Recommended for Professional Reading

THE GOOD TEEN
Rescuing Adolescence from the Myths of the Storm and Stress Years
by Richard M. Lerner, Ph.D.

“There is no one in America today who understands teenagers better than Richard Lerner.”
—William Damon, author of The Healthy Child, professor of education, and director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, Stanford University

“The most prolific developmental psychologist of our era has distilled his decades of insight into The Good Teen, a very accessible analysis of adolescence as it deserves to be understood.”
—Graham Spanier, Ph. D., President, The Pennsylvania State University

In this landmark eight-year study of 4,000 teens from 25 states, acclaimed researcher Richard M. Lerner sets the record straight about today’s teenagers.

With real-life anecdotes and smart, cutting-edge science, The Good Teen defies current societal thinking: teens are not inherently difficult or deficient, nor are the teen years by necessity ones of storm and stress; teens are not problems to be fixed, but resources to be developed.

Recommended for Professional Reading

Focus On:
Censorship & Banned Books

New Guides & Strategies for Teaching About & Challenging Censorship:
Kimberly Horne, ReLeah Lent, and Pat Scales

Articles by Noted Authors:
Maya Angelou, Judy Blume, Ray Bradbury, Billy Collins, Pat Conroy, and Lloyd Jones

Contributions from:
ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom, American Booksellers Foundation for Freedom of Expression, and the National Coalition Against Censorship

Reading Excerpts from New Titles

Inside: Banned Books CD Sampler
Includes an Interview with Judy Blume
Some time after the books had been forbidden—
The one about the woman and her daughter,
The one about the boy who spoke poorly—
And after the smoke from the incinerators had cleared,

It was suggested that censorship be extended
To the plover, the wild turkey, and the common moorhen.
But these birds have done nothing, a few protested.
That is precisely the problem, the loudspeakers answered.

It rained that month day and night.
Men with nets fanned out into the fields
And shouted to each other along the shorelines.
Teachers disappeared on the way to their cars.

Then the committee came after the morning glory
For its suggestive furling and unfurling
And the ligustrum and the alstroemeria
Because they were difficult to pronounce and spell.

Then the pine tree for its tricky needles and cones
And parsley and red and yellow peppers for no reason at all.
You would think the lock and the gate
Would be safe, but that was well before whispering,

Shaking hands on the street,
And hooking an arm around someone’s waist
Became the subjects of discussion
Across long granite tables behind dark glass doors.

And the rain was constant and cold—fine days
to curl up with a good book, someone joked—
but there were no more books,
just the curling up of people quietly in corners and doorways,

bits of straw floating down the streets
along the curbs into the turbulent rivers and out to sea.
Contributors

Rain
by Billy Collins Page 1

In a poem that is simultaneously profound and accessible, Billy Collins explores the ludicrous, but ultimately frightening, repercussions of a society in which book banning is condoned. Author image © Jersey Walz

Articles by Professional Organizations

Page 7

Does Censorship Matter?
by Pat Scales Page 27

ALSC President Pat Scales’ unequivocal answer is yes. Through numerous examples, she demonstrates how censorship is detrimental not only to children academically but also emotionally, as well as how we may all fight back.
Those Who Ban Books
by Maya Angelou Page 46
One of the most celebrated poets of the twentieth century, Maya Angelou openly mourns for those children who will be unable to read censored authors like Vonnegut, Dickens, and herself. Author image © tedhollins.com

About Censorship . . . In Her Own Words
by Judy Blume Page 56
For Blume, book banning hurts children—their ability to learn, love, grow, and think for themselves. The fear instilled by censors, she argues, is just as damaging as censorship itself. Author image © Mary Lee Shalvoy

A Letter to the Editor of the Charleston Gazette
by Pat Conroy Page 62
Conroy’s eloquent response to the banning of his books should be read by censors around the country. It is a moving testament to his love of English and its teachers.
To see what you can do to fight censorship and support Banned Books Week, the national celebration of First Amendment Rights, check out the First Amendment First Aid Kit at www.firstamendmentfirstaid.com
FOCUS ON: CENSORSHIP AND BANNED BOOKS

“Some particular cases of book burning are long and traumatically remembered—because the books destroyed were irreplaceable and their loss constituted a severe damage to cultural heritage, and/or because this instance of book burning has become emblematic of a harsh and oppressive regime. Such were the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, the burning of books and burying of scholars under China’s Qin Dynasty, the destruction of Mayan codices by Spanish Conquistadors and priests, and in more recent times, Nazi book burnings.”

—BOOK BURNING, FROM WIKIPEDIA.ORG

Here we are, nearly a decade into the 21st century, and book burning is still with us, perhaps as ferociously as ever.

Today, book burning is sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical, but the result is always the same: books disappear.

We turn in this issue of RHI to today’s leading authors, educators, thinkers, and professional organizations for their advice . . . and for hope. Some stand at the forefront working to extinguish the bonfires, and others have simply—and inadvertently—found themselves caught within its flames.

What they all offer to you, the educator, are their thoughts on a complicated, nuanced, and sometimes dangerous issue, as well as practical resources and tips for the classroom . . . and your career.

We are as delighted as you are to hear from such legendary authors as Maya Angelou, Billy Collins, and Ray Bradbury, and we humbly offer you their wisdom.

Another legendary author, Louis L’Amour, once wrote, “We needed books, we needed something on which to build dreams.”

So let’s all begin that building of dreams, and fight against the fire that seeks to destroy.

Michael D. Gentile
Editor, RHI Magazine
Director, Academic Marketing
Random House, Inc.
Article I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
It may be hard to imagine, but book censorship is still a problem in the United States. Not only is state-sanctioned book-banning alive and well, but so is the equally prevalent—almost more insidious—fear of censorship. This “social tyranny” discourages teachers from assigning books and school librarians from stocking them, out of fear that they may be challenged.

In an open letter AAP president Pat Schroeder writes to remind educators that they have allies. Joan Bertin identifies several themes that may elicit rebuke, and insists that the temptation to self-censor be resisted: “almost anything is vulnerable to challenge.” Inside, you’ll also find contributions from ALA, PEN American Center, ABFFE, and The American Place Theatre—all extolling the virtues of our guaranteed freedom of speech.
AN OPEN LETTER TO TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

from

Pat Schroeder, President and CEO, Association of American Publishers

In his “Coda” to Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury remarked that “There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.” In misguided efforts to “protect” young minds and to avoid offending anyone’s sensibilities, many of these “lit matches” are being tossed at books on recommended reading lists and on school library shelves.

To the courageous teachers and librarians on the front lines, fighting for the right of students to read a wide variety of books of their own choosing, we want to tell you that you are not alone. The Association of American Publishers (AAP) is proud to stand with you. Working closely with allies such as the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, AAP continues to make the publishing industry’s voice resonate in the fight against censorship.

Among incidents we have weighed in on in recent months:

AAP joined in sending a letter protesting the removal of Robert Cormier’s highly acclaimed novel The Chocolate War from a 9th grade social studies curriculum in Harford County, Maryland on the complaint of a few parents about language and references to homosexuality. The decision to remove the book was ultimately reversed and teachers given the option of using The Chocolate War as required reading in a unit on school bullying and harassment if permission is obtained from parents.

In the wake of a book banning controversy in West Virginia involving two of Pat Conroy’s most popular works, AAP joined in a letter to the local newspaper calling a proposed rating system for books used in an honors English class unwise and unworkable. The books are back in the classroom.

AAP was among those protesting the removal of Khaled Hosseini’s novel The Kite Runner from a 10th grade honors English class in Morganton, North Carolina, noting that while the novel is “indeed concerned with mature, complex themes and historical events that are playing out in the world today,” it is precisely these elements that “recommend the book, rather than disqualify it as a teaching tool.”

You can find out more about AAP and the work of our Freedom to Read Committee by visiting the AAP web site at: http://www.publishers.org and clicking on the “Freedom to Read” link on the left.

We applaud your efforts to open young minds, and hope that you will consider us a resource and an ally.

Sincerely,

Pat Schroeder
President and CEO,
Association of American Publishers

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RH! Censorship & Banned Books
BOOK CENSORSHIP 2008

A View from the Trenches

by JOAN BERTIN, Executive Director of the National Coalition Against Censorship

While the general public may not be aware of it, it’s probably not news to teachers that book censorship is alive and well in the United States. It’s a fact of life in almost every school district in the nation. While it’s impossible to say precisely how many challenges occur, there are hundreds reported in the press or to advocacy organizations like the National Coalition Against Censorship every year. Whatever number we can point to, however, is by definition an under-estimate, because many more fly below the radar. Add all the books not assigned in class, or purchased for libraries, because of fears that they might be challenged, and the numbers rise even further.

Another fact that jumps off the pages describing reported cases is that almost anything is vulnerable to challenge: In the Night Kitchen because of a drawing of a little boy’s naked body; The Lorax for its advocacy of environmentalism; Where’s Waldo because it contains a line drawing of a breast; and Little House on the Prairie because of statements about Native Americans.

Nonetheless, certain subjects are particularly likely to elicit a challenge. For example, sex in almost any form—from sex education, to health and biology, to sexual maturation. It’s Perfectly Normal has been frequently attacked as “explicit” and “pornographic.” The Boston Women Health Book Collective’s classic, Our Bodies, Ourselves has been called “pornographic” and “filthy.” Seventeen Magazine was removed from a high school library over an article, written by a doctor, describing what to expect when visiting a gynecologist. Judy Blume’s coming-of-age novel, Forever, seems to have been on the most challenged list—well, forever.

Predictably, material referring to homosexuality is commonly targeted. Heather Has Two Mommies, Daddy’s Roommate, and Annie on my Mind are among the commonly challenged titles. And Tango Makes Three, a true story about male penguins raising a penguin chick, was recently attacked for its “homosexual undertones.”

Some parents feel that exposing their children to books about same-sex relationships violates their religious beliefs. When parents in Massachusetts raised such an argument recently, the federal appeals court dismissed the suit: “Requiring a student to read a particular book is generally not coercive of free exercise rights. Public schools are not obliged to shield individual students from ideas which potentially are religiously offensive, particularly when the school imposes no requirement that the student agree with or affirm those ideas, or even participate in discussions about them.”

Religious sensitivities also prompt challenges to books containing certain forms of profanity that is deemed blasphemous (e.g., Katherine Patterson’s A Bridge to Terabithia) and books about magic and sorcery, such as the Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman’s The...
Golden Compass, which has been called anti-Christian. Profanity that is deemed vulgar is attacked on other grounds - that students should not read books containing words they’re not allowed to say in school (e.g., Chris Crutcher’s Whale Talk and Robert Cormier’s The Chocolate War).

Race and ethnicity represent another sensitive category. Many books that are attacked on these grounds were written with the goal of exposing the evils of prejudice or recounting the details of life in some communities and families (e.g., Black Boy, Huck Finn, To Kill A Mockingbird, Down These Mean Streets, Tar Baby). By describing certain experiences realistically, and delving into darker moments in history, for some parents such books merely re-open old wounds.

And the list could go on and on.

Censorship incidents can arise at any stage in the educational process. Until recently, such controversies were more prevalent in the lower grades and middle school, but there is now a marked increase in censorship challenges at the high school level, often in classes for college-bound students. For example, Beloved by Toni Morrison was removed from Advanced Placement English classes in Louisville, Kentucky. Within 30 pages of the end of the novel, the book was removed and discussions about it abruptly halted. In West Virginia, The Prince of Tides and Beach Music by Pat Conroy were removed from the Advanced Placement English curriculum. While the books were ultimately returned to the curriculum, the school board now requires teachers to notify parents about books that someone might find objectionable.

Other books that have been challenged at the high school level include The Freedom Writers Diary by Erin Gruwell, Cormac McCarthy’s Child of God, The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison, and Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut. Students in any high school in which these kinds of books are banned will likely graduate with little or no experience with contemporary fiction and unprepared for college-level study.

What is clear from these incidents is that parents often need to be educated about why a particular book has been assigned, what students are expected to learn from reading it, and how literature not only
sharpen language and analytical skills but also allows young people to explore the world vicariously and better understand the world around them. When children are exposed to books on disturbing or sensitive topics in school, the experience can open lines of communication with parents, teachers and peers.

While parents are entitled to voice their views and concerns, in the end the task of selecting readings for the curriculum properly belongs to professional educators. Parents may be equipped to make choices for their own children but, no matter how well-intentioned, they have no right to impose their views on others or demand that the educational program reflect their personal preferences.

As one federal appeals court recently observed, public schools have the obligation to “administer school curricula responsive to the overall educational needs of the community and its children.” Thus, no parent has the right “to tell a public school what his or her child will and will not be taught.” Any other rule, as the courts have noted, would put schools in the untenable position of having “to cater a curriculum for each student whose parents had genuine moral disagreements with the school’s choice of subject matter.”

The First Amendment thus offers protection for educators who stand up for intellectual freedom and an expansive education. Few, if any, courts have ever ruled against a school for retaining material in the library or curriculum, as long as the decision was based on sound pedagogical reasons. For example, in a case challenging *Huck Finn* over its racial language, the federal appeals court upheld “the assignment of a literary work determined to have intrinsic educational value by the duly authorized school authorities.” As that court recognized, removal of material because someone objects to its content or message would likely be challenged successfully by those who wish to read it and argue that removal constitutes censorship.

