

The Kids' Right to Read Project

A collaboration of the **American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE)** and the **National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)**, the Kids' Right to Read Project offers support, education, and advocacy to people facing book challenges or bans and engages local activists in promoting the freedom to read.

In the past year, the Project has confronted challenges and bans involving over **250 books** in **28 states**.

The Kids' Right to Read Project provides:

- Advice and assistance to students, teachers, and others opposing book-banning in schools and communities nationwide
- Educational materials to promote community awareness about the right to read, including printed and online resources on the First Amendment in Schools (www.ncac.org/education/schools) and a Book Censorship Toolkit (www.ncac.org/literature/bookcensorshiptoolkit.cfm)
- Support for local activism by reaching out to students, teachers, booksellers, librarians, journalists, and other community members
- Access to a nationwide network of advocates and activists involved in promoting and defending the right to read
- A clearinghouse of information for students, journalists, scholars and others, created by tracking book censorship incidents across the country (www.ncac.org/kids-right-to-read; www.abffe.com/schoolbookchallenges.html)

How the project fights book censorship:

In Louisville, KY, a principal removed *Beloved* by Toni Morrison from AP English classes when students were 30 pages from the end of the novel, and class discussions were terminated, because some parents complained about the book's racial and sexual content.

In Vineland, NJ, a principal literally tore out pages from the anthology *Paint Me Like I Am* by Bill Aquado and Richard Newirth because included a poem he found "objectionable."

In Baxley, GA, the school board banned *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley despite parents' and teachers' approval after a local church minister challenged the books.

In cases like these, we contact local reporters, teachers, booksellers, librarians, and others involved in the controversy, write letters to the school board or local newspaper in support of the books, provide educational materials and talking points to local activists, and track cases online. We also respond to student research inquiries about banned books and censorship in schools.

Local community involvement is essential to the work of the Kids' Right to Read Project. We work directly with teachers, librarians and booksellers to provide resources and support for their advocacy for the right to read.

In addition, we conduct interviews with authors whose books have been challenged or banned. We have worked with authors Ellen Wittlinger, Carolyn Mackler, Susan Patron, Diana Abu-Jaber, Chris Crutcher, John Green, Julia Alvarez, Lauren Myracle, Rachel Vail, and Judy Blume.

Book Challenges: December 2006 - May 2009

Individual Book Challenges (Alphabetical by Title)

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

by Sherman Alexie (Hachette)

Banned in Prineville, Oregon, December 2008

School officials in Crook County, OR, removed *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie from ninth grade English classes at Crook County High School after one parent complained about a passage that discussed masturbation. The Kids' Right to Read Project sent a letter to the Crook County superintendent and school board. We also offered resources and support to school officials who opposed the book's removal.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

by Mark Twain (Penguin)

Challenged in Manchester, Connecticut, December 2007

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was challenged for use in the 11th grade curriculum at Manchester High School in December 2007. One parent objected to racially sensitive language in the book. We wrote a letter to the local newspaper opposing the challenges. The book was returned to classrooms in January 2008.

The Amazing Bone

by William Steig (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Challenged in Lehigh Acres, Florida, February 2008

The Amazing Bone was challenged at Sunshine Elementary School in February 2008 by a parent who objected to a scene in the book in which robbers try to steal from the main character (a pig) and brandish pistols and a dagger. The parent wanted the book removed from the library. NCAC and ABFFE worked with the school principal and provided informational resources on the First Amendment in schools to the school's book review committee. In an interview with a local TV station, we emphasized the importance of protecting all parents' First Amendment rights to decide what their children may

read. The review committee voted on February 8, 2008 to keep *The Amazing Bone* in the school, and school officials worked with the parent to accommodate the family individually.

And Tango Makes Three

by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell (Simon & Schuster)

Restricted in Loudoun County, Virginia, February 2008

And Tango Makes Three was placed on restricted access in all elementary school libraries throughout Loudoun County in February 2008. The book was challenged by one parent who objected to the story of two male penguins who parent a chick as an attack on families headed by heterosexuals. The book was reviewed by two committees of librarians, teachers, principals, parents, and administrators at the school and district levels. Both committees recommended against any restrictions on the book. Despite these recommendations, the Superintendent decided to restrict student access to the book, which was made available only to teachers or parents. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the Superintendent urging him to reverse his decision, and our comments on the issue were printed in the *Loudoun Times-Mirror*. We also provided resources on book challenge policies and the First Amendment in schools to members of the school board. The Superintendent later returned the book to circulation based on “procedural errors” in the review process.

Challenged in Ankeny, Iowa, December 2008

Two parents challenged *And Tango Makes Three* for use in elementary school libraries in Ankeny, Iowa. The parents objected to the story of two male penguins who parent a chick because they say the book is not “age-appropriate.” ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the Ankeny School Board opposing the challenges in November 2008. We also provided information on the First Amendment in schools to school officials. The board voted 6-1 in December 2008 to keep the book on library shelves.

Angels in America

by Tony Kushner (Theatre Communications Group)

Challenged in Deerfield, Illinois, March 2008

Angels in America was challenged at Deerfield High School by a community member who objected to the play's sexual, religious, and racial content and wanted it removed from the school's AP English classes. The school then offered the play as an "opt-in" assignment. In addition, a local organization publicly attacked the play, calling it "pornography." ABFFE, NCAC, and three organizations sent a letter to the Superintendent and School Board supporting their resolve to stand by First Amendment principles and keep the play in the curriculum. We also published a youth op-ed on the issue, written by a Deerfield High School graduate, on the NCAC website. The school board voted unanimously to uphold the principal's decision to keep the play in classes.

