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# CELEBRATE YOUR FREEDOM TO READ DURING BANNED BOOKS WEEK

by JUDITH KRUG, Director, ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom

**Banned Books Week:** Celebrating the Freedom to Read is an annual event sponsored by the national book community. The yearly celebration serves to remind Americans not to take this precious democratic freedom for granted. This year marks the 27<sup>th</sup> celebration of Banned Books Week, which takes place the last week of September.

The origins of Banned Books Week were laid at the American Booksellers Association (ABA) convention in May 1982. The ABA presented a Banned Books Exhibit featuring nearly 500 banned or challenged books in large metal cages, which were padlocked with a sign hanging overhead that proclaimed, “Caution! Some People Consider These Books Dangerous.” The exhibit was a huge success, and the idea of sponsoring a Banned Books Week generated a great deal of interest.

After the convention, the ABA asked organizations that had assisted them in preparing the exhibit to co-sponsor or endorse an ongoing Banned Books Week. The American Booksellers Association, the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Association of College Stores (NACS) co-sponsored the first Banned Books Week and asked each of their members to mount a display for Banned Books Week. The displays were to celebrate the right of each individual to choose the books that he or she wants to read without another person or group being able to deny that right. Since 1985, the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) has taken primary responsibility for the production of Banned Books Weeks materials, including posters, t-shirts, and an ever expanding list of books that have been banned or challenged throughout history.

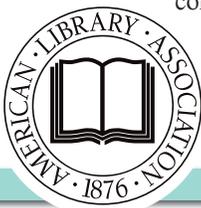
The first Banned Books Week was an unmitigated success, and it has grown each year since. Banned Books Week celebrates the free-

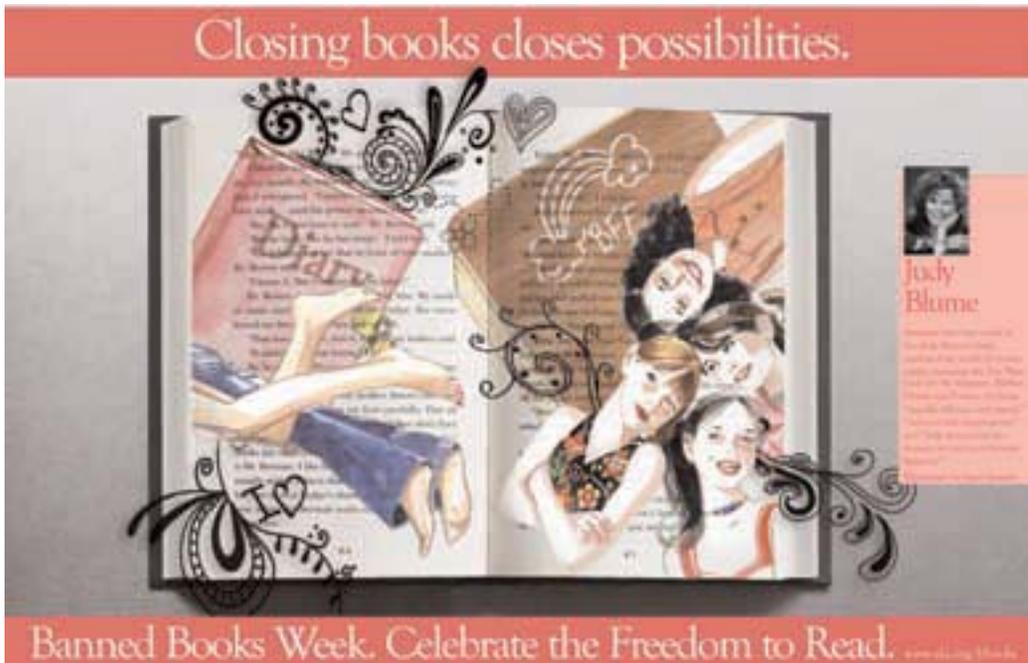
dom to not only choose what we read, but also to select from a full array of possibilities—a right that is firmly rooted in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Although we enjoy an increasing quantity and availability of information and reading material today, we must remain vigilant to ensure that access to this material is preserved. Would-be censors, who continue to threaten the freedom to read, come from all quarters and all political persuasions.

If you think book bannings don’t happen in America, think again. In 2007 alone, 420 books were challenged or banned in U.S. public libraries and schools – and those are just the ones that are reported to ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom. It is estimated that as many as 75% of challenges go unreported to ALA.

Challenges to library and school materials take many forms. Usually, the complainant files a formal, written complaint, which is then considered by the institution and a decision is made on the merits of the complaint. In some places, books are ceremonially burned (in the U.S., this tends to be more of a symbolic act). Occasionally, and more frequently in a school setting, a principal or superintendent will unilaterally remove a book based on community pressure. Because the removal of books in such cases often takes place outside an established procedure, courts around the country have found these actions to be unconstitutional and ordered the replacement of the materials.

When a book is challenged, burned, or otherwise removed from a library’s collection because of the ideas contained in it, our freedom to choose what to read for ourselves and our families is hampered. Fortunately, a good number of these challenges are unsuccessful, thanks in part to community





members who believe that our First Amendment right to access information is vital to our society.

Over the past 27 years, Banned Books Week has developed into a major event. All over the country, libraries, schools, bookstores, and community organizations are holding events, sponsoring exhibits, and presenting programs to shed light on the issue of censorship. In Chicago, near its headquarters, ALA sponsored a “Read-Out” on Saturday, September 27, in which some of the most frequently challenged authors (including Chris Crutcher, Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, and Lois Lowry) read from their favorite banned or challenged books. We’ve also set up Banned Books Week pages on Facebook and MySpace, where people can learn about activities for the week and connect with others in support of our freedom to read.

We hope you will use Banned Books Week as an opportunity to pick up a book or two you might not otherwise have read. Think about the ideas presented. Talk to your friends about them. Find out what your local library or bookstore is doing for Banned Books Week. And take a moment to learn more about libraries, books, and censorship by visiting [www.ala.org/bbooks](http://www.ala.org/bbooks). We are proud to stand up and speak out for all Americans’ freedom to read, and we hope you’ll join us.

Banned Books Week is sponsored by the American Booksellers Association, American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, American Library Association, American Society of Journalists and Authors, Association of American Publishers, National Association of College Stores, and is endorsed by Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. ■

#### About the Writer

*JUDITH KRUG, Director, ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, helped found the Freedom to Read Foundation, and has served as its executive director since 1969. In 1998, Krug received the Joseph P. Lippincott Award. In addition Dr. Krug serves as vice president of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, vice-chair of the Board of Directors of the Center for Democracy and Technology, chair of the Internet Education Foundation and immediate past chair of the Media Coalition.*