In our experience, the best way to avoid potentially contentious debates is to establish and consistently follow a clear policy governing how challenges can be made and how they will be processed. To address constitutional concerns, challenged works should be considered as a whole. Decisions about retention should be based solely on educational considerations, not on personal preferences, beliefs or sensitivities, and materials should never be removed until the review process has been completed. Well-crafted policies of this sort can encourage dialogue through which parents gain insight into the educational methods and goals used in the school, while respecting the professional judgments of educators.

To a large extent, book controversies reflect the reality of contemporary life: people with widely divergent experiences, values, and cultural norms rub shoulders at work, in school, on the street, in the store, and at social gatherings—and they educate their children together. Regardless of their differences, most parents have a common goal: to have their children acquire the information and skills they need to become productive, self-sufficient adults. If parents see how the books their children read in school serve that end, perhaps they will appreciate the value of literature, rather than fear it.

**About the Writer**

JOAN BERTIN, Executive Director of the National Coalition Against Censorship, is a graduate of NYU Law School, where she was a fellow in the Arthur Garfield Hays Civil Liberties Program. She practiced law for many years, first as a legal services lawyer representing indigent clients and then litigating civil rights and civil liberties cases at the ACLU. She has taught at Columbia University, where she remains on the faculty, and at Sarah Lawrence College, where she held the Joanne Woodward Chair in Public Policy. She frequently speaks and writes on legal and policy issues, and is the author of more than 30 chapters and articles in professional books and journals.
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 27th 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 1983, 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 freedom 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. 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.
Best Bets for Your Classroom

The award-winning and bestselling fiction, non-fiction, and memoir featured here explore a wide diversity of voices that will speak to your students.

BLACK SWAN GREEN: A Novel
by David Mitchell
- Winner 2006 ALA Notable Book
- Winner 2006 ALA Best Books for Young Adults
- Winner 2006 School Library Journal Best Adult Books for High School Students
- Winner 2007 ALEX Award

The narrator of this novel, a thirteen-year-old boy, tells his poignant coming-of-age tale in thirteen chapters, spanning a year of his life from 1982-1983. The novel is a powerful yet disturbing read, and English teachers may want to pair it with Lord of the Flies or Catcher in the Rye, especially for students who are ready for more than the traditional reading fare.

Random House | TR: 978-0-8129-7401-0 | 304 pp. $13.35

ALSO AVAILABLE IN AUDIO: RH Audio | Unabridged CD: 978-0-7393-3248-1 | $44.95

BLACK SWAN GREEN: BIRTH OF AN EMPIRE
by Conn Iggulden
- Winner 2008 ALEX Award (Young Adult Library Services Association)
- Winner 2008 New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age

"...[I]ntriguingly imagined and addictive historical fiction...Building on the fragment of Genghis's life, Iggulden weaves a spellbinding story of an exotic and 'unforgiving land' and the enigmatic young man—charismatic, a brilliant tactician and capable of utter ruthlessness—who sets out to tame it. This is historical fiction of the first order." —Publishers Weekly, starred review

Dell | MM: 978-0-440-24390-8 | 560 pp. $6.99

ALSO AVAILABLE IN HARDCOVER

IN THE COUNTRY OF MEN
by Hisham Matar
- 2006 Man Booker Prize Shortlist
- 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist
- Winner 2007 Commonwealth Writers' Prize of Europe and South Asia

Suleiman, the young male protagonist, is thrust into the terrifying and secretive world of Libyan politics in 1979. Students will recognize the universal relationship of parents to son, but they may not so easily identify with living in a society where brutalities and repression are the order of the day. There is no better way to teach students about the power of politics gone awry than with this compelling novel.

Dial Press | TR: 978-0-385-34042-4 | 256 pp. $12.00

ALSO AVAILABLE IN HARDCOVER

THE LAST TOWN ON EARTH
by Thomas Mullen
- Winner 2007 James Fenimore Cooper Prize for Historical Fiction

This is both a fascinating history lesson and a provocative story about a teenager who takes on adult responsibilities when his town quarantines itself during the 1918 influenza epidemic. The possibilities for using this novel in content-area classes (particularly English, history, and science) are limited only by the time available to devote to it. This novel is guaranteed to hook students—and teachers—from the very first page.

Random House | TR: 978-0-8129-7392-5 | 432 pp. $13.95

LAY THAT TRUMPET IN OUR HANDS
by Susan Carol McCarthy
- Winner 2003 Chautauqua South Fiction Award
- Winner 2003 San Diego Magazine Book Award for Fiction
- Winner 2002 Deadly Pleasures' Best U.S. First Novel

"Reminiscent of To Kill a Mockingbird, McCarthy's debut novel is an engrossing story of one girl's coming of age during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement."

—Library Journal

Bantam | TR: 978-0-553-38183-0 | 288 pp. $14.00

MISTER PIP: A Novel
by Lloyd Jones
- Winner 2007 Commonwealth Writer's Prize in the UK
- Winner 2007 American Library Association Literary Awards
- Winner 2007 ALEX Notable Book
- Winner 2008 ALEX Award—YALSA
- Winner 2008 YALSA Best Books for Young Adults
- Winner 2008 Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize

"Lloyd Jones is a brave and fierce writer, and he has given us Dickens brand new again." —Keith Donohoe, author of The Stolen Child

Dial Press | TR: 978-0-385-34107-3 | 272 pp. $12.00

UN LUN DUN
by China Mieville
- Winner 2008 YALSA Best Books for Young Adults
- Winner 2008 New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age

It is London through the looking glass, an urban Wonderland of strange delights where all the lost and broken things of London end up ...and some of its lost and broken people, too.

"[A] dark, charming, robust, comical adventure played according to new rules." —VOYA

Dial Re: 978-0-385-43564-5 | 496 pp. $16.00

For more award-winning titles, visit www.randomhouse.com/highschool
On May 10, 1933, university students gathered in cities and towns across Germany to burn books. Thousands of books. In Berlin alone, some 25,000 volumes that the students had pulled from public and personal libraries were heaped onto the bonfire in Opera Square as speakers chanted indictments against them and their authors. Works were condemned to the flames for depicting decadence and moral decay and undermining discipline and morality. For promoting political irresponsibility and disloyalty and weakening dedication to the State. For betraying the German troops who fought in the First World War and failing to educate the people in the truth about the war. The offending writers included Erich Maria Remarque, Helen Keller, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein.

For PEN, an organization founded 11 years earlier in the belief that creating a dialogue between writers of different origins would diminish the kind of nationalism that gives rise to wars, it was a defining moment. Meeting in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia for its annual international congress of writers two weeks after the Nazi book burnings, delegates from PEN centers throughout Europe and the Americas were forced to confront two grim realities: not only the fact that young Germans had just publicly incinerated many of the greatest works of early twentieth century literature, but also that the German PEN Center had recently expelled all its Jewish members.

H.G. Wells was President of International PEN at the time, and he presided over a Congress that helped clarify PEN’s purpose. Over the fierce objections of the German PEN Center, Wells gave the floor to the exiled playwright Ernst Toller, who spoke passionately about the assault on writers and freedom of expression in Germany. The German PEN Center walked out of the assembly in protest, and would eventually be replaced by a center composed of German writers in exile. By the end of the meeting, PEN understood that promoting a truly open international conversation required confronting specific acts of censorship and defending individual writers who are being persecuted for their work.

Today, PEN is best known for its advocacy on behalf of imprisoned and threatened writers around the world. Last year, PEN acted on behalf of 1009 writers in 91 countries, working to secure their release from prison, forestall harsher treatment, and protect them from arrest or physical attack. It also conducts international campaigns focusing on particular countries and troublesome trends; such campaigns include both an Olympic-year push to win the release of 44 writers and journalists jailed in China and an ongoing effort to rewrite defamation laws that
RHI: Censorship & Banned Books

have been used to silence writers in a number of countries around the world.

As the largest of the 141 centers of International PEN, PEN American Center leads many of these international efforts. We also work to protect freedom of expression in the United States, where, fortunately, our First Amendment provides strong safeguards for writers and journalists and discourages the natural impulse of the government to censor unfavorable material and silence critical voices. But as Ray Bradbury famously observed, “There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.”

In the United States those people are generally less likely to be federal government officials than members of their own communities. Not that this makes the threats they pose to books and intellectual freedom any easier to confront: it is in fact often far more difficult to stand up to one’s neighbors. So for the past 16 years, PEN has been honoring U.S. citizens and residents who have fought courageously, despite adversity, to defend the First Amendment right to freedom of expression as it applies to the written word, first with the PEN/Newman’s Own First Amendment Award and now with the PEN/Katherine Anne Porter First Amendment Award. The list of recipients is full of men and women who took brave stands against would-be censors in their own communities.

They include Claudia Johnson, a Florida teacher who fought a statewide ban on teaching classic literary works by Aristophanes, Chaucer, Steinbeck, and others; Cissy Lacks, a Missouri high school creative writing teacher who was fired for refusing to censor her students’ work; Dr. William Holda, a Texas university president who defended a campus production of Tony Kushner’s play Angels in America; Deloris Wilson, a high school librarian in Louisiana who fought to preserve access to library materials banned for sexual content; Jerilyn Adams Williams, a public librarian who successfully turned back an attempt to remove books from circulation in her county library system; and Joyce Meskis, a bookstore owner who successfully challenged a Colorado law barring stores open to children from selling novels and art books with sexual content.

In the past five years, though, we have also honored ordinary Americans who have fought free expression battles against forces from outside their communities.

2005 PEN/Newman’s Own First Amendment Award winner Joan Airoldi, a librarian and library director in rural Washington State, challenged an effort by the FBI to search patron records to learn who had checked out a biography of Osama Bin Laden. A former FBI employee won the award in 2006; Sibel Edmonds, who had worked as a translator for the agency, was fired for blowing the whistle on shortcomings in the FBI’s translation services. And this year, PEN American Center awarded the first PEN/Katherine Anne Porter First Amendment Award to Laura Berg, a Veterans Administration nurse who was investigated for sedition after writing a letter to her local newspaper criticizing the Bush Administra-
tion’s handling of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. These cases all point to a new chill in the air since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

As Director of PEN American Center’s Freedom to Write and International Programs, I, too, experienced this chill following Hurricane Katrina. A few days after the storm, FEMA announced that it was not going to allow any more news photographs of dead bodies. A couple of hours after the announcement, I received a call from Reuters asking if PEN had a reaction or comment. I answered that we naturally opposed such a ban as a clear violation of First Amendment protections of freedom of the press, and that I didn’t see how you report a story whose subject is death without allowing the public to see images of the subject of the story.

The Reuters story carrying my quote was posted on the Internet that afternoon. Within an hour I was getting a steady stream of extremely angry emails questioning my upbringing, suggesting I had “no decency,” and, in one case, expressing the wish that my family—or better yet, I myself—had been among those lost in the floodwaters. That these messages came not from government officials but from my fellow citizens somehow made them all the more harrowing.

I recently traveled to Cambodia, a country that has one of the most effective censorship regimes I’ve ever seen. What makes it so effective is that its mechanisms are so unclear, so diffuse: it is very hard to find the government’s fingerprints on the censorship. Instead, it’s always someone much closer to home who tells you that you shouldn’t say this, you shouldn’t write that. If you’re a journalist, it’s your editor. If you’re a university professor, it’s your department chair. In the end, everybody is holding something back. Everybody has a reason for holding something back, and very few of those reasons are traceable to the government.

The day after the Nazi book burnings, during which many publications that were “un-German” had been destroyed, German officials tried to tell a shocked world that it was the students who had planned and carried out the spectacles – that the bonfires were a kind of spontaneous grassroots cultural cleansing. And indeed it was the students who did the work – many, I’m sure, believing that eradicating these particular volumes would strengthen the moral and political core of their communities. Even here in the United States, with our First Amendment heritage, we can recognize these impulses. Here, as everywhere, the first and best thing each one of us can do to preserve that heritage is to make sure we never become those students.

To become an Associate Member of PEN, visit www.pen.org/join

To learn more about PEN’s efforts to protect free expression in the United States, see www.pen.org/corefreedoms
To suggest someone as candidate for the PEN/Katherine Anne Porter First Amendment Award, email us at ftw@pen.org

About the Writer

LARRY SIEMS directs the Freedom to Write and International Programs at PEN American Center, where he leads PEN’s ongoing efforts to defend writers facing persecution around the world and PEN’s Campaign for Core Freedoms, a comprehensive initiative to turn back new threats to freedom of expression in the United States.

A poet and a nonfiction writer, he has written extensively on immigration and cross-cultural issues; his publications include the acclaimed collection Between the Lines: Letters between Undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans and their Families and Friends. He researched and reported on human rights abuses along the U.S.–Mexico border for Human Rights Watch, and studied and wrote on immigrant politics in Orange County, California under a fellowship from the Open Society Institute. His poems have appeared in leading literary journals.
You wouldn’t want to live in a country where I would remove that book. Or maybe you would.

We will never, ever do what you’re asking.

I’m just going through the motions so you’ll go away sooner.