Beach Music

by Pat Conroy (Random House)

Challenged in Kanawha County, West Virginia, October 2007

In October 2007, two novels by Pat Conroy, *The Prince of Tides* and *Beach Music*, were challenged for use in the Advanced Placement English curriculum at Nitro High School in Kanawha County, WV, because some parents objected to graphic violence including sexual violence in the books. The books were pulled from classrooms, and many students protested the books' removal. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the school board, who referred the matter to a book review committee, and we provided educational resources to educators involved in the controversy. In addition, Pat Conroy wrote a letter to the local newspaper, the *Charleston Gazette*, which covered the controversy. Following the review committee's vote in favor of both books, *Beach Music* and *The Prince of Tides* were returned to classrooms. The school board subsequently passed an alternative reading policy requiring teachers using supplemental materials to send home a copy of the syllabus and to notify parents through a form of any materials that may be considered objectionable. The letter from ABFFE, NCAC, and four other free speech groups opposing the policy

was published in the *Charleston Gazette* in December 2007. See also:
The Prince of Tides

Beloved

by Toni Morrison (Random House)

Banned in Louisville, Kentucky, March 2007

Beloved was removed from Advanced Placement English classrooms at Eastern High School in Louisville, KY, in March 2007 because some parents complained about the book's racial and sexual content. Students were told to stop reading the book within 30 pages from the end of the novel, and class discussions were terminated. ABFFE and NCAC were joined by PEN American Center and the National Council of Teachers of English in opposing the book's removal. We also worked with the local chapter of the ACLU and local activists.

The Bermudez Triangle

by Maureen Johnson (Penguin)

Banned in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, May 2007

The Bermudez Triangle was removed from circulation in the school library at Bartlesville Mid-High in May 2007. The book was removed following complaints from one parent about homosexual themes and underage drinking in the book. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the Superintendent and Board of Education opposing the book's removal.

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya (Hachette)

Banned in Orestimba, California, November 2008

Newman-Crows Landing Unified School District Superintendent Rick Fauss removed *Bless Me, Ultima* from district high school classes in November 2008 after one parent objected to the book as "anti-Catholic." Our letter opposing the ban was published in the Modesto Bee. We also sent a letter to the school board and worked with the ACLU of Northern California to oppose the ban. Despite our efforts, the school board voted 4-1 on February 2, 2009, to uphold the superintendent's decision to remove the book from classrooms. It will remain in the school library.

The Book of Bunny Suicides

by Andy Riley (Hodder & Stoughton)

Challenged in Brownsville, Oregon, November 2008

The Book of Bunny Suicides was challenged by one parent who wanted the book removed from the library at Central Linn High School. In November 2008, NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the school board in support of keeping the book in the library.

The Bookseller of Kabul

by Asne Seierstad (Back Bay Books)

Banned in Wyandotte, Michigan, December 2008

The Wyandotte Board of Education voted to ban *The Bookseller of Kabul* by Asne Seierstad from the library and honors English classes at Roosevelt High School. Two adults in the community objected to violence and sexual content in the book and asked the school board to remove it. The board implemented a new Media Selection Guidelines Policy and revised its bylaws to include a formal process for dealing with challenges to instructional and library materials. However, the school board also decided to pull the book from the library and classes while policies were formed and to maintain the ban during the book's review. The Kids' Right to Read Project sent a letter to the school board and superintendent in late February, urging them to return the books to the library and classrooms during the review. We also provided resources on the First Amendment in schools to the principal and other members of the review committee and covered the story on the NCAC blog.

Our letter was read as part of the committee meeting on February 25, 2009, a meeting that lasted four and a half hours. The committee voted 6-0 to keep the book in the school library, but students age 17 or under would need permission from a parent to check the book out of the library. The committee voted 5-1 to keep the book in the curriculum. A list of books for required reading for the class would be publicized before the class begins, including reviews and synopses of the books to be taught, and a one-letter rating system (e.g. V for violence); parents can still opt out and request that their children read a different book. Ratings will be based on teachers' discretion. This is

seen as a compromise position and will be the recommendation the committee gives to the academic review committee.

The academic review committee, consisting of three board members, will review the book later this spring. Then the book will be reviewed at a meeting of the entire school board; the date for this meeting has not yet been determined.

The book remains in the superintendent's office during this process.

Child of God

by Cormac McCarthy (Random House)

Banned in Tuscola, Texas, October 2007

Child of God was removed from Jim Ned High School in Tuscola in October 2007 and cancelled from the school library's order list following complaints by parents of one student, who also filed an official complaint against a teacher with the local sheriff. The book was included in an optional reading list from which students chose books to read for a class assignment. The student's parents objected to violence, sexual themes including sexual violence, and profanity in the book. They met with the school principal and their daughter's English teacher. Dissatisfied, they registered an official complaint with the sheriff's office, charging the teacher with providing material "harmful to minors" to their daughter under Texas Penal Code 43.24. The teacher was placed on paid administrative leave in early October 2007. NCAC, ABFFE, and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) sent a letter to the superintendent and school board opposing the book's removal.

