decision made in 2005, the Dover-Sherborn school board voted unanimously to keep the book as part of a sixth-grade language arts unit on survival. The school is exploring other texts to bring balance to the unit in response to the criticism leveled against the book by some parents and community members. Source: Jan. 2007, pp. 13-14; Mar. 2007, pp. 73-74.

Wood, Maryrose. Sex Kittens and Horn Dawgs Fall in Love. Delacorte. Removed along with nine other titles from a library order at the Letcher County, Fla. (2006) schools. Among the other books culled from Nature Coast Technical High School's order were Barbara Kingsolver's first novel, The Bean Trees; The Clan of the Cave Bears, by Jean Auel; Boy's Life, by Robert McCammon; and the abbreviated young-adult version of The Power of One, by Bryce Courtenay. A board member led the charge against those books, reading profanity-laced passages and castigating the school officials who placed the order. Other books the school system wants to have reviewed are: Are You in the House Alone? Rainbow Boys; Rats Say God; and The King Must Die. Source: July 2006, p. 182.