It’s not my job to protect your kids from the world.

Okay. Then I’ll show them books you’d hate even more.

If you knew me, you’d want me removed from the library too.

I believe that bad ideas shouldn’t (and can’t) be suppressed. That good ideas trump bad ideas. And that the distinction can’t be mandated, it has to be discovered.

Know what I find offensive? You.

That book belongs here. Perhaps you don’t.
In November 2007, four people got up at a meeting of the school board in Westhampton Beach, N.Y., to protest a proposal to ban books from the optional ninth-grade reading list. One of them was a bookseller, Terry Lucas, owner of The Open Book in Westhampton Beach, which is located on Long Island.

The controversy began when parents submitted a petition to the school board signed by 75 people that demanded the removal of James Patterson’s *Cradle and All*, and Jodi Picoult’s *The Tenth Circle*, from the list of 300 works that students could choose to read. The parents complained about the sexual content of the books.

In 2007, more than 400 books were challenged in schools and libraries around the country. Many Random House authors were among those targeted, including Toni Morrison, Erin Gruwell, Kurt Vonnegut, William Styron, Judy Blume, and Chris Crutcher. Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* and Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass* ranked in the top 10 most frequently challenged books.

Lucas was appalled that a small group of parents was attempting to censor what students could read. Fearing that it might create a precedent, she took a leading role in opposing the proposed ban. She spoke at school board meetings and to the district superintendent. She addressed a committee that was appointed to review the books. She started her own petition and worked with students who opposed the ban, hanging their protest banners in the windows of her store. She also organized a “read-in” that attracted 60 students, teachers, and librarians.

Despite the hard work of Lucas and the other opponents of the ban, the school board voted 5–4 to remove the books from the reading list. The only consolation for those who protested is that the board did not remove the books from the library as well.

The American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE), www.abffe.com, helps booksellers like Terry Lucas. ABFFE was created in 1990 by the American Booksellers Association (ABA), the trade association that represents independent booksellers, following nearly a decade of growing censorship pressure. Sparked by the election of Ronald Reagan, a cultural counterrevolution was underway that sought to roll back the important gains for freedom of speech that had been made during the 1950s and 1960s.

Today, ABFFE acts as the bookseller’s voice in the fight against censorship. We intervene
directly on behalf of booksellers who face threats from individuals or groups who object to the content of the books they sell. We also oppose legislation at the state and federal levels that would restrict the First Amendment rights of booksellers and their customers. One of our most important tasks is to work with other groups to defend the free speech rights of all Americans.

Booksellers weren’t always defenders of free speech. In the period before World War I, booksellers, librarians, and publishers were part of a cultural establishment that attempted to protect the public from “bad” books, particularly European imports that dealt with sex in ways that were both more realistic and more prurient than Americans were used to. Between 1915 and 1923, Boston booksellers served on a committee with members of a local “decency” group that suppressed more than 50 books!

Booksellers changed sides in the censorship debate a few years later, and have been strong defenders of free speech ever since. At the height of the McCarthy “witch hunt” in 1953, booksellers endorsed a statement called, “The Freedom to Read,” which had been issued by the ALA (American Library Association) and the American Book Publishers Council, the predecessor of the Association of American Publishers (AAP) a few months earlier. “Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down,” the statement read. “The defense of their freedom and integrity . . . requires of all citizens the fullest of their support.”

Since 1953, booksellers, librarians, and publishers have worked closely together to defend free speech. One of the key battles has raged around the definition of “obscenity.” It wasn’t until 1957 that the U.S. Supreme Court finally declared that books dealing with the subject of sex are protected by the First Amendment, unless they are, “utterly without redeeming social value.” Twenty years later, the Court broadened the definition of obscenity, giving communities the power to apply “local standards” in suppressing books. This decision created the real danger that books with serious literary, artistic, political, and scientific value might be banned. In 1975, ABA, ALA, and AAP responded by creating a new group, Media Coalition, www.mediacoalition.org, to act as our legislative and legal watchdog on the issue.

Another important free speech issue has involved censorship in the schools. In the early 1980s, there was a surge in the number of challenges to books that schools had chosen for their educational value, but were deemed objectionable to some parents because of their sexual or violent content, use of profane language, racial stereotyping, or references to magic or witchcraft. The most frequently challenged titles include, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, The Chocolate War, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Of Mice and Men, Forever, and Bridge to Terabithia.

To help build support for beleaguered librarians and teachers, the ABA joined ALA, AAP, and others in launching Banned Books Week in 1982. Banned Books Week, the only national celebration of the freedom to read, is observed in hundreds of bookstores and libraries across the country during the last week of September. These venues mount displays and sponsor readings and other events to drive home the message that free expression is always under attack somewhere in the United States, and that the range of materials attacked is broad, including many beloved works.

ABFFE’s first major school censorship battle occurred in the late 1990s when the Harry Potter books...
were the most challenged works in the country. We worked with a group called Muggles for Harry Potter that successfully fought restrictions in the schools in Zeeland, Michigan, and later launched a Web site by that name to help organize national opposition to the banning of *Harry Potter*. ABFFE also submitted a friend of the court brief in a lawsuit that overturned a school ban on Potter books in the Cedarville, Arkansas.

More recently, ABFFE has been involved in a challenge to the Miami school board’s decision to ban *Vamos a Cuba*, a picture book for young children that was criticized for being pro-Castro because it does not discuss the defects of the Cuban political system. In banning the book, the school board ignored the recommendations of two review committees that it be kept in the schools. A federal judge overturned the ban, but the case has been appealed. ABFFE has filed a friend of the court brief in opposition to the ban.

In late 2006, ABFFE joined the National Coalition Against Censorship in increasing the resources that are available for fighting school censorship. We have created the Kids’ Right to Read Project to oppose every challenge to a book that comes to our attention. In its first 18 months, the project has opposed bans on 47 books in 22 states. In every case, the school board or superintendent received a letter. In many cases, the project worked with a local teacher, librarian, or bookseller to organize opposition. We also encouraged other groups to participate, including the AAP, the Freedom to Read Foundation, PEN American Center, the National Council of Teachers of English, and several state chapters of ACLU. In almost every case, the proposed ban was rejected!

Of course, as the case of Westhampton Beach shows, we will not always be successful. But so long as booksellers like Terry Lucas are prepared to join forces with teachers, librarians, and others in their communities, we have a very good chance to uphold the freedom of speech.

ABFFE is eager to do whatever we can to help.

**About the Writer**

CHRISTOPHER M. FINAN is president of the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE), and the author of From the Palmer Raids to the Patriot Act: A History of the Fight for Free Speech in America (Beacon Press).
Not that long ago, I was seated in our intimate studio theatre in midtown Manhattan watching a dynamic, solo performance of *The Things They Carried*, by Tim O’Brien. Quite suddenly, I was called out to address an urgent phone call. Our educational partner in Cleveland had some difficult news.

Our production of Richard Wright’s classic novel *Black Boy*, one of the best-known in our Literature to Life® series of great American literature brought to the stage, was to be performed for 1,600 students, 300 live and 1,300 via closed circuit TV into their classrooms. The pre-show would begin in a few short hours, and the leadership of the school had just announced to our teaching artist that the actor could not, under any circumstances, use the “n” word as contained in the script. “If he says it even once we will have the police remove him from the stage.”

My heart just stopped. Our Literature to Life Program prides itself on verbatim adaptations of selected text in order to provide new access to the author’s words and encourage deep personal connections to the material. How could a modern educational institution even consider removing any text whatsoever, let alone a word that is at the very center of the journey and moral significance of the story?

My first response was absolutely, no. It is not my place, or my right, to alter the words of the author. That is sacred ground. I vowed long ago not to allow words and ideas to be removed from our texts and our lives. Sitting in my office, I immediately thought of *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury (a classic we have since selected for our 2009 Literature to Life Award). Over the span of 15 years, we have adapted more than twenty works of great writers from Toni Morrison to Frank McCourt, Sandra Cisneros to Khaled Hosseini, but Ray Bradbury and that book have been a sort of a Holy Grail to us.

*F-451* takes a very passionate and essential truth—that ideas are sacred and necessary—and sounds the alarm. The transformative power of both words and writers are at the heart of the work we do at The American Place Theatre. Words are indeed sacred, but also precious and vulnerable. They are powerful and must be heard. For young readers with 21st century approaches to learning, having Montag come to his monumental realizations in a more visceral way, dramatically on a stage, is a consummation devoutly to be wished. To meet Captain Beatty in person and have him deliver his precise explanation of why it came to be
that books, by necessity, be eliminated; to eavesdrop on Montag and Professor Faber’s crazy scheme to save the world—these are experiences that will remain with you forever. They are neither the same as reading nor a substitute for that very private experience; rather, they are a communal engagement that activates the imagination in critical and profound ways.

So put yourself in my shoes in regards to Black Boy. What would you do? What would Richard Wright do? What would Ray Bradbury do? While an actor must “live truthfully under imaginary circumstances,” American Place remains resolutely aware that the environment in which we present our work is not the real world, but the school world. We are partners in a very delicate balance with the teacher, the school, and the student.

Putting yourself in the shoes of others is at the very essence of drama-in-education and the Literature to Life methodology. It informs the surrounding activities of our in-classroom Residency workshops and our Professional Development activities. Adhering to that purpose, I investigated further and discovered the situation at the high school was more nuanced than it had at first appeared. The community had just experienced severe racial tensions that the school did not want to enflame. However, if I simply agreed to eliminate the “n” word, I would be denying the entire school the chance to see and hear all of the ideas and thoughts of Richard Wright as he battled racism and hatred in his own country.

We were ultimately left with a stark choice: either cancel the show and deprive the students of Wright’s work, or do the show without the offensive word. I asked to speak to my actor privately and, considering the circumstances, we decided we could not deny even one student the right to be inspired by Wright’s hunger for truth and equality. So we staged the play, albeit with a substitute word.

I vowed that day to push harder, to make bolder our mission of “voices worth hearing.” We present this upcoming season of books to the stage, specifically Fahrenheit 451, in order to stoke the flame that is too easily extinguished. To learn how this and other great literature can be brought to life for you and your students, visit www.americanplacetheatre.org or call 212-594-4482 x22.

“The stage is not merely the meeting place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life.”

—Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) Irish poet and dramatist

About the Writer

DAVID KENER’s long and multi-faceted association with The American Place Theatre began when he studied acting with APT’s Co-founder and Artistic Director, Wynn Handman. After performing in many of its productions, David served as the Theatre’s Director of Education before becoming Executive Director in 2001. He has brought APT’s Arts Education programs to national recognition through partnerships including the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., NYU’s Steinhardt School of Education, the Museum of Arts and Design, and many others. Widely acclaimed for his innovative approaches to arts education, theatre-based literacy initiatives, and building community coalitions, David Kener received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from New York University.
In summer 2008, Wilmette Park District wrestled with an outdoor staging of the play adaptation of E.L. Doctorow’s award-winning novel Ragtime. The play was initially selected, then canceled due to language (principally a racial slur), but then reinstated without the offensive language and with the location of the performance moved indoors.

A scope into America’s past, E.L. Doctorow’s work focuses on key moments in the nation’s history and compels students to critically examine all aspects of the American Dream, as well as to encounter the prevailing attitudes and social mores of a different historical time. Many of his books have become staples within Language Arts and Social Studies curricula, as well on summer-reading lists.

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“Free speech is life itself.”  Salman Rushdie was right.  Without the absolute freedom to say—and, by extension, read—what we want, our lives are emotionally and intellectually impoverished. Who can think of a childhood without The Lorax, or experience teen angst without The Catcher in the Rye?

ReLeah Cossett Lent admits that some books will be challenged. Instead of pretending it can’t happen, prepare yourself: know the protocol for book complaints. Or learn from Kimberly Horne, the high school teacher whose school had to face either self-censorship or the loss of a sizeable donation. Also included are articles from both Pat Scales, President of the Association of Library Services to Children, a division of ALA, and Erin Gruwell, educator and author of The Freedom Writers Diary. In all of the articles, you will come away with a reaffirmation of your belief that freedoms of speech and thought are priceless.

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For more information about the organization, go to: www.coreknowledge.org
Does Censorship Matter?

by Pat Scales

“What I shall never forget is the silence of my teachers during the book banning. Only one of my teachers ever commented to me about the book banning. She was the English department chair, a good English teacher who had instructed me as a junior and in a ‘Great Books’ course as a senior. One day after class she whispered to me, ‘Steve, you’re doing the right thing.’ I will never be able to forget that she felt the need to whisper.”


All Americans have a voice. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says so. This is why it’s so ironic that book censors use their First Amendment rights to try and suppress the free speech rights of others. Words matter. Thoughts count. Opinions are important. This is what we teach students in school—then the book censors arrive and knock at the doors of principals, superintendents, and school board members. From there, curriculum is rewritten, library books disappear, and educators start to question their teaching decisions. What are the effects of censorship on students? Who should select books chosen for the curriculum, or placed on school library shelves? What difference does it make if a book is banned? Does censorship really matter?

To most librarians and English teachers, there are answers to these questions. But in the ongoing battle over books and materials used in public schools, the resolve to provide answers is sometimes challenging. Parents, students, and some educators are often surprised to learn that children and young adults have First Amendment rights. In fact, the courts have ruled in favor of students’ free speech rights in a number of cases.