The Chocolate War

by Robert Cormier (Random House)

Banned in Bel Air, Maryland, April 2007; returned to classrooms in November 2007

In April 2007, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier (Random House) was removed from the ninth grade Social Studies curriculum in Harford County Public Schools. Parents challenged the book because they objected to language, sexual content, and references to homosexuality. ABFFE and NCAC were joined by the National Council of Teachers of English, the Association of American Publishers Freedom to Read, the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom, and PEN American Center in sending a letter opposing the ban. The Superintendent reversed her decision, and *The Chocolate War* was returned to classrooms in November 2007.

Cradle and All

by James Patterson (Hachette)

Banned in Westhampton Beach, New York, December 2007

Cradle and All by James Patterson and *The Tenth Circle* by Jodi Picoult (Simon and Schuster) were challenged in November 2007 by some parents who objected to sexual content in the books and requested that they be removed from the ninth grade optional reading list at Westhampton Beach High School. Terry Lucas of The Open Book bookstore in Westhampton Beach, NY, was one of four people who spoke in support of the books at the school board's initial meeting on the challenges; parents opposing the books had gathered over 75 signatures on their side. Terry wrote a letter to the school board, and we helped her to assemble a petition in support of the books, gave her talking points, and assisted with plans for her store's banned book "Read-In" event. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the school board in support of the books. The board voted 4-3 in early December 2007 to remove the books from the optional reading list, although they will remain available in the library. In a press release, we condemned the board's decision. See also: ***The Tenth Circle***

The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things

by Carolyn Mackler (Candlewick)

Challenged in Colorado Springs, Colorado, February 2008

A middle school teacher reported challenges to books in his school library including the removal of *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* in late February 2008. We provided educational resources for the teacher to use as he gathered more information about the challenges.

The Fighting Ground

by Avi (Harper)

Banned in Panama City, Florida, June 2008

The Fighting Ground was banned from elementary schools throughout the Bay District Schools in June 2008 after one parent challenged the book for language he found objectionable. A review committee and the superintendent recommended that the book be kept in school libraries. We sent a letter to the school board opposing the book's removal.

Finding Laura Buggs

by Stanley Gordon West (Lexington-Marshall Publishing)

Challenged in Fargo, North Dakota, May 2007

Finding Laura Buggs and *Until They Bring the Streetcars Back*, both by Stanley Gordon West, were challenged in May 2007 for use in the Fargo public schools because of one parent's objections to violence and sexual content. The complaining parent demanded that the school district ban the books despite district policy explicitly stating that only parents with children in classes assigned to read the books may file formal complaints; her child was not assigned to read either of the books. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the Superintendent and book reconsideration committee, who decided to retain the books. See also:

Until They Bring the Streetcars Back

Fool's Crow

by James Welch (Penguin)

Challenged in Helena, Montana, April 2007

Fool's Crow was challenged for use in the 10th grade English curriculum in Helena Public Schools in April 2007. One parent objected to violence and sexual content in the book. The parent said she would be satisfied with an alternative assignment for her son, but the school district said it never offered him one because he never asked. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the school board opposing the challenge and advising the school district about ways to deal with challenges of this nature to avoid further controversy. *Fool's Crow* was kept in the high school curriculum.

The Freedom Writers Diary

by Erin Gruwell (Random House)

Banned in Indianapolis, Indiana, February 2008

The Freedom Writers Diary was removed from English 11 classes at Perry Meridian High School in February 2008 while students were in the process of reading it. No formal complaint process against the book was initiated, students' parents had signed permission slips indicating their approval of the book's use, and the book is freely available in the high school library. ABFFE and NCAC were joined by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in sending a letter to the school board opposing the book's removal.

Challenged in Howell, Michigan, February 2007

The Freedom Writers Diary by Erin Gruwell, *Black Boy* by Richard Wright (Harper), *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (Random House), *Running with Scissors* by Augusten Burroughs (Macmillan), and *Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut (Random House) were challenged in Howell High School in February 2007 for sexual themes and profanity by members of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education (LOVE) with assistance from the Michigan chapter of the American Family Association. ABFFE and NCAC organized a coalition of nine free expression groups who sent a letter to the school board urging them to keep the books. The school board voted 5-2 to retain all of them. Dissatisfied with this result, the AFA also assisted LOVE

in filing a complaint with the State Attorney General and the U.S. Department of Justice, claiming that the books violate laws against child pornography and sexual abuse. ABFFE and NCAC issued a press release condemning the decision. The U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan referred the matter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. However, federal, state, and local prosecutors alike declared the complaints to be without merit. ABFFE and NCAC issued a press release applauding the decision. See also: **Howell, Michigan**

Girl, Interrupted

by Susanna Kaysen (Random House)

Censored in New Rochelle, New York, December 2008

Teachers at New Rochelle High School removed pages from *Girl, Interrupted* by Susanna Kaysen (Random House), reportedly due to complaints about sexual content and profanity. The school board issued a statement in December 2008 opposing the censorship and announced that full text copies will replace the censored copies. NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the school board commending the decision. We also spoke with reporters about this and other book censorship incidents and blogged about the case on NCAC's blog. Our comments were published in *The Guardian*.

A Girl's Life Online

by Katherine Tarbox

Challenged in Baldwinsville, New York, May 2008

A Girl's Life Online was challenged at Baker High School in May 2008 by a parent who objected to sexual content in the book and asked the district to remove it from the curriculum. We sent a letter to the *Syracuse Post-Standard* opposing the challenge.

