

Censorship in young-adult and juvenile books

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Introduction Reading is something that many teens across the nation enjoy doing to pass the time. It is because of this that thousands of new books are in print every year. School libraries are in possession of many of these new books, and these new books have been challenged at some point in different places across the United States. There are four main reasons that a book had been banned from a classroom, or a school system completely.

These four are primarily based off of sexual, religious, political, and social grounds. I feel that young-adult censorship is a cause worth fighting for.

Section One – What is Censorship? Censorship is something that is happening everywhere and most people have no idea what it truly means. Censorship is “ the act of changing or suppressing speech or writing that is considered subversive of the common good” (Merriam-Webster). Clare Booth Luce, a former congresswoman, once said, “ Censorship, like charity, should begin at home, but unlike charity, it should end there” (Goodreads, Luce). And the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights states a similar idea.

It says that, “ Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents – and only parents – have the right and responsibility to restrict the access of the children – to library resources” (ALA, 1939). Most people do not know this, but book banning is a lengthy process. Sometimes it can take over a year for a final decision to be made. The majority of the time it is a parent who sees something wrong with what the students are reading. Robert Cormier said, “ You seldom get a censorship attempt from a 14-year-old boy.

It’s the adults who get upset”(brainyquote, Cormier). This is true, in many accounts it is a teacher or parent who attempts to ban books. Once the said

adult gets upset over one of the books they go to the teacher who supplied the student with the book in question, by themselves or with other adults who also find the book inappropriate. Sometimes they go straight to the administration in charge of the teachers and ask them to review the book and remove it from the school. Then if that does not work, they adult(s) take it up to a committee or the school board and attempt to get the book removed from the entire school system.

From that point, if the teacher cares enough, he or she can contact the publisher who will generally send a letter recommending that the book should stay available in the school libraries and in the classroom because it is a good quality book. Teachers can also do other things, like Erik Nyrop from William Monroe High School in Greene County Virginia, Mr. Nyrop got other teachers and adults in the school system to read the book in question and write recommendations so future ninth grade classes can continue reading *Feed*, a young-adult novel by M. T. Anderson. From there it is up to the school board, or designated committee on whether or not the book that is in process of being banned, really should be or not.

Although many people think that young-adult censorship is good for all youth, there are many more who disagree. Stacey Jay, the author of the *Zombie Settler* series, which was banned in a Tennessee, said, “ Young adults are young adults, after all, not overgrown children” (Jay, young). Judy Blume, a popular children and young-adult author, one that has many books banned, also said something on censorship, “ The books that will never be read. And all due to the fear of censorship. As always, young reader will be the real losers” (brainyquote, Blume). The *School Library Journal* asked 655
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media specialist, librarians, across the United States about their collections and they had interesting thoughts about censorship and controversial titles because they were afraid of how the parents would react.

(See Appendix A, Figure I.) In 2009 Whelan found other common reasons that that people did not buy and/or teach a book that had caused tension between parties in the past. (See Appendix A, Figure II.) If you were to go to all of the publishers and ask for a copy of all of the books that they printed that day you would not just get one or two; you would probably get close to a hundred. Every year there are thousands of new titles printed, approximately 4, 939 in 2010 and 5, 028 in 2009.

For every book printed there is at least two books being challenged in one calendar year. (See Appendix B, Figure I.) In 2000-2009 there were hundreds of books banned, the American Library Association put together a list of the top 100. The first book on the list is actually a series, the Harry Potter series by J. K Rowling, along with children favorites such as the Junie B. Jones series (71st on the list) by Barbara Park, and Goosebumps (94th on the list) by R.

L. Stine. Section Two – Why are Books Banned? Books are banned on mainly four grounds social, sexual, religious, and political grounds. Books banned for reasons that seem unrelated are not; they are merely sub categories that branch off from the four major ones. Many classic novels that our parents have grown up reading have been banned from school systems because of the use of foul language and racial themes, one of the many being To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. Harper Lee’s novel was challenged at Brentwood, TN Middle School in 2006 for because the book contains “

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profanity” and the use of racial slurs promotes “ racial hatred, racial division, racial separation, and promotes white supremacy.

” It was also temporarily banned due to words used in the book, such as “ damn” and “ whore lady.” In 1963 *The Catcher in the Rye* by JD Salinger was nearly banned in Columbus, Ohio for being “ anti-white” and “ obscene” but the school board refused to remove the book from the cities schools. Book banning because of racial themes has become better known since the civil rights movement officially ended in 2008. Stacey Jay told me, “ People who try to ban those stories in the name of protecting our young people are sadly misguided. It’s like taking the smoke alarm out of a burning house.

The alarm may sound ugly to some, but there’s a chance that racket will wake a few people up and allow them to make it out of the house alive” (Jay, people). With how much our world is centered around sexual intercourse now it is no surprise that this is one of the biggest reasons that books are banned. “ The motivation for challenges often comes from a desire to protect children from ‘ inappropriate’ sexual content or ‘ offensive’ language”(olemiss, 2012). The Printz Honor award-winning book *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson was banned and called “ soft pornography” because it follows a young girls rape and recovery throughout her high school years. Henry Steel Commager, an American historian, stated, “ Censorship always defeats it own purpose, for it creates in the end the kind of society that is incapable of exercising real discretion”(brainyquote, Commager).

In the medieval world religion was the most important thing to people, it was what held society together once Rome fell, and it is still very important to

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billions of people around the world. All across the United States religious text such as the Bible have been banned because of religious differences. Books have also been banned because the use of witchcraft, the famous Harry Potter series was banned because it promotes witchcraft, which some Christians take seriously. “Thou shalt not allow a sorceress to live” (Bible, Webster’s) is what the Webster’s translation of the Bible states in Exodus 22:18, and some people believe that their children should not be allowed access to books that contradict this statement. For some people politics is the touchiest subject of all, especially here in America.

The book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell was challenged and banned in many schools because the novel had been objected for its political theories and phrases such as “masses will revolt.” Another reason this book was challenged in many schools was because that the author was a communist and the book showed themes that were against constitutional rights.

Conclusion Right now there is a book in the process of being banned that should not be and it is being unfairly judged and prosecuted. Censorship is not something to take a glance at and ignore. It is an issue that has been in our society since the beginning of literature and will continue to be a problem unless it is properly addressed.

Taking a book off its proper place on the shelf, and even if it goes against religious or political view of the person attempting to remove it, even if it has foul language or sexual content. Ai Weiwei, a Chinese contemporary artist said, “Censorship is saying: ‘I’m the one who says the last sentence.

Whatever you say, the conclusion is mine.’ But the Internet is like a tree that is growing. The people will always have the word – even if someone has a <https://assignbuster.com/censorship-in-young-adult-and-juvenile-books/>

very weak, quiet voice. Such power will collapse because of a whisper”(brainyquote, Weiwei).

Appendix A. Appendix B Parenthetical Citations (ALA, 1939) “ Banned Books Week: Why Are Books Banned?” Banned Books: University of Mississippi Libraries. University of Mississippi, 2010. Web. 20 Feb.

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