The most defining case of the 20th century concerning free speech in schools was Board of Education vs. Pico (1982). Steven Pico was only seventeen-years old, a junior in high school, when he began the long battle to rescue eleven library books from the hands of book banners—the Island Trees school board in Levittown, New York. It all started in 1976, when three school board members attended a conference in New York State and heard a presentation by conservative activists about the “kinds” of books creeping into the hands of the young. There was a list of thirty-three books that were considered “objectionable.” These three board members returned to Levittown with booklist in hand, and entered the Island Trees High School library at night when there were no students or staff in the building. They scanned the shelves and pulled nine books from the high school library: Best Short Stories by Negro Writers, edited by Langston Hughes; The Naked Ape by Desmond Morris; Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.; Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas; Go Ask Alice by an anonymous author; Laughing Boy by Oliver LaFarge; Black Boy by Richard Wright; A Hero Ain’t Nothing but a Sandwich by Alice Childress; and Soul on Ice by Eldridge Cleaver. A Reader for Writers, edited by Jerome Archer was removed from the junior high school library, and The Fixer by Bernard Malamud was banned from the high school English curriculum.

One of the important facts of this case is that no parent, student, or teacher ever objected to the books. They were simply removed because school board members didn’t like the “ideas” expressed in the books, even though they probably hadn’t read them. What transpired was a lengthy legal battle led by one passionate student who was determined to prove that his First Amendment rights had been violated.

In summary, the Supreme Court heard the case and ruled that neither school boards nor school officials
This is the stuff of real life. Good teachers have a tremendous amount of power. They have the power to inspire, guide, and help students understand the totality of the human experience.

could remove books from libraries simply because they didn’t like the ideas in them. To date, Board of Education vs. Pico is the precedent case for book censorship arguments. Unfortunately, most school officials don’t know about Pico, and they aren’t likely to learn about it unless they land in court over similar circumstances. That is exactly what happened in 1994 when high school students in Olathe, Kansas, sued the superintendent of schools for removing Annie on My Mind by Nancy Garden, a book about two high school girls who question their sexuality. A United States District Court Judge, citing Pico, ordered the book returned to the library shelves.

Though “Annie” won her day in court in Kansas, some parents and citizens throughout the nation have continued to challenge books that deal with gay and lesbian lifestyles. Books like Boy Meets Boy by David Levithan, The Full Spectrum by David Levithan and Billy Merrill, and Joining the Tribe: Growing Up Gay & Lesbian in the 90’s by Linnea Due are disappearing from library shelves. Students who question their own sexuality, or straight teens who simply need books to help them understand other lifestyles, need these books to help them with their journey. Ask these students if censorship matters when they can’t get the information they need. Libraries have an obligation to stock books and materials that represent every element of their student population—meaning all cultures, all religions, and all sexual preferences.

In the summer of 2006, the ACLU of Florida and the Greater Miami Chapter Student Government Association took Miami-Dade County School Board to court. ¡Vamos a Cuba!, the Spanish language edition of Let’s Go to Cuba, was removed from school libraries because the book, intended for ages 4–7, didn’t relate the true nature of oppression under Castro. The attorneys for the school board argued that to omit information in a work of non-fiction is essentially, “lying to the reader.” This notion led the school board to remove all twenty-three books in the Let’s Go series. The judge in Miami cited Pico and ruled in favor of the ACLU. But this case was appealed in 2007, and the decision is pending. If the Appellate Judge in this case rules in favor of the Miami-Dade School Board, there will be a chilling effect on school libraries and the students they serve. Would an omission of a fact in Partners to History by Donzaleigh Abernathy constitute lying? What about Jerusalem by Karen Armstrong, or Inventing Japan: 1853–1964 by Ian Buruma? Will the credibility of these writers be questioned if there is a missing fact? Even high school students know that works of non-fiction aren’t always comprehensive. Librarians read reviews, study a book’s Table of Contents, and check the authority of the works of non-fiction before selecting books for school libraries. They strive to include a number of books on a given subject so that students have access to books with various scopes and viewpoints.

In 2002, the parents of a fourth-grader in Cedarville, Arkansas, sued the principal and superintendent of schools for placing the Harry Potter books on a restricted book shelf. The judge ruled in favor of the parents. He concluded that requiring parental permission to read Harry Potter might indeed imply that children who choose the books are “evil” in the eyes of their classmates. This case was the first to deal specifically with restricted shelves in libraries. It was an extremely important victory for free speech advocates, and students of all ages. If the parents in Arkansas had lost this case, then the Catholic League’s opposition to Philip Pullman’s The Golden Compass in the fall of 2007 could have landed the book on a restricted shelf, along with any number of works of fantasy.

In the past five years, there have been a number of attempts to censor works of literature taught in AP English classes. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou was banned because of, “immorality”; The Things They Carried by Tim O’Brien because his view of the Vietnam War was believed to be, “anti-American”; Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison and Nobody Knows My Name by James Baldwin for, “racial issues that could lead
to bigoted behavior”; Ellen Foster by Kaye Gibbons for child abuse; and Old School by Tobias Wolff and Prep by Curtis Sittenfeld for dealing too realistically with issues related to adolescent angst.

There have even been concerns expressed by teachers over using All Over But the Shoutin’ by Rick Bragg in their English classes. This issue arose after Bragg admitted that many of his columns in The New York Times were fictionalized. This book is a memoir. It is unlikely anyone outside Bragg’s immediate family could possibly know how much fiction exists in his boyhood memory. Facts are often illuminated in personal essays. There are several possible strategies for teaching this book. Censoring it is not one of them.

There continues to be debate over classics like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, The Canterbury Tales, and The Diary of Anne Frank. Many schools used abridged editions of these books, especially Canterbury Tales. This may appear to be a reasonable solution, but if abridged versions are used improperly, they could become a kind of censorship. If teachers use these versions to avoid dealing with “offensive” passages, then they are guilty of censorship. On the other hand, English teachers may select abridged editions because they feel that Chaucer’s “old English” and Twain’s 19th-century language is too difficult for the students they teach. Knowing the intent of the teacher makes it easier to determine whether censorship has occurred.

Currently, there is a huge debate in Charleston, West Virginia, over the use of The Prince of Tides and Beach Music by Pat Conroy in the AP English curriculum. This is an especially troubling case because the school board is proposing that a rating system, like the MPAA ratings for movies, should be developed for books. Here’s the problem: who will decide the rating system? Do several sex scenes in a book get a different rating than a single sex scene? What about violence? Will there be a formula to decide how many four-letter words it takes for a specific rating? Who will police such a system? This lame attempt to censor the books used in an English curriculum designed for “college credit” is an insult to the professionalism of teachers who carefully select the novels they teach, and to students who are intelligent and analytical enough to handle the reading.

What will likely happen is that all students, regardless of whether they are in AP classes, will now read the works of Pat Conroy. This is simply human nature. The desire for the forbidden is very strong. Does censorship matter to the students in Charleston, West Virginia? Apparently it does, because they have promised a lawsuit if the school board moves forward with its attempt to abridge their free speech rights. Organizations like the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, the National Coalition against Censorship, and the American Civil Liberties will join their efforts.

Racial slurs, bullying, obscene language, sex scenes, and violence will always appear in books that students read. There will always be challenging themes, emotionally-charged scenes, and characters with few traits to admire. This is the stuff of real life. Good teachers have a tremendous amount of power. They have the power to inspire, guide, and help students understand the totality of the human experience.

Websites like www.pabis.org tell the public that teachers are doing a poor job of selecting books. There are school officials who will use these book lists in the same way the Island of Trees School Board used their list of “objectionable” books. There are journalists who write inflammatory stories about the novels used in classrooms. School boards will demand justification in every book challenge, but they most likely aren’t going to read the books. Teachers and librarians will, and they have the skill and knowledge required to make the best literature choices for the students in their schools.

Does censorship matter? It did to Steven Pico, the students in Olathe, Kansas, and the student government leaders in Miami. It mattered to one set of parents in Cedarville, Arkansas, and it matters to the students in Charleston, West Virginia. How does censorship affect students? It affected Steven Pico so much that he left this country because it simply became too hard for him to live here.

**About the Writer**

PAT SCALES is President of the Association of Library Services to Children, a division of ALA. She is a retired school librarian who now works as independent consultant and freelance writer. She is the author of Teaching Banned Books: 12 Guides for Young Readers.

To download a free copy of CENSORSHIP: An Educator’s Guide by Pat Scales, which includes lesson ideas and discussion questions for the classroom, please go to: www.randomhouse.com/highschool/resources/guides3/censorship.html
<table>
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<th>Suggested Reading:</th>
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Books cited in this article include:

- **PARTNERS TO HISTORY** by Donzaleigh Abernathy  
  Crown, HC, 978-0-609-60914-9, 256 pp., $29.95

- **I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS** by Maya Angelou  
  Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38001-9, 304 pp., $15.00  
  Audio Available Read By Maya Angelou  
  Random House Audio, Unabridged CD, 978-0-679-45173-0, $22.95

- **JERUSALEM: One City, Three Faiths** by Karen Armstrong  
  Ballantine, TR, 978-0-345-39168-1, $12.00

- **NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME** by James Baldwin  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-679-74473-3, 256 pp., $12.95  
  Teacher's Guide Available

- **ALL OVER BUT THE SHOUTIN’** by Rick Bragg  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-679-77402-0, 352 pp., $12.95

- **INVENTING JAPAN** by Rick Bragg  
  Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7235-1, 448 pp., $13.95

- **BEACH MUSIC** by Pat Conroy  
  Delta, TR, 978-0-385-33379-5, 256 pp., $15.00

- **THE PRINCE OF TIDES** by Pat Conroy  
  Dial Press, TR, 978-0-553-38154-2, 672 pp., $15.00

- **JOINING THE TRIBE** by Linnea Due  
  Anchor, TR, 978-0-385-47500-6, $19.00

- **SILENT SPRING** by Rachel Carson  
  Mariner, HC, 978-0-618-05174-5, 288 pp., $17.95

- **THE AGE OF INNOCENCE** by Edith Wharton  
  Modern Library, HC, 978-0-375-70149-8, 208 pp., $12.95  
  Teacher’s Guide Available

- **THE FUGITIVE** by JOHN WESLEY POWELL  
  Modern Library, HC, 978-0-375-70537-2, 144 pp., $14.95

- **THE DUMB GIRL’S DANCER** by David Levithan  
  Knopf, TR, 978-0-375-83299-4, 192 pp., $8.95

- **THE DEFINITIVE EDITION** by Anne Frank  
  Edited By Otto M. Frank and Mirjam Pressler  
  Bantam, MM, 978-0-553-29698-3, 304 pp., $5.99  
  Winner: YALSA Best Books for Young Adults

- **INVENTING JAPAN** by Alan Bullock  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-679-73276-1, 352 pp., $14.95  
  Introduction By Eleanor Roosevelt

- **THE TALE OF GENJI** by Murasaki Shikibu  
  Bantam Classics, MM, 978-0-553-21082-8, 688 pp., $5.99  
  Audio Available Read By Joe Morton, 978-0-7393-2207-9, $34.95

- **THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL** by Anne Frank  
  Translated By B.M. Moooyart  
  Introduction By Eleanor Roosevelt  
  Winner: YALSA Best Books for Young Adults  
  Bantam, MM, 978-0-553-29698-3, 304 pp., $5.99

- **THE MATERIALS OF ART** by Antoine-Henri Bertrand  
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  Bantam Classics, MM, 978-0-553-21082-8, 688 pp., $5.99  
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  Translated By Susan Massotty  
  Bantam, MM, 978-0-553-57712-9, 352 pp., $6.99

- **ELLEN FOSTER** by Kaye Gibbons  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-375-70305-8, 144 pp., $11.95

- **BOY MEETS BOY** by David Levithan  
  Winner 2004: ALA Best Books for Young Adults  
  Winner 2004: ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers  
  Knopf, TR, 978-0-375-83299-4, 192 pp., $8.95  
  Teacher’s Guide Available

- **THE FULL SPECTRUM** by David Levithan and Billy Merrell  
  Knopf, TR, 978-0-375-83299-4, 192 pp., $9.95

- **THE NAKED APE: A Zoologist’s Study of the Human Animal** by Desmond Morris  
  Delta, TR, 978-0-385-33430-3, 256 pp., $16.00

- **THE THINGS THEY CARRIED** by Tim O’Brien  
  Winner: YALSA Best Books for Young Adults  
  Broadway, TR, 978-0-7679-0289-2, 272 pp., $14.95

- **“HARRY POTTER AUDIO”** by J.K. Rowling and read By Jim Dale  
  Available in Listening Library Unabridged CD:  
  Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, 978-0-8072-8194-9, $49.95  
  Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, 978-0-8072-8232-8, $54.95  
  Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, 978-0-8072-8195-6, $49.95  
  Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, 978-0-8072-8259-5, $89.95  
  Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, 978-0-307-28365-8, $75.00  
  Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, 978-0-8072-2029-0, $75.00  
  Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, 978-0-7393-6038-5, $79.95