The Giver

by Lois Lowry (Random House)

Challenged in Concord, California, November 2007

The Giver was challenged and reviewed in Mt. Diablo School District for use on the sixth-grade optional reading list and in the school library. We sent a letter to the local newspaper to publicly oppose the challenge.

The Golden Compass

by Philip Pullman (Random House)

Challenged in Winchester, Kentucky, October 2007

The Golden Compass was challenged in Winchester, KY, in October 2007 by parents and some local Christian leaders who believed it to be anti-Christian. The school board appointed a review committee to read the book and make recommendations to the board. ABFFE and NCAC sent letters to the committee and the school board in support of the book. In addition, the Catholic League, a national advocacy organization, urged parents to keep their children from seeing the new film, *The Golden Compass*, for fear that it would encourage kids to read the book, which they condemn as anti-Christian. We created a web page to track challenges to the book and provide resources for opposing them.

Grendel

by John Gardner (Random House)

Challenged in Sherwood, Oregon, November 2008

Grendel was challenged for use in Sherwood High School's 10th grade accelerated English curriculum in November 2008. Some parents objected to sexual content and violence in the book, but their children were offered an alternative assignment. The school board voted to keep the book in the curriculum. A letter from the Kids' Right to Read Project in support of the decision to keep the book was published in the local newspaper.

Help the Forest

by Rita Crosby (Pearson Scott Foresman)

Challenged in Grants Pass, Oregon, March 2009

In March 2009, school officials removed *Help the Forest* by Rita Crosby from first grade classes after complaints about the way the book portrays loggers. Original copies of *Help the Forest* were replaced with a revised version. The new version sent to the district by the publisher shows the loggers planting a tree instead of littering and says, “These people take care of huge forests,” among other changes. KRRP publicized the issue on NCAC’s blog.

The Higher Power of Lucky

by Susan Patron (Simon & Schuster)

The word “scrotum” in February 2007 made the Newbery Award-winning novel the subject of controversy among authors and librarians across the country. Following a report in the *New York Times*, the story of Patron’s challenged book received national attention, and many school librarians hesitated to purchase the book for their collections. Susan Patron is the Juvenile Materials Collection Manager at the Los Angeles Public Library and the author of five other books for children. In an interview with Patron, we asked her about the controversy over *The Higher Power of Lucky* and librarians’ role in defending the First Amendment. ABFFE and NCAC also disseminated information about book censorship and worked with publishers and others to build awareness and draw attention to the issue.

Hoops

by Walter Dean Myers (Random House)

Challenged in Council Bluffs, Iowa, April 2009

Hoops was challenged in April 2009 in the Council Bluffs School District by a parent who objected to profanity, derogatory language and sexual content in the book and wanted it removed from the district. Her twin sons were in the sixth grade and selected the book as part of a guided reading program for their Language Arts class. The Kids’ Right to Read Project covered the incident on the NCAC blog. We also provided advice and online resources to a school official to share with the committee

reviewing the book. The seven-member review committee held a public meeting on April 13th and voted unanimously to keep the book in district classrooms and libraries.

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents

by Julia Alvarez (Penguin)

Banned in Smithfield, North Carolina, December 2007

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents was removed from Johnston County Schools in December 2007 following challenges by a few parents who objected to sexual themes in the book. Although their daughter was offered an alternative assignment, the parents continued to press for the book's removal. A review committee recommended that the book be kept in school classrooms and libraries, but a district committee decided to ban it. In addition, the district began using lists of challenged books to "weed out" potentially offensive materials. ABFFE, NCAC, and PEN American Center sent a letter to the school board condemning both decisions. We also conducted an exclusive interview with Julia Alvarez which is featured on NCAC's website in 'Voices Against Book Censorship.'

It's Perfectly Normal

written by Robie H. Harris and illustrated by Michael Emberley
(Candlewick)

Removed by a library patron in Lewiston, Maine, September 2007

In September 2007, a woman refused to return *It's Perfectly Normal* to the Lewiston public library and filed obscenity charges against the library because she objected to the book's sexual content. The patron was issued a civil complaint summons for refusing to return the library book after she was asked to return it. We contacted the librarian to offer support and resources in dealing with the controversy. Ellen Richmond of Children's Book Cellar in Waterville, ME, alerted us to this incident, and we worked with her to monitor the controversy as the case was reviewed by the library board.

Just Listen

by Sarah Dessen (Penguin)

Challenged in Tampa, Florida, December 2007

Just Listen was challenged in December 2007 at Armwood High School by a few parents who objected to the book's sexual themes and language and requested that it be removed from the school library. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the *Tampa Tribune* and the Hillsborough County School Board in support of the book. A review committee of teachers, parents, and students voted unanimously to keep the book in the library.

Kaffir Boy

by Mark Mathabane (Simon and Schuster)

Challenged in Thief River Falls, Minnesota, November 2008

Kaffir Boy was challenged for use in ninth grade English classes at Lincoln High School in Thief River Falls, MN, in November 2008. Some parents objected to sexual violence and graphic language in the book. NCAC and ABFFE wrote a letter to the school board, urging that the book be retained in the curriculum. We spoke with school administrators involved in the issue. The school board voted to keep the full version of the book in classrooms but to offer parents the option for their children to read an abridged version of the book, through the use of an opt-out form.