- **THE HUNGER GAMES** by Suzanne Collins  
  Scholastic, HC, 978-0-545-24505-8, 384 pp., $17.50

- **HIS DARK MATERIALS, BOOK I: THE GOLDEN COMPASS** by Philip Pullman  
  Read By Philip Pullman and Full Cast  
  Audio Available  
  Listening Library, Unabridged CD, 978-0-8072-0471-9, $29.95

- **PREP: A Novel** by Curtis Sittenfeld  
  Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7235-1, 448 pp., $13.95

- **UNCLE TOM’S CABIN** by Harriet Beecher Stowe  
  Bantam Classics, MM, 978-0-553-21218-1, 544 pp., $5.95  
  Introduction By Jane Smiley

- **DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS** by Piri Thomas  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-679-78142-4, 352 pp., $12.95  
  Also available in Spanish edition:  
  POR ESTAS CALLES BRAVAS  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-679-77628-4, 384 pp., $8.95

- **ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN** by Mark Twain  
  Bantam Classics, MM, 978-0-553-21079-8, 320 pp., $5.95  
  Ballantine, TR, March 1997, 978-0-449-91272-0, 448 pp., $14.95  
  Children’s Classics, HC, 978-0-517-22998-6, 256 pp., $6.99  
  Ballantine, MM, 978-0-8041-1571-1, 384 pp., $4.99  
  Introduction By George Saunders

- **SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE** by Kurt Vonnegut  
  Teacher’s Guide Available  
  Delta, TR, 978-0-385-33384-9, 288 pp., $14.00  
  Dell, MM, 978-0-440-18029-6, $14.00

- **SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE: Or The Children’s Crusade, A Duty Dance With Death (25th Anniversary)** by Kurt Vonnegut  
  Delacorte Press, HC, 978-0-385-31208-0, $22.95

- **OLD SCHOOL** by Tobias Wolff  
  Vintage, TR, 978-0-375-37014-9, 208 pp., $12.95
“Charles Murray is one professional contrarian who cannot be written off—not since his first book, Losing Ground, led to a complete restructuring of America’s welfare system. At first Real Education, with its plan for identifying “the elite,” may strike you as an elaboration of his hotly contested views on IQ. But suddenly—swoc!—he pops a gasper: a practical plan for literally reproducing, re-creating, a new generation of Jeffersons, Adamses, Franklins, and Hamiltons, educated, drilled, steeped, marinated in those worthies’ concern for the Good and Virtuous with a capital V—nothing less than an elite of Founding Great-great-great-great-great Grandchildren.” —Tom Wolfe

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by Charles Murray

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Crown Forum, HC, 978-0-307-40538-8 • 256 pp., $24.95

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Charles Murray is the author of Losing Ground and coauthor with Richard Herrnstein of The Bell Curve. He was named by the National Journal as one of the 50 “People Who Make a Difference” in national policy making.
When audiobooks were a fledgling industry, I had an uphill battle getting educators to consider this alternative form of “reading.” There was a great suspicion that listening to a book was somehow easier and, therefore, cheating. No longer do I have to cajole educators when it comes to the value of using audiobooks in school. With classics and popular curriculum titles available on audio, with the emergence of the American Library Association’s lists of distinguished audiobooks to use with children and young adults, and now with the inauguration of the Odyssey Award—the first major award for distinction in audiobooks for children and young adults—audibooks are becoming a standard in classroom collections and in school and public libraries. Audiobooks are being successfully used to assist English language learners, ADD and ADHD students, and struggling readers. And let us not forget that audiobooks work just as well for skilled readers. Gifted, accelerated, challenged, or on-level: the ability of the reader is not at issue when it comes to audiobooks. Audiobooks provide simply another way for ALL readers to find time with books.

One battle appears to have been won—audibooks are accepted and respected by educators. However, with more than 30 years as a warrior for audiobooks, I know there is more to come. After all, we have seen children’s and YA literature make inroads into classrooms across the country, only to find ourselves embroiled in controversy after controversy over content. That’s right: censorship continues to increase; books are still targets for those who wish to control what children and teens read. How long will it be before we see the same battles waged against audiobooks that are now fought against texts of the more conventional sort?

Of the Top Ten Challenged Books from 2007 (American Library Association, www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bannedbooksweek.cfm), eight are available in audiobook formats, including: The Chocolate War; The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things; The Bluest Eye; Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark series; The Gossip Girls series; Athletic Shorts; The Perks of Being a Wallflower; and Beloved. Also consider these books that were included on the Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults from the Young Adults Library Services Association of the American Library Association (YALSA), and/or the Notable Children’s Recordings from the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC) for 2008: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, The Higher Power of Lucky, The Rules of Survival, The Wednesday Wars, Before I Die, Forever in Blue, and Thirteen Reasons Why. Wizards, sex, death, suicide, abuse, religion, and a myriad of other issues that have been problematic in the past crop up in these honored audiobooks.

According to statistics from the American Library Association, approximately 20% of challenges made to books are due to objectionable language, another 20% to sexual content, another 20% for unsuitable content for the intended audience, 15% for occult content, 9% for homosexual content, 8% for violence, and 7% for religious content. These percentages are approximations; full statistics are available at http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/challengedbanned/challengedbanned.cfm. The aforementioned titles include books with sexual content (Before I Die and Forever in Blue), references to the occult (censors point to the spells cast in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows), violence (Rules of Survival), objectionable language (recall the furor raised over the use of the word “scrotum” in The Higher Power of Lucky, and Thirteen Reasons Why has a few choice words for the censors as well), and homosexuality (Dumbledore is gay?). These are, in many instances, ephemeral charges. One person’s objectionable language may be acceptable to the next person. F-bombs notwithstanding, how do we determine what is objectionable? One of my favorite anecdotes is about the person who objected to A Wrinkle in Time because of a character she thought was named Mrs. Witch, but in reality was Mrs. Which.
That said, why have audiobooks and other digital media gone unnoticed? There are two possible explanations. One is that audiobooks and other “non-traditional” formats have been flying under the radar of censors. For years, teen magazines have included content that, in another medium, would be found objectionable by the censors. However, magazines remain relatively unscathed. Graphic novels, manga, and comics have generally escaped the scorn of the censors. In large part, this is because they are emerging genres that are less prominent than traditional texts. The same is true for audiobooks and other digital media. One reason that we have not seen wholesale challenges for audiobooks is that they have been most often used on an individual basis and not in whole class settings. Educators have used them in booktalks, played clips for students as motivation for individual reading, or placed them within collections alongside their print counterparts.

As audiobooks continue to make inroads into classrooms and libraries, complaints and challenges are certain to follow. Educators should prepare now for the censors, and ready the ammunition to defend the use of audiobooks with controversial content in instructional situations. What follows are a few tips that just might forestall future challenges. Audiobooks offer a tremendously exciting opportunity for educators to welcome more and more readers into the “reading club.” We must be armed to fight for their inclusion in the classroom and in library collections.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND LIBRARIANS

1. Make sure that library collection development policies for your school include digital media (audiobooks on CD, downloadable audiobooks, etc.) Have a copy of that policy on hand and use it for classroom collections as well. Talk to your school librarian about these policies and create procedures that will follow should a challenge arise—often called a “reconsideration” of challenged materials policy.

2. For those audiobooks that will become part of whole group instruction, consider developing rationales for their use. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has developed many such rationales (http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/censorship/five/108603.htm), and these should serve as models for others.

3. Read reviews, talk to colleagues, consult online sources and recommended lists from YALSA and ALSC (www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/selectedaudio/audiobooks.cfm and www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/childrensnote/notablecreclist/currentnotable.cfm) and other professional organizations about potential audiobooks to add to collections. Best of all, listen to audiobooks under consideration. Be knowledgeable of the materials being added to audiobook collections. Note: most public libraries are a great source for unabridged audiobooks, and some audio publishers also offer clips of their titles on their websites (see: www.booksontape.com).

4. Be familiar with the research on the benefits of using audiobooks with students. While this is still a relatively new area for research, early work by Kylene Beers, Sylvia Vardell, Mary Burkey, and others has demonstrated the value of audiobooks with English language learners, dyslexic readers, struggling readers, and others who have difficulty with traditional texts. (A select bibliography at the end of this article contains some links to articles and presentations that discuss some of the nascent research on the effectiveness of audiobooks for students.)

Finally, know that there is a fine and often fuzzy line between selection and censorship. Failing to add an audiobook to a collection because it might be offensive is censorship. However, adding an audiobook because it meets the needs and preferences of the students with whom you work is selection. Censorship seeks to exclude; selection aims to include. Be an advocate of considered selection. Stand up against censorship in all its guises.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

http://www.audiobookshelf.com/listen.html
http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/audio-books2.html
www.freewebs.com/professornana/ALSC.ppt
http://audiobooker.blogspot.com/

About the Writer

TERI S. LESESNE is the 2007 ALAN Award recipient and a professor in the Department of Library Science at Sam Houston State University. Teri is the author of Making the Match and Naked Reading (Stenhouse Publishers), and has served as a member of the first ever Odyssey Committee. When not reading or listening, Teri can be found traveling around the country speaking to teachers and librarians.
Suggested Listening...

BANNED BOOKS ON AUDIO

THIRTEEN REASONS WHY
by Jay Asher; read by Debra Wiseman and Joel Johnstone
978-0-7393-6122-1 • 5 CDs

FAHRENHEIT 451
by Ray Bradbury; read by Scott Brick
978-1-4159-1619-3 • 6 CDs

FOREVER IN BLUE
by Ann Brashares; read by Angela Goethals
978-0-7393-4845-1 • 7 CDs

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT’S ME, MARGARET.
by Judy Blume; read by Laura Hamilton
978-1-4000-8994-9 • 3 CDs

BLUBBER
by Judy Blume; read by Halley Feiffer
978-0-8072-1781-8 • 3 CDs

IN COLD BLOOD
by Truman Capote; read by Scott Brick
978-1-4159-3082-2 • 12 CDs

THE CHOCOLATE WAR
by Robert Cormier; read by Frank Muller
978-1-4000-8996-3 • 5 CDs

OLIVER TWIST
by Charles Dickens; read by John Lee
978-0-7366-8790-4 • 14 CDs

BEFORE I DIE
by Jenny Downham; read by Charlotte Parry
978-0-3072-0733-1 • 6 CDs

AS I LAY DYING
by William Faulkner; read by a Full Cast
978-1-4159-2773-3 • 14 CDs

OLIVE’S OCEAN
by Kevin Henkes; read by Blair Brown
978-0-3072-0728-9 • 3 CDs

THE OUTSIDERS
by S.E. Hinton; read by Jim Frye
978-0-8072-1606-4 • 5 CDs

THE GIVER
by Lois Lowry; read by Ron Rifkin
978-0-8072-8609-8 • 4 CDs

BELOVED
by Toni Morrison; read by the Author
978-1-4159-3535-4 • 10 CDs

LOLITA
by Vladimir Nabokov; read by Jeremy Irons
978-1-4159-0126-7 • 10 CDs

1984
by George Orwell; read by Richard Matthews
978-0-7366-8786-3 • 9 CDs

THE HIGHER POWER OF LUCKY
by Susan Patron; read by Cassandra Campbell
978-0-7393-4851-2 • 3 CDs

HIS DARK MATERIALS TRILOGY
by Philip Pullman; read by the Author and a Full Cast

HARRY POTTER SERIES
by J.K. Rowling; read by Jim Dale

HOW TO EAT FRIED WORMS
by Thomas Rockwell; read by Jay O. Sanders
978-0-8072-1156-4 • 2 CDs

FRANKENSTEIN
by Mary Shelley; read by Jim Weiss
978-0-7366-8596-6 • 9 CDs

ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY
by Mildred Taylor; read by Lynne Thigpen
978-0-8072-1608-8 • 6 CDs

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN
by Mark Twain; read by Michael Prichard
978-0-7366-8640-2 • 10 CDs

THE RULES OF SURVIVAL
by Nancy Werlin; read by Daniel Passer
978-0-7393-5115-4 • 5 CDs

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In his remarkable first-person account titled *The Translator*, Daoud Hari, a tribesman in the Darfur region of Sudan, tells in heartbreaking detail the story of his survival after Sudanese government-backed militia groups attacked his village. Hari persevered by living according to his motto, “You have to be stronger than your fears if you want to get anything done in life.” While the issue of censorship is not tantamount to Hari’s life-or-death crisis, the fear of censorship, often referred to as the “chilling effect,” influences curricular choices more than we might like to admit. Even books that have been in the curriculum for decades hold no guarantees: the American Library Association confirms that classics such as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* have been challenged and censored all over the country. So, the question censors often ask themselves, “Is this book safe?” may be rhetorical; the real question becomes “Is this book important for students to read?” Daoud’s stark and disturbing portrayal of genocide, for example, is essential in helping students recognize the enormity of such tragedies, and understanding how one group’s quest for control can lead to the unfathomable suffering of those who are oppressed. The raw power and vivid detail of his text, however, may cause some teachers to be reluctant to include it in their curriculum.

Our responsibility as educators forces us to address what is important for our students in spite of our fears. David Warlick, in his book *Redefining Literacy for the 21st Century*, notes, “Our job as educators is to prepare our students for their futures. This job today is especially challenging because, for the first time in history, we cannot clearly describe the future for which we are preparing our children.” Today, that future is a global one, and students who have little understanding of an existence outside their own sphere, or lack the ability to empathize with others whose lives are in stark contrast to their own, will not be equipped to interact compassionately and wisely with a wider world. In fact, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills lists the following abilities students will need in the future, most of which can’t be assessed on a standardized test: *creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration skills, social and cross-cultural skills, leadership, and responsibility*. If we want students to become thoughtful citizens capable of facing a world we cannot yet describe, they must read, think, discuss, and write about events, ideas, and language that may, indeed, spark censor’s fires. How can teachers protect students’ rights to know and, at the same time, not fall victim to a public censorship incident? While there is no simple answer to this complex question, there are specific steps teachers and schools can take to reduce the risks of a challenge from the censors.

**GIVE STUDENTS CHOICE**

In addition to being a powerful motivator, choice may also pre-empt a challenge.

When students understand that they, not the teacher, are in charge of adhering to their *family standards*
WRITE A RATIONALE

For every book that you intend to use with the entire class, or for those that you will assign for small group reading, write a rationale that explains clearly and in detail why the text is the one that will meet your pedagogical needs and increase learning for students in your content area. Such a rationale might include answers to the following:

1. Why have you chosen this particular book to use with this particular group of students?
2. What content standards or learning goals will this book address?
3. How will the book be used in class? (i.e. silent or oral reading, whole class or small group discussion.)
4. What instructional activities will accompany the study of the book? How will such activities further learning goals for this topic of study?
5. What reviews, awards, or recommendations support the use of the text?
6. Do you or other teachers have previous experience with the book that supports your use of it?
7. What potential objections to the book do you foresee? (i.e. violence, sexual content, language.)
8. How does the educational value or literary merit of the book outweigh possible objections?
9. How do you plan to handle sensitive issues within the work?
10. What alternate selections will you provide for those who might find the book objectionable?

(or personal values), the responsibility circles back to the student—where it rightly belongs. Only then will students feel empowered, perhaps even compelled, to defend what they have chosen to read. It follows that no student should ever be forced to read something he or she finds offensive, and everyone, students and parents alike, should be reassured on that point from the first day of class. With every assigned text, an alternate selection should be available to any student or parent who finds a text objectionable.

Choice also enriches and expands content areas, which should be supported with a variety of texts (often in the form of classroom libraries) that will appeal to students with differing learning styles, reading abilities, and background experiences. Once teachers experience the advantages of students’ increased engagement and learning as they make choices, it may be difficult for them to return to the one-text-for-all practice. For example, although a book such as Albert Camus’ *The Plague* may be a curriculum staple for English or social studies classes, teachers could also provide a similar but more current offering like *The Last Town on Earth*, a mesmerizing historical novel about a town that quarantines itself during the 1918 influenza outbreak and faces complex moral questions. In this way, students may choose between two compelling texts that will prompt meaningful and deep study while decreasing the possibility of a challenge for either book.
BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Engage students, faculty, parents, and community in study groups, forums, and informal discussions about the nature of censorship and intellectual freedom, and review the rights of parents, students, and teachers in choosing materials for classroom use. Such a dialogue will create a framework for understanding, and may well shift a potentially volatile challenge to simply another important talking point. You may find students in government or English classes who would agree to host community book clubs using books that address censorship issues, such as Chris Crutcher’s *Sledding Hill* or Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. Your community may also decide to read and discuss books that have been frequently censored. Check out the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development’s First Amendment Center for information on becoming an affiliate or project school. (www.firstamendmentschools.org)

WHAT TO DO IF A CHALLENGE OCCURS

Despite the most careful preparation to avoid a challenge, one may still occur. If a procedure is in place to handle the issue respectfully, thoughtfully, and calmly, the situation can be turned from a “battle” into an opportunity for growth and understanding.

1. Know your district’s Challenged Materials policy. Make sure that all steps in the process have been followed. For example, the complainant may not have completed a Reconsideration of Materials request form, which should instruct him or her to read the work in its entirety before submitting the form.

2. Request a meeting with the person filing the challenge and listen carefully to his or her concerns. Try to understand the underlying reasons for the challenge and address those as fully as possible without being defensive or condescending.

3. Provide your written rationale for using the book, explain the book’s importance to the unit of study, and discuss alternate selections. Invite the complainant to sit in on a class discussion of the book.

4. Prepare a folder that contains reviews and awards related to the challenged book and include student comments, if possible. Make copies of the folder available to students, parents, and other interested parties.

5. If the challenge continues beyond the classroom level, be prepared to repeat the above procedure with the Challenged Materials Review Committee as well as the principal, school board, and/or superintendent.

6. Discuss the issue with others in your department or on your faculty, requesting their support. *This is an issue that affects the entire school community, not just one teacher.*

7. Contact organizations that have experience with censorship and can provide resources, support, and advice, such as American Library Association (www.ala.org), the National Coalition Against Censorship (www.ncac.org), or the National Council of Teachers of English (www.ncte.org).

Facing a challenge, and even dealing with one, does not have to be disastrous; in fact, it may open the door for intellectual and civic growth throughout the entire school community. In our deepest hearts, of course, we hope that our community will agree with Voltaire, who so wisely said, “Think for yourselves and let others enjoy the privilege to do so, too.” If students are to think for themselves, they must be provided with fodder that sparks thinking through texts that challenge, probe, disturb, confirm, and enlighten. And perhaps it is through such texts, along with our students’ responses to them, where we will continue to find the courage to become stronger than our own fears.

About the Writer

ReLEAH COSSETT LENT, a secondary teacher for many years, is now a national consultant and author of several books and articles on censorship and adolescent literacy, including *Engaging Adolescent Learners: A Guide for Content-Area Teachers*. Her first book, *At the Schoolhouse Gate: Lessons in Intellectual Freedom*, co-authored with Gloria Pipkin, tells the much-publicized story of a Florida town that censored both students’ reading and writing. ReLeah was the 1999 recipient of the PEN Newman’s Own First Amendment Award.
Suggested Reading...

Books cited in this article include:

**AMERICAN YOUTH** by Phil LaMarche

This fast-paced novel addresses a topic as timely and relevant as the evening news: one teenager accidentally shoots his brother with a gun that belongs to his friend’s father. In the months that follow, the adolescent protagonist must make decisions that will forever challenge his view of himself and his concept of truth. The questions this novel raises are ones that will help students think critically about issues they face everyday.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7740-0, 256 pp., $14.00
Teacher’s Guide Available

**BLACK SWAN GREEN: A Novel** by David Mitchell

Winner 2006: ALA Notable Book
Winner 2006: ALA Best Books for Young Adults
Winner 2006: School Library Journal Best Adult Books for High School Students
Winner 2007: ALA Alex Award

The narrator of this novel, a thirteen-year old boy, tells his poignant coming-of-age tale in thirteen chapters, spanning a year of his life from 1982-1983. The novel is a powerful yet disturbing read, and English teachers may want to pair it with *Lord of the Flies* or *Catcher in the Rye*, especially for students who are ready for more than the traditional reading fare.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7401-0, 304 pp., $13.95
Also available in Audio:
RH Audio, Unabridged CD, 978-0-7393-3248-1, $44.95
Teacher’s Guide Available

**ENRIQUE’S JOURNEY** by Sonia Nazario

In this nonfiction account by an award-winning journalist, readers follow the desperate and dangerous path of a Honduran boy, Enrique, as he makes his way from South America to find his mother in North Carolina. With the United States experiencing the largest wave of immigration in its history and the widespread attention this topic garners in the media, this book is one that every high school student should read.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7178-1, 336 pp., $14.95
Teacher’s Guide Available

**GOD GREW TIRED OF US: A Memoir** by John Bul Dau with Michael S. Sweeney

From the first page of this memoir, readers will be transported to a small village in Sudan. They will feel Dau’s terror as the attack on his family and friends forces him to flee into the forest, and they will live his fear as they turn the pages that follow his journey. Students will never forget the lessons they learn about humanity and history from this important account.

National Geographic, TR, 978-1-4262-0212-4, 304 pp., $14.95

**THE LAST TOWN ON EARTH** by Thomas Mullen

Winner 2007: James Fenimore Cooper Prize for Historical Fiction

This is both a fascinating history lesson and a provocative story about a teenager who takes on adult responsibilities when his town quarantines itself during the 1918 influenza epidemic. The possibilities for using this novel in content-area classes (particularly English, history, and science) are limited only by the time available to devote to it. This novel is guaranteed to hook students—and teachers—from the very first page.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7592-5, 432 pp., $13.95
Teacher’s Guide Available

**TIGERHEART** by Peter David

Readers will hang on every word of this wonderfully engaging novel as they follow protagonist Paul Dear’s escape to Anyplace in search of the Boy of Legend. With background knowledge firmly activated, students will recognize this coming-of-age “Peter Pan for adolescents” and lose themselves in the sheer joy of a rollicking good read. *Tigerheart* would also be great as a read-aloud to entice reluctant readers.

Del Rey, HC, 978-0-345-50159-2, 304 pp., $22.00

**THE TRANSLATOR: A Tribesman’s Memoir of Darfur** by Daoud Hari

This heartbreaking memoir of Daoud Hari’s survival after militiamen attacked his Sudanese village will force students to take stock of the world beyond their own cities and country. They will come to understand courage as they read about Hari returning, time and again, to his dangerous homeland in an effort to help the world become aware of the genocide from which he had escaped.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7917-6, 304 pp., $13.95

**UN LUN DUN** by China Miéville

2008 Best Books for Young Adults

Miéville has created a fanciful world where the adolescent characters discover how to use their own wits, along with clues from a Professor’s book, to survive some very sticky situations. Even the most reluctant readers will love this fast-paced, imaginative novel that allows students to practice critical thinking as they become lost in an exciting adventure.

Del Rey, TR, 978-0-345-45844-5, 496 pp., $9.00
Teacher’s Guide Available
Toward the end of the 2004–2005 school year, I received a call from my Head of School who informed me that some parents had complained to her about a portion of my English 12 curriculum. She suggested that I might hear from these parents, but she wanted to reassure me that she was attempting to handle it herself. This fairly unexciting phone call ushered in what was for me and the school an extremely difficult time filled with anxiety, frustration, and pain. Neither I nor the school was prepared for the grueling and emotional battle which followed. Fortunately, we survived and, I believe, we are stronger for it.

The original complaint involved my use of Annie Proulx's short story “Brokeback Mountain.” At the time of the complaint, I had taught this story for 5 years in conjunction with Lillian Hellman’s play, *The Children’s Hour*. Understanding the mature nature of both pieces of writing, I counseled my students before each reading assignment to read with care and sensitivity. I alerted them to the graphic nature of some of the scenes, and I also assured them that I would not quiz them over the story. Over the years I found it to be a powerful way to continue our discussion of language as it pertains to social constructs in the world of Hellman’s play, in our contemporary world, and in the smaller world of St. Andrew’s.

While some students tended to struggle with the material, my overall estimation of the use of the story in my curriculum was that it was a crucial cog in the greater wheel of the thematic continuum of my class which usually began with the summer reading of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Of course, if I had ever received consistent and fervent complaints about the story (especially from my students), I would have seriously reconsidered. Instead, I was convinced that, coming as it did at the end of the school year, its use helped prepare my students to face difficult conversations that they would certainly encounter in college, and solidified a feeling of mutual respect between a teacher and her students.

Interestingly enough, the complaint came from parents who were not parents of seniors; in fact, these parents did not have students in the Upper School, but they had made a 3 million dollar pledge for new construction on the Upper School campus, which had already begun. In further conversation, this family threatened to pull their pledge if the story was not removed from the curriculum. During the summer, Lucy Nazro, the Head of School, and I met to talk not only about the story’s place in my curriculum but also the consequences of letting parents dictate any part of any teacher’s curriculum. Never at any point did I doubt Lucy’s support or her understanding of the position she had been put in. Agree to the demands and establish a horrible precedent and potentially lose the trust of the faculty. Keep the story and lose the 3 million dollars and perhaps offend other families. After more meetings and conversations, Lucy, with the support of the Board of Trustees, kept the story in the curriculum, thereby rejecting the pledged donation. The Upper School blessed the new building in September of 2005, calling it Building 12.

At the end of that same month, however, much to Lucy’s chagrin and my ambivalence (I believed this kind of public attention would inevitably come to the school), the *Austin American-Statesman* published a front page story about the controversy. Because the article was, I think, unbiased and fair, we braced ourselves for the worst. What neither of us could have predicted was the overwhelmingly positive response we received instead, namely about Lucy’s decision not to change the curriculum. At this point, the family, as promised, had pulled their donation, but by December, St. Andrew’s had replaced the lost money through large and small donations. Lucy, the Board, and I received letters and emails from local supporters and, as the story spread...
through different channels, from people as far away as Buffalo, NY, Canada and Australia. Even so, a rift now existed between the majority of the families at the school and a smaller number of people who continued to agree with the original complaints. Then, just as things began to quiet down, I had a run in with another family about another text in my curriculum, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.