The Land

by Mildred D. Taylor (Penguin)

Challenged in New Tampa, Florida, March 2008

The Land by Mildred D. Taylor and *The Starplace* by Vicki Grove were challenged in the Turner Elementary School library in New Tampa in March 2008. One student's parents objected to the authors' use of racial language and wanted the books removed from the elementary school library. A school-based committee reviewed *The Land* and voted to remove it from the library and donate it to a middle school. Our understanding is that no official challenge to *The Starplace* was submitted, and that the book is still available in the school library.

A Lesson Before Dying

by Ernest Gaines (Random House)

Challenged in Huntsville, Alabama, July 2008

A Lesson Before Dying was challenged in the Huntsville City Schools by two parents who objected to sexual references and profanity in the book. The parents asked that it be removed from the ninth grade required summer reading lists. The principal of Grissom High School offered an alternative assignment to students who object to the book, and the school board reviewed it and decided to make the book optional reading. NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the school board in support of the book.

Looking for Alaska

by John Green (Penguin)

Challenged in Depew, New York, February 2008

Looking for Alaska was challenged at Depew High School in February 2008 by some parents who objected to sexual content and graphic language in the book and requested that it be removed from the 11th grade English curriculum. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the *Buffalo Times*, and we were joined by Jonathon Welch of Talking Leaves...Books in Buffalo, NY, in sending a letter to the school board opposing the challenges. The school board appointed a committee to review *Looking for Alaska* and voted unanimously to keep the book. See also: **St. Louis County Libraries, Missouri**

Midnight In the Garden of Good and Evil

by John Berendt (Random House)

Challenged In Beulah, ND, January 2009

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil was challenged by two parents after their son brought it home from the school library as part of an accelerated reader program. The parents who objected to the book called it “pornographic” and asked that it be removed from the school library. The school board voted 4-3 on January 15 to remove the book. Four days later, the board reversed the ban, and the book was returned to the school library. The board chairman cited potential legal issues that could arise from a hasty decision to remove a book.

KRRP provided resources on the First Amendment in schools to the superintendent to share with other school officials. We offered advice and assistance to the superintendent and publicized the issue on NCAC's blog.

My Brother Sam is Dead

by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier (Scholastic)

Challenged in Muscogee County, GA, February 2009

The Muscogee County School District's media committee voted in late February 2009 to keep the novel, *My Brother Sam is Dead*, in elementary school libraries. One parent had challenged the book because she objected to profanity in it. KRRP sent a letter to the *Ledger-Enquirer* in support of the committee's decision.

Night Talk

by Elizabeth Cox (Graywolf Press)

Challenged in Gwinnett County, GA, Fall 2008

One parent challenged *Night Talk* in Fall 2008 for its sexual content and requested that the book be removed from the library at South Gwinnett High School. A school-based committee denied the request in November 2008, and decided to keep the book in the library. KRRP sent a letter on January 28, 2009 to the System Review Committee and the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, opposing the challenges. The Committee is currently reviewing school policies and procedures.

Nineteen Minutes

by Jodi Picoult (Simon and Schuster)

Challenged in Beardstown, Illinois, September 2008

Nineteen Minutes was challenged in September 2008 by one parent who objected to sexual references, profanity, and violence, including bullying and suicide, in the book and asked that it be removed from the Beardstown Middle/High School library. A committee comprised of teachers, a school principal, a librarian, and a school psychologist reviewed the book and recommended that it be retained in the high school adult fiction section of the school library. NCAC and ABFFE

sent a letter to the school board opposing the challenges, and we provided resources and assistance to local educators involved in the controversy. The school board voted to retain the book in the high school section of the library, but students are required to get parental permission to check it out.

Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck (Penguin)

Challenged in Appomattox, Virginia, January 2008

Of Mice and Men was challenged in January 2008 at Appomattox High School by a parent who objected to graphic language in the book. Though her son was given an alternative Steinbeck book to read, the parent insisted that the book was inappropriate for other students and asked that it be removed altogether from the 10th grade English curriculum. We wrote a letter to the review committee opposing the challenges. See also: **Baxley, Georgia**

Paint Me Like I Am

by Bill Aquado and Richard Newirth (Harper)

Poem Excised in Vineland, New Jersey, May 2009

The principal of Landis Intermediate School literally tore pages out of the school's copy of the nationally acclaimed poetry anthology, *Paint Me Like I Am*. The pages, including Jayson Tirado's poem, "Diary of an Abusive Stepfather," were ripped out after one mother of a thirteen year-old student raised concerns over the age-appropriateness of the poem's content. Kids' Right to Read Project offered resources and assistance to school officials and the incident was covered on NCAC's blog. ABFFE and NCAC are currently preparing a further response.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower

by Stephen Chbosky (MTV)

Banned in Portage, Indiana, November 2008

The Perks of Being a Wallflower was banned from ninth grade classrooms at Portage High School in late November 2008. The book was challenged by one parent who objected to sexual content in the novel, and the school board decided to remove the book from

the curriculum. In response to an article published in the school newspaper, the *Pow Wow*, which reported on the review process for *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, school administrators imposed a new policy requiring that all future newspaper content be subject to prior review. In December 2008, NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the school board and superintendent opposing the banning of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and the prior review policy for the newspaper.

The Pillars of the Earth

by Ken Follett (Penguin)

Challenged in Cleburne, TX, February 2009

Superintendent Dr. Ronny Beard removed *The Pillars of the Earth* by Ken Follett from the Cleburne High School curriculum after parents complained about sexual content. *The Pillars of the Earth* had been part of the senior honors English curriculum at Cleburne High since 1996. Parents complained after the book was assigned in the summer, even though the teacher offered an alternative assignment for those who objected to sexual content. The school board also considered implementing a policy that would instruct teachers about when to send notification slips home to parents. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the school board opposing the challenges.

The Prince of Tides

by Pat Conroy (Random House)

Challenged in Kanawha County, West Virginia, October 2007

See: ***Beach Music***

Sandpiper

by Ellen Wittlinger (Simon & Schuster)

Challenged in Brookwood, Alabama, September 2007

Sandpiper was challenged at Brookwood High School by a student and her grandmother who objected to the book's sexual content. The student refused to return the book to the school library. A review committee recommended that the book be retained in school libraries. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the school board in support of the book. The board voted to keep *Sandpiper*, but board members promised to consider policies to prevent potentially "offensive" material from being included in library collections.

So Far from the Bamboo Grove

by Yoko Kawashima Watkins (Harper)

Challenged in Dover/Sherborn, Massachusetts, December 2006

So Far from the Bamboo Grove was challenged in Dover-Sherborn Middle School in December 2006 by parents who found its depiction of Koreans during World War II offensive, calling this work of fiction "historically inaccurate." The challengers also sought to bar the author from visiting the school to meet with students, though her annual presentation had been an integral part of the sixth grade English Language Arts unit on "survival" for years. Partly in response to a letter from ABFFE, NCAC, and other free expression groups, the school board reversed a committee decision that had recommended removing the book. This incident was brought to our attention by Carol Chittenden of Eight Cousins Bookstore in Falmouth, MA, with whom we worked in responding to the controversy.

Song of Solomon

by Toni Morrison (Penguin)

Banned in Shelby, Michigan, May 2009

Song of Solomon was suspended from the curriculum of an advance English class after the superintendent of the Shelby school board ordered a teacher to remove the book from the classroom. On May 19, the board reviewed the book and voted to reinstate it. Kids' Right

to Read Project publicized the incident on NCAC's blog.

The Starplace

by Vicki Grove (Penguin)

Challenged in New Tampa, Florida, March 2008

See: ***The Land***

The Tenth Circle

by Jodi Picoult (Simon & Schuster)

Banned in Westhampton Beach, New York, December 2007

The Tenth Circle by Jodi Picoult and *Cradle and All* by James Patterson (Hachette) were challenged in November 2007 by some parents who objected to sexual content in the books and requested that they be removed from the ninth grade optional reading list at Westhampton Beach High School. Terry Lucas of The Open Book bookstore in Westhampton Beach, NY, was one of four people who spoke in support of the books at the school board's initial meeting on the challenges; parents opposing the books had gathered over 75 signatures on their side. Terry wrote a letter to the school board, and we helped her to assemble a petition in support of the books, gave her talking points, and assisted with plans for her store's banned book "Read-In" event. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the school board in support of the books. The board voted 4-3 in early December 2007 to remove the books from the optional reading list, although they will remain available in the library. In a press release, ABFFE and NCAC condemned the board's decision. See also:

Cradle and All

Tripping Over the Lunch Lady: And Other School Stories

ed. by Nancy E. Mercado (Penguin)

Challenged in Williamsburg, Virginia, October 2007

Tripping Over the Lunch Lady: And Other Stories was challenged in Magruder Elementary School in October 2007 by some parents who objected to war references in one of the stories. We wrote a letter to the local newspaper applauding the school district's decision to keep the book in the school library and in Magruder's optional, school-wide "One Book for All" reading program, which encourages students and parents to read together.

TTYL

by Lauren Myracle (Abrams)

Banned in Round Rock, Texas, November 2008

TTYL was removed from middle school libraries throughout Round Rock Independent School District in November, 2008. One student's parents challenged *TTYL* because they objected to sexual content and profanity in the book. Two review committees evaluated the book and recommended that it be kept on library shelves. However, before the school board could review the matter, Superintendent Jesús Chávez had the book removed from middle school libraries throughout the district. NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the school board and superintendent opposing the banning and a letter to the *Austin American-Statesman*.

Until They Bring the Streetcars Back

by Stanley Gordon West (Lexington-Marshall Publishing)

Challenged in Fargo, North Dakota, May 2007

Finding Laura Buggs and *Until They Bring the Streetcars Back* both by Stanley Gordon West were challenged in May 2007 for use in the Fargo public schools because of one parent's objections to violence and sexual content. The complaining parent demanded that the school district ban the books despite district policy explicitly stating that only parents with children in classes assigned to read the books may file formal complaints; her child was not assigned to read either of the books. ABFFE and NCAC sent a letter to the Superintendent and

book reconsideration committee, who decided to retain the books.
See: ***Finding Laura Buggs***

Vamos A Cuba

by Alta Schreier (Heinemann)

Banned in Miami, Florida, April 2006

Vamos A Cuba was banned in April 2006 by the Miami-Dade County School Board because a local parent complained that the book paints too favorable a picture of Cuba. The school board decided to ban the entire series of travel books, which are intended for children ages 4-8. ABFFE joined an amicus brief in support of the ACLU lawsuit opposing the school board's decision. A three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard arguments in the case on June 6, 2007. A decision was still pending in December 2008.

Whale Talk

by Chris Crutcher (Random House)

Challenged in Missouri Valley, Iowa, March 2007

In early March 2007, *Whale Talk* was challenged in tenth grade English classes at Missouri Valley High School by a local pastor who complained about the book's "objectionable language." Following a letter from ABFFE and NCAC, the book reconsideration committee recommended that the school board vote to keep the book, and the books were subsequently returned to classrooms.

What's Happening to Me? A Guide to Puberty

by Peter Mayle (Lyle Stuart)

Challenged in Raleigh, North Carolina, April 2008

In April 2008, a third grade teacher reported objections in her elementary school to *What's Happening to Me? A Guide to Puberty*. We provided educational resources and support as she obtained more information about the challenges and worked to make policies about book challenges more widely known in her district.

Book Challenges and Bans Involving Multiple Titles (Alphabetical by State)

Jacksonville, Florida: Novels Challenged

Middle and High Schools, March 2007

In March 2007, *Vegan Virgin Valentine* by Carolyn Mackler (Candlewick) was challenged in Mandarin High School library for language some parents found objectionable. The challengers wanted, at minimum, parental permission to be required for students to check the book out of the school library. Also in the Duval County Public Schools, parents challenged four books in the school library at LaVilla School for the Arts, a Jacksonville middle school. They objected to *Lucky* by Eddie de Oliveira (Scholastic), *Beyond the Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier (Random House), *Tiger Eyes* by Judy Blume (Random House), and *Olive's Ocean* by Kevin Henkes (Harper). Most of the objections concerned the allegedly “offensive” language in the books. In the case of *Lucky*, the critics disliked the protagonist’s questioning of his own sexuality. ABFFE and NCAC joined with PEN American Center in writing letters to the school principal and superintendent urging them to retain the books and to follow a thorough review policy.

Leesburg, Florida: Novels Challenged

Public Library, April 2009

Only in Your Dreams: A Gossip Girl Novel by Cecily von Ziegesar (Hachette) and *The Bermudez Triangle* by Maureen Johnson (Penguin) were challenged in April 2009 in the Leesburg Public Library. One parent objected to sexual content and drug references in the books and asked that they be removed from the Young Adults section. The parent first assembled a petition with 120 signatures before deciding to comply with the library’s challenge policy and submitting a formal challenge. The Kids’ Right to Read Project

sent a letter to the library board opposing the challenges. We also covered the incident on the NCAC blog and provided advice and online resources to the library director.

Baxley, Georgia: Novels Banned

High School, November 2007

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (Penguin) and *Native Son* by Richard Wright (Harper) were banned by the Appling County School Board in November 2007 after a local church minister challenged the books. Two review committees of twenty educators reviewed the books and recommended that they be kept in Appling County High School classrooms. Parents signed permission slips to express their support of *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (Harper), which was banned, as well, without prior review, in violation of district policy. We sent a letter to the school board opposing its decision.

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho: Novels Reviewed

Middle and High Schools, December 2008

In the fall of 2008, the Coeur d'Alene school board placed over two dozen titles in a review process and suspended the books' use in classrooms for sixth through twelfth grades during the review. Initially, 78 books were removed from high schools and 39 from middle schools, as the district sought to complete an evaluation process administrators say was overlooked when the books were adopted. Once the evaluation process was completed and the books were approved, they were returned to classrooms. In December 2008, the board unanimously approved 26 titles, including *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, over which the board had split in a previous session. The list also included *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The Kids' Right to Read Project offered advice and assistance to a community mem-

ber interested in opposing efforts to remove the books. We also offered resources to school district administrators.

Delphi, Indiana: Novels Challenged and Returned

High School, March 2009

Following challenges by some parents to *In Country* by Bobbie Ann Mason (Harper), *Chinese Handcuffs* by Chris Crutcher (Harper), and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (Random House) in 11th grade advanced English classes, a review committee at Delphi Community School Corporation recommended that the books be kept in classes. Parents and students who objected to the books were offered an alternative assignment. The school board voted 5-1 in early March 2009 to retain the books. We covered the story on the NCAC blog and sent a letter to the local newspaper, the *Journal-Courier*, commending the board's decision to keep the books.

Howell, Michigan: Novels Challenged

High School, February 2007

Black Boy by Richard Wright (Harper), *Running with Scissors* by Augusten Burroughs (Macmillan), *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (Random House), *Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut (Random House), and *The Freedom Writers Diary* by Erin Gruwell (Random House) were challenged in Howell High School in February 2007 for sexual themes and profanity by members of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education (LOVE) with assistance from the Michigan chapter of the American Family Association. ABFFE and NCAC were joined by nine free expression groups in a letter to the school board urging them to keep the books. The school board voted 5-2 to retain all of them. Dissatisfied with this result, the AFA also assisted LOVE in filing a complaint with the State Attorney General and the U.S. Department of Justice, claiming that the books violate laws against child

pornography and sexual abuse. The U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan referred the matter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. However, federal, state, and local prosecutors alike declared the complaints to be without merit.

St. Louis County, Missouri: Young Adult Books Challenged Libraries, September 2007 and September 2008

Local residents concerned about efforts to restrict access to books in the Daniel Boone branch of the St. Louis County Public Library contacted us to report challenges to several books for young adults. *Growing Up Gay in America* by Jason R. Rich (Franklin Rich), *Homosexuality: What Does It Mean? (Perspectives on Healthy Sexuality)* by Julie K. Endersbe (Capstone Press), *Making Sexual Decisions: The Ultimate Teen Guide (It Happened to Me, No. 4)* by L. Kris Gowen (The Scarecrow Press), and *A-List #6, Some Like It Hot* by Zoey Dean (Poppy) were challenged by a community member who called them “obscene” and spoke against the books at a City Council meeting. We wrote a letter to the City Council and a local newspaper opposing the challenges. f

In September 2008, a local group, Citizens Against Pornography, and some community members objected to a dozen titles in the young adult section of the St. Louis County Libraries. The books are *Alice on Her Way* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (Simon and Schuster), *Escape from Egypt* by Sonia Levitin (Penguin), *Hard Cash* by Kate Cann (Simon and Schuster), *Rainbow Boys and Rainbow High* by Alex Sanchez (Simon and Schuster), *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (Penguin), *33 Snowfish* by Adam Rapp (Candlewick), and *A Seahorse Year* by Stacey D’Erasmus (Houghton Mifflin), as well as non-fiction books on sexuality and sexual health: *Growing Up Gay in America* by Jason R. Rich (Franklin Street Books), *Homosexuality: What Does It Mean? (Perspectives on Healthy Sexuality)* by Julie K. Endersbe (Capstone Press), *Making Sexual Decisions: The Ultimate Teen Guide* (The Scarecrow Press), and *The Little Black Book for Girlz: A Book on*

Healthy Sexuality by St. Stephen's Community House (Annick Press). The group asked that the library impose restrictions on the books, such as using a "rating" system to classify books, or requiring that teens get written permission from a parent or guardian to check the books out. NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the library board opposing the proposed changes.

Morganton, North Carolina: Novels Challenged

February 2008 and Fall 2008

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini (Penguin) was challenged at Freedom High School in February 2008 by a community member who objected to sexual content and graphic language in the book. A school board member also strongly objected to the book and moved to have the board circumvent the normal procedures for dealing with book challenges. The same board member also proposed amending the district's media policy to apply standards for audio and visual materials to all materials including books. In direct violation of district policy, the Superintendent told all schools in the district to suspend use of the book pending a review by a Media Advisory Committee. ABFFE and NCAC were joined by PEN American Center, the Association of American Publishers, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom in sending a letter to the school board and superintendent opposing the challenges. The school-based media and technology committee recommended that the book be kept and that a policy be created for future reading assignments involving books with "mature content." The policy would require that the school send written notification to parents warning them of the content of the book. *The Kite Runner* was reviewed and subsequently approved for use in classrooms.

In the fall of 2008, some parents objected to sexual content, profanity, and violence in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (Random House), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (Har-

court), *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger (Hachette), and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (Penguin) in Burke County, NC, schools. NCAC and ABFFE sent a letter to the school board opposing the challenges in November 2008.

West Bend, Wisconsin: Novels Challenged, Library Board Members Removed for Views

Public Library, April 2009

A few community members circulated a petition to have books they consider “obscene” removed from the YA section of the West Bend Community Memorial Library. The challenges to several books and to the library’s online list of titles addressing GBLTQ issues, “Over the Rainbow,” were brought to our attention in March 2009. The challenged books include *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (Simon & Schuster), *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (Harper), *Deal with It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain, and Life as a gURL* by Esther Drill, Heather McDonald, and Rebecca Odes (Simon & Schuster), and *Baby Be Bop* by Francesca Lia Block (Harper). On May 18, the West Bend Common Council voted for a second time not to reappoint four members of the Library Board because of their views. NCAC and ABFFE were joined by the Association of American Publishers and PEN American Center in urging the Common Council to reconsider this decision and to keep the challenged books in the library. We also publicized the incident in a press release and on the NCAC blog. In addition, the Christian Civil Liberties Union’s Milwaukee branch filed a legal claim arguing that its elderly plaintiffs have suffered mental and emotional damage due to the books’ presence in the library’s YA section. The claim names the city of West Bend, Mayor Kristine Deiss, the West Bend Library Board and Library Director as defendants and seeks to recover \$30,000 per plaintiff, Deiss’ resignation and the books’ removal for a public burning.

What You Can Do About Book Censorship:

WATCH FOR CENSORSHIP AND LET US KNOW!

E-mail Jamie Chosak, jamie@ncac.org; jamie@abffe.com

CELEBRATE BANNED BOOKS WEEK

Find a Banned Books Week event in your area:

www.bannedbooksweek.org

SUPPORT THE KIDS' RIGHT TO READ PROJECT

Make a tax-deductible gift online: www.ncac.org or www.abffe.com

Additional Resources and Links:

The National Coalition Against Censorship, "Book Censorship Toolkit."

Available online: www.ncac.org/literature/bookcensorshiptoolkit.cfm

The National Coalition Against Censorship, "Censorship in Schools: Learning, Speaking, and Thinking Freely: The First Amendment in Schools."

Available online: www.ncac.org/education/schools/index.cfm

The National Council of Teachers of English, "The Student's Right to Read."

Available online: www.ncte.org/positions/statements/rightto-readguideline

The American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, "Banned Books Week Handbook."

Available online: www.abffe.com/banned2007.htm

The American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom, Banned Books Week Resources: www.ala.org/bbooks/

PEN American Center, Freedom to Write:

www.pen.org/page.php/prmID/172