I began teaching Roy’s book as one of a few optional texts for a postcolonial project. Students would read a book and then write an analytical paper that explored the book’s postcolonial aspects. Due to students’ positive responses to Roy’s book in particular and to our department’s gradual attempts to further include non-Western works, I then replaced Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, a book I adore, with *The God of Small Things* which had won the Booker Prize in 1997 and dovetailed nicely with the thematics already in place in senior English. For two years running, it was a class favorite, despite its difficult subject matter and a few graphic scenes, one which depicted a young boy being molested in the lobby of a movie theater by an older man, an event that serves to destroy his childhood and realistically continues to haunt him into his adult life. Like “Brokeback Mountain,” Roy’s text brought a taboo topic out of the dark recesses where, culturally, we like to stow these things. Both texts, while difficult, are written in lyrical prose about characters who are overwhelmed and overlooked by the world they live in. Despite the vast differences between the characters and their private school readers, my students had responded almost unanimously in favor of the book. The realistic and graphic nature of some of the descriptions forced us all to question the author’s intentions and her success or lack thereof in getting her point across. After these discussions, I knew that my students were benefiting from watching each other critically approach a text and its author in order to discern literary merit.

In the fall of 2005, one student and her family disagreed with the “filth” I was teaching which resulted in that student refusing to come to class, a bitter confrontation between me and the family, and numerous meetings between me and the administration and the family and the administration. Once again, I felt wrongly accused and deeply misunderstood. My intentions as a teacher were seen by a select few as furthering some sort of private agenda. As a popular teacher who had spoken at graduation and had friendly relationships with my students, I was even seen as taking advantage of that position in order to in some way brainwash my unsuspecting students.

The family in question came to see themselves as brave standard bearers in an all out war against a school that had so radically misrepresented its Christian mission. At the height of the controversy, the family sent out a 13-page letter detailing its interactions with the school to every family just as contracts for the next school year

“Defending myself and the moral worth of these books was not a fight I chose, but I never doubted it was a fight worth fighting.”

**Teacher’s Guide**

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were coming due. Eventually, the senior graduated and a feature article appeared in *Texas Monthly* the following Fall, a year to the month after the original *Statesman* article.

Remarkably, the waters calmed as the new school year began. Some families had left the school while a few had enrolled their children in support of the school’s position. I continued to teach *The God of Small Things* but cut “Brokeback Mountain” and *The Children’s Hour* after witnessing an underwhelming discussion in the spring that was more about my students trying to exhibit their utter lack of prejudice than about an honest discussion of difficult topics. I appreciated their efforts (and recognized it as their way of showing their support) but mourned what I knew was the end of my teaching of the story. Even as there were losses, there were gains. The humanities department as a whole felt fairly battered and buffeted, but we were also even more committed to what we do.

The eleventh grade began teaching Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* as a way to expand its American Studies curriculum, and teachers became more deliberate about explaining up front why they teach what they teach. Now, for every potentially controversial text or movie or cultural artifact we teach, we write a statement in defense, explaining the merits and procedures of its use. If there is a parent complaint, we can address it right away. We also became more deliberate about advertising what we do as a way to celebrate what we teach, holding brown bag lunches for parents and laying out any and all materials at Back to School Night. At our last brown bag luncheon for parents, the main concern was AP exams, not curricular quality. We knew then that the worst was really over.

As for my personal experience, I learned in real time that you have to believe in what you teach down to the last comma; every bit of text you ask a student to read has to have sound pedagogical reasoning behind it. Luckily, I had thought carefully about the materials I had chosen and had followed the proper channels to get their approval. Luckily, the administration of the school wholeheartedly supported my professional ability to make the right choices for my students. Because teaching well is so hard to do, I have felt ever since I entered the field that it is the greatest vehicle for self-doubt. During the worst of it, late at night, sleep-deprived yet unable to sleep, I would let myself begin to be convinced that I had somehow done something wrong. In sympathizing with the families who adamantly disagreed with me, I tried to see my choices in the light by which they had cast them. Every time I let myself go down this path, however, I could honestly say to myself at the end of it that I passionately believed in my careful choices of texts, my intentions behind my use of them and the powerful ways that I seen students grow from reading and discussing them. Defending myself and the moral worth of these books was not a fight I chose, but I never doubted it was a fight worth fighting. At every step of my career at St. Andrew’s, I have been trusted to be the professional that I am. I have been given the freedom to make choices about my curriculum, knowing that it’s incumbent upon me to teach the material with sensitivity and with a respect for artistic achievement and my student’s burgeoning abilities to recognize such achievement. It was that trust and freedom, as much as it was my career and my beliefs, that I knew I had to protect.

About the Writer

KIMBERLY HORNE received her B.A. in English from Tulane University in 1994 and an MFA in Poetry from the University of Virginia in 1997. She has taught 10th grade humanities and Senior English at St. Andrew’s in Austin, Texas for nine years. In 2007, she received the National NCTE/SLATE Intellectual Freedom Award and was one of seven recipients of the 2007 NCTE/SLATE State, Region, and Provincial Affiliate Intellectual Freedom Awards.
I have found that the best way to get teenagers to read a book is to ban it. As an English teacher, some of the most provocative books that evoked my students’ curiosity were those construed as controversial, or were previously on the “banned” book list. Even though *The Catcher in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Color Purple* were considered risqué to the censorship bureau, they paled in comparison to the obvious references to sexuality, violence, and vulgarity that my students were exposed to through reality television and rap music.

Inspired by the courage of others to share their stories, my students began to chronicle their own lives on paper. Like the classic characters in literature, my students shared Holden Caulfield’s teenage angst, Atticus Finch’s aversion to racism, and Celie’s pain from abuse. My students documented their experiences in gritty and graphic detail. Even though their book was sprinkled with expletives, the brutal reality of racism, and the heart-breaking ramifications of sexual abuse, an underlying message of hope resonated.

When we sent our manuscript, “The Freedom Writers Diary,” to Doubleday, we envisioned that some of the grittier stories may be edited, and some of the taboo subjects may be omitted. We were pleasantly surprised when our book was published and all of our stories were left in tact. There it was, in black and white, profanity and the effects of racism and sexual abuse. The Freedom Writers and I began to wonder if we would suffer the same fate as J. D. Salinger, Harper Lee, or Alice Walker.

Our first bout of controversy came from a small, rural town in Oregon. A new teacher, armed with *The Freedom Writers Diary*, embarked on a journey of enlightenment after a student made intolerant comments in her class. Unfortunately, the lesson took a twist when the student’s disgruntled mother sent the radio shock jock Dr. Laura Schlessinger a passage from our book. Without researching the book, and by taking the passage out of context, Dr. Laura went on the air and recommended that the teacher get fired. Suddenly the teacher found herself at the center of a media maelstrom. While the school board rallied to have her removed from the classroom for teaching “pornography,” 53 of the 54 students at the high school orchestrated a school walkout. Following in the fashion of the Freedom Writers and free speech, the community chose to stand behind the book, and luckily the teacher kept her job.

Another teacher in Michigan came under attack for using *The Freedom Writers Diary*. Her city had a reputation of white supremacy and once housed the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. She wanted to teach her students lessons of tolerance after swastikas were spotted in the school. Our book was removed from the class, students were forbidden to read it, and it was eventually sent to the FBI, along with Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*. To the Freedom Writers and me, to be in the company of such talented and poignant authors was awe-inspiring. Fortunately, the FBI ruled our book was not pornography, and because of the controversy, even more books flew off the shelves and into the hands of eager students.

But even after the FBI ruling, the controversy continued. Recently, a teacher in Indiana experienced the latest bout of censorship pertaining to our book. After teaching twenty-six years in a suburb of Indianapolis, she
was selected to attend our Freedom Writer Institute and learn from me and some of the original Freedom Writers the intricacies of how to teach our book. She returned to Indiana following the workshop with a renewed sense of purpose to reach her at-risk students. She secured a personal copy of The Freedom Writers Diary for each one of her students, but on the day she passed them out, she was removed from her classroom. In a sign of solidarity, when the school board tried to confiscate the books, the students refused to relinquish them.

As was the case with the other teachers who faced controversy for using our book in their classrooms, I flew to her community on a mission to get the book reinstated in the class. Unfortunately, unlike our success in both Oregon and Michigan, the Indiana teacher’s fate was far more severe. After a tearful testimony, including students and community members who rallied behind the twenty-seven-year veteran, the lawyer representing the school board had the audacity to compare our book to Hustler Magazine, resulting in the suspension of the teacher for eighteen months sans pay for “insubordination.”

School board members and legal observers say this is not a free-speech issue. It is a question of insubordination and of the teacher’s disregard for her superior’s orders. Educators familiar with her story, however, claim the controversy is much bigger. Her situation has a chilling effect on teachers in need of engaging stories for their students.

The severity of the situation triggered teachers everywhere to draw parallels to the Salem Witch Trials, book burnings, and suppression of free speech. In an era of unfunded political mandates and “teaching to a test,” the fear is that “Big Brother” is always watching, and rather than take risks in the classroom, students would be spoon-fed watered-down curriculum.

Lamentably, the American Library Association says the number of books banned or challenged at public libraries increases every year. Since we’ve been thrown into the center of the censorship storm, we have come to realize that banning our book just makes more teenagers apt to read it, but the controversy also makes it more difficult for teachers to integrate it into their curriculum. While book banning piques students’ interest, the larger consequences can lead to irrational instances like book burning. Hearing the testimony of Holocaust survivors recounting the horrific sight of watching books go up in flames in Nazi Germany, I’d hope that we would learn from history, so we are not doomed to repeat it.

About the Writer
ERIN GRUWELL, the Freedom Writers, and her nonprofit organization, The Freedom Writers Foundation, have received many awards, including the prestigious Spirit of Anne Frank Award, and have appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Primetime, Good Morning America, and The View, to name a few. Gruwell is also a charismatic motivational speaker who spreads her dynamic message to students, teachers, and business people around the world. She lives in southern California.

Books by Erin Gruwell

THE FREEDOM WRITERS DIARY: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them by The Freedom Writers and Erin Gruwell
With powerful entries from the students’ own diaries and a narrative text by Erin Gruwell, The Freedom Writers Diary is an uplifting, unforgettable example of how hard work, courage, and the spirit of determination changed the lives of a teacher and her students. Broadway, TR, 978-0-385-49422-9, 340pp., $13.95

THE FREEDOM WRITERS DIARY TEACHER’S GUIDE by Erin Gruwell and The Freedom Writers
A teacher’s companion to the successful The Freedom Writers’ Diary, this “standards based” guide includes innovative teaching techniques that will engage, empower and enlighten. Broadway, TR, 978-0-7679-2696-6, 256pp., $21.95

TEACH WITH YOUR HEART Lessons I Learned from The Freedom Writers by Erin Gruwell
Broadway, TR, 978-0-7679-1584-7, 272pp., $12.95
Help your students build their vocabulary, study for standardized tests, and learn interesting facts about word origins, all at the same time.

The *Essential High School Dictionary* is a test-prep resource and traditional reference guide, all in one. It’s an annotated dictionary, highlighting hundreds of important words for high school students and complete with:

- Tips for avoiding common usage and spelling mistakes
- Cultural histories and myths behind words
- Etymologies of prefixes, suffixes and word roots
- Explanations of words with multiple meanings
- Synonyms and famous quotations to help you remember word meanings
- Words coined in the works of William Shakespeare
- Notes on positive and negative connotations and denotations of words

**THE ESSENTIAL HIGH SCHOOL DICTIONARY**
Princeton Review, TR, 978-0-375-76543-8, 656pp., $12.95
Having one’s own book banned from libraries has varying effects on people. Jon Clinch, author of *Finn*, aspires to be censored—just like Twain. Then there are those like Maya Angelou or Judy Blume, who simply voice their grief that some children will never be able to read their, or any other banned author’s, books. Some, like Lois Lowry, are just puzzled. David Ebershoff, for one, cannot understand how his favorite book, *The Scarlet Letter*, something virtually impregnated with controversy, has been challenged so infrequently.

And that is just the beginning. Inside are contributions from some of literature’s most luminary minds—from Ray Bradbury to Pat Conroy; Phil LaMarche to Salman Rushdie. Here, each author provides their own view on censorship, and what can and should be done to prevent it.
"THOSE WHO BAN BOOKS"
by Maya Angelou

An original poem written exclusively for RHI Magazine

They were scared of sexes and hexes and multi-colored sheets.

And men and women doing even consensual things.

They banned a same-sex marriage room and Judy Blume

Charles Dickens Chicken-Lickin and Why the Caged Bird Sings

There is a poster which shows the likeness of Dickens, James Baldwin, Mark Twain, Kurt Vonnegut, Shakespeare, Judy Blume and Maya Angelou.

I know that puts me into wonderful company, but I pity the young students who, because of someone else’s ignorance, and at someone else’s whim, are unable to read Twain, Baldwin, Shakespeare and Angelou. They will miss some delight.

About the Writer

MAYA ANGELOU, poet, writer, performer, teacher, and director, was raised in Stamps, Arkansas, and then moved to San Francisco. In addition to her bestselling autobiographies, beginning with I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, she has also written a cookbook, Hallelujah! The Welcome Table; five poetry collections, including I Shall Not Be Moved and Shaker, Why Don’t You Sing?; and the celebrated poem “On the Pulse of Morning,” which she read at the inauguration of President William Jefferson Clinton. To Have the Heart to Hope, an essay collection, is being published in the Fall of 2008.
Books by Maya Angelou

All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes
Vintage, TR, 978-0-679-73404-8, 224pp., $13.00

Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem NEW!
Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6558-5, 32pp., $9.95
Also available in a Young Readers edition illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher
Schwartz & Wade, MG, 978-0-375-84150-7, 40pp., $17.99
Schwartz & Wade, HC, 978-0-375-94327-0, 40pp., $20.99

And Still I Rise
Random House, HC, 978-0-394-50252-3, 64pp., $15.00
Also available in Random House Audio Voices, CD, 978-0-375-41949-2, $12.00

Celebrations: Rituals of Peace and Prayer
Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6610-0, 128pp., $16.95

The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou
Modern Library, HC, 978-0-679-64325-8, 1,184pp., $40.00

The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou
Random House, HC, 978-0-679-42895-4, 288pp., $25.95

Even the Stars Look Lonesome
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-37972-3, 160pp., $12.00

Gather Together in My Name
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-37997-6, 224pp., $14.00
Bantam, MM, 978-0-553-26066-3, 192pp., $6.50

Hallelujah! The Welcome Table
A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes
Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7485-0, 240pp., $19.95

The Heart of a Woman
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38009-5, 336pp., $14.00
Bantam, MM, 978-0-553-24689-6, 288pp., $6.99

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38001-9, 304pp., $15.00
Also available in Random House Audio, CD, 978-0-679-45173-0, $22.95

I Shall Not Be Moved
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-35458-4, 64pp., $12.00

Letter to My Daughter NEW!
Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6612-4, 176pp., $25.00
Also available in Random House Audio, CD, 978-0-7393-7038-4, $27.95

Mother: A Cradle to Hold Me
Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6601-8, 32pp., $9.95

My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, and Me
Illustrated by Margaret Courtney-Clarke

Phenomenal Woman
Random House, HC, 978-0-375-50406-8, 32pp., $19.95

Poems: Maya Angelou
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-37985-3, 224pp., $14.00

Singin’ and Swingin’ and Getting Merry like Christmas
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38203-7, 224pp., $13.00

A Song Flung Up to Heaven
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38203-7, 224pp., $13.00

Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38017-0, 144pp., $13.00
Also available in Random House Hardcover

Also... Maya Angelou: A Glorious Celebration
by Marcia Ann Gillespie, Rosa Johnson Butler and Richard A. Long
Foreword by Oprah Winfrey
Doubleday, HC, 978-0-385-51108-7, 208pp., $30.00
“There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running around with lit matches.”

—Ray Bradbury
FAHRENHEIT 451—55 YEARS LATER

An Interview with Ray Bradbury and Chris Schluep, Ballantine Senior Editor

Pasadena, Aug. 1, 2008  “Fifty-five years later, and the book is doing so well—it’s terrific.” Ray Bradbury ebulliently proclaimed over the phone from his home in Pasadena. “Just a few months ago, Fahrenheit-451 was translated into Egyptian. Egyptian for God’s sake. Now it’s in the Alexandria Library, and it’s a part of world history. Alexandria was the first place where books were burned, after all. The library there burnt three or four times; Caesar even caused it be set fire once.”

CHRIS SCHLUEP: But I needed to know: just where did the idea for his classic book come from? He instantly recalled that for me....

RAY BRADBURY: When I was writing Fahrenheit-451 on a rented typewriter, I was doing so in the basement of another library—at UCLA. Many people think I was reacting to the McCarthy era, which was going on at the time, but the truth is I wasn’t thinking about McCarthy so much as I was thinking about the burning of the library of Alexandria 5,000 years before. Then I would walk through the stacks at UCLA, look at all those books, and think about more recent events in Italy and Germany, and the rumors about Russia during the war. What could endanger all those books? That’s what I was thinking as I wrote my book.

CS: And this, I guess, is what prompted the writing of the classic. But what about the fifty-five years since? How is the book being read and interpreted today? Mr. Bradbury was happy to let me know.

RB: Two plays just opened up based on Fahrenheit-451, one in New York and one in Pasadena. Egypt is teaching the book through an international component of the NEA’s Big Read program. Here in America, Fahrenheit-451 is part of The Big Read program, too.

CS: Wow, and it all started in the basement of the UCLA library. What about librarians? Teachers? What message does he have for them today?

RB: In particular, I’m very proud of the work of teachers and librarians. The book is being taught by teachers in thousands of schools across America. And it’s being celebrated by librarians in libraries, too. I owe teachers and librarians a huge debt of gratitude, and I couldn’t be happier or more proud of the work they’re doing and how they’ve received my books.

CS: With that, I thanked him for his time and allowed him to go back to what he was doing before I called—writing on a typewriter, this one he owned.

The following essay was written by Ray Bradbury in response to feedback to his classic work Fahrenheit 451. It captures his thoughts on the subject of censorship of his book and other great works of literature. It is included in the Ballantine paperback edition of this book.

Coda by Ray Bradbury

About two years ago, a letter arrived from a solemn young Vassar lady telling me how much she enjoyed reading my experiment in space mythology, The Martian Chronicles.

But, she added, wouldn’t it be a good idea, this late in time, to rewrite the book inserting more women’s characters and roles?

A few years before that I got a certain amount of mail concerning the same Martian book complaining that the blacks in the book were Uncle Toms and why didn’t I “do them over”?

Along about then came a note from a southern white, suggesting that I was prejudiced in favor of the blacks and the entire story should be dropped.

Two weeks ago my mountain of mail delivered forth a pipsqueak mouse of a letter from a well-known publishing house that wanted to reprint my story “The Fog Horn” in a high school reader.

In my story, I had described a lighthouse as having, late at night, an illumination coming from it that was a “God-Light.” Looking up at it from the viewpoint of any sea-creature one would have felt that one was in “the Presence.”

The editors had deleted “God-Light” and “in the Presence.”

Some five years back, the editors of yet another anthology for school readers put together a volume with some 400 (count ‘em) short stories in it. How do you cram 400 short stories by Twain, Irving, Poe, Maupassant and Bierce into one book?

Simplicity itself. Skin, debone, demarrow, scarify, melt,
render down and destroy. Every adjective that counted, every verb that moved, every metaphor that weighed more than a mosquito—out! Every simile that would have made a sub-moron’s mouth twitch—gone! Any aside that explained the two-bit philosophy of a first-rate writer—lost!

Every story, slenderized, starved, bluepenciled, leeched and bled white, resembled every other story. Twain read like Poe read like Shakespeare read like Dostoevsky read like—in the finale—Edgar Guest. Every word of more than three syllables had been razored. Every image that demanded so much as one instant’s attention—shot dead.

Do you begin to get the damned incredible picture?
How did I react to all of the above?
By “firing” the whole lot.
By sending rejection slips to each and every one.
By ticketing the assembly of idiots to the far reaches of hell.
The point is obvious. There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running around with lit matches. Every minority, be it Baptist/Unitarian, Irish/Italian/Octogenarian/Zen Buddhist, Zionist/Seventh-day Adventist, Women’s Lib/Republican, Mattachine/Four-SquareGospel feels it has the will, the right, the duty to douse the kerosene, light the fuse. Every dimwit editor who sees himself as the source of all dreary blancmange plain porridge unleavened literature, licks his guillotine and eyes the neck of any author who dares to speak above a whisper or write above a nursery rhyme.

Fire-Captain Beatty, in my novel Fahrenheit 451, described how the books were burned first by minorities, each ripping a page or a paragraph from this book, then that, until the day came when the books were empty and the minds shut and the libraries closed forever.

“Shut the door, they’re coming through the window, shut the window, they’re coming through the door,” are the words to an old song. They fit my lifestyle with newly ar-ashed heads, male and female, a good lot of Shakespeare that would never be seen again especially if you count lines and find that all the good stuff went to the males!

I wrote back maybe they should do my play one week, and The Women the next. They probably thought I was joking, and I’m not sure that I wasn’t.

For it is a mad world and it will get madder if we allow the minorities, be they dwarf or giant, orangutan or dolphin, nuclear-head or water-conversationalist, pro-computerologist or Neo-Luddite, simpleton or sage, to interfere with aesthetics. The real world is the playing ground for each and every group, to make or unmake laws. But the tip of the nose of my book or stories or poems is where their rights end and my territorial imperatives begin, run and rule. If Mormons do not like my plays, let them write their own. If the Irish hate my Dublin stories, let them rent typewriters. If teachers and grammar school editors find my jawbreaker sentences shatter their mushmilk teeth, let them eat stale cake dunked in weak tea of their own ungod-ly manufacture. If the Chicano intellectuals wish to re-cut their “Wonderful Ice Cream Suit” so it shapes “Zoot,” may the belt unravel and the pants fall.

For, let’s face it, digression is the soul of wit. Take philo-sophic asides away from Dante, Milton or Hamlet’s father’s ghost and what stays is dry bones. Laurence Sterne said it once: Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine, the life, the soul of reading! Take them out and one cold eternal winter would reign in every page. Restore them to the writer—he steps forth like a bridegroom, bids them all-hail, brings in variety and forbids the appetite to fail.

In sum, do not insult me with the beheadings, finger-choppings or the lung-deflations you plan for my works. I need my head to shake or nod, my lungs to shout or whisper with. I will not go gently onto a shelf, degutted, to become a non-book.

All you umpires, back to the bleachers. Referees, hit the showers. It’s my game. I pitch, I hit, I catch. I run the bases. At sunset I’ve won or lost. At sunrise I’m out again, giving it the old try.

And no one can help me. Not even you.

About the Writer

RAY BRADBURY is America’s foremost writer of science fiction and fantasy. Among his most popular adult books are Fahrenheit 451, The Martian Chronicles, The Illustrated Man, and Dandelion Wine. In addition, he has written several books for children, including Switch On The Night.
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MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE
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Currency, HC, 978-0-385-52054-6, 240pp., $23.95
Also Available in Audio CD

Over the past thirty years, MacArthur Fellowship “genius” award winner Bill Strickland has been transforming the lives of thousands of people through the creation of Manchester Bidwell, a jobs training center and community arts program. Working with corporations, community leaders, and schools, he and his staff strive to give disadvantaged kids and adults the opportunities and tools they need to envision and built a better, brighter future. Make the Impossible Possible shows how all of us can build on our passions and strengths, dream bigger and set the bar higher, achieve meaningful success and help mentor and inspire the lives of others.

“Success is the point where your most authentic talents, passion, values, and experiences intersect with the chance to contribute to some greater good.” —BILL STRICKLAND
I am delighted to introduce you to a new (old) book that I think has its place among such dystopian classics currently taught in schools as Fahrenheit 451, A Brave New World, and 1984. The Chrysalids, by John Wyndham, offers an especially vivid picture of a society ruled by dogmatism, with a special resonance, I think, for your young adult readers.

The book is set in the future, following a nuclear conflict that, even a good hundred years after it took place, has left most of the world a smoldering radioactive heap. David, the narrator and hero of the book, lives in Labrador in a small agrarian community that had the good fortune to be far enough away from the center of power to survive the disaster. It is a community of religious fundamentalists and biblical literalists, who suppose that the destruction visited upon their forebears was a divine punishment. In particular, they are convinced that their ancestors must have offended God by adopting a tolerant attitude to genetic mutation. Didn’t God create the earth and all its inhabitants, assigning each a distinctive form? Didn’t He make Adam and Eve in his own image? Any deviation from the divine blueprint, however slight, must be considered an abomination—a heresy: it is to be cursed, extirpated, and atoned for. Inspectors go from farm to farm to make sure that the crops and livestock conform to rule, and blasphemous plants and animals are incinerated to the singing of hymns. Human deviants are publicly and ruthlessly sacrificed. Anyone who has any reason to be thought abnormal lives in dread of exposure. Those who cannot hide flee to the so-called fringes, radioactive baddlands where, between banditry and hunting and gathering, they eke out a precarious living.

David is still a child when the story begins, and much of it is devoted to his gradual discovery of the harshness and arbitrariness of his people’s protocols. He finds himself increasingly alienated from his punitive father and submissive mother: people who, in the name of righteousness, have emptied themselves of fellow feeling. His situation is complicated further when he discovers something about himself: that he, along with a number of other younger people, has the power of telepathy. It is an invisible attribute (except of course to those who share it) and one of the most powerful sections of the book—crucial to the plot—concerns one maturing girl’s agonized inability to accept a difference that will put her forever odds with family, friends, and community.

Wyndham’s depiction of dogmatism and its dynamics is brilliantly astute, as is his dramatization of the dawning reflection and growing rebellion in David, while the future he has imagined is one that finds many echoes in the present and past. In the mid-1950s, when the book first appeared, the fanatical ideas of purity and intolerance of difference would have immediately brought to mind both Nazi racism and Communist dogmatism. In the midst of the Cold War, and not long after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the prospect of massive nuclear destruction loomed large in the public psyche. But Wyndham’s book transcends its historical moment to speak directly to our time. The threat of nuclear destruction is, after all, only an extreme expression of the general contingency of modern life—in which jobs, communities, ways of life, species, and whole biospheres lie under the threat of destruction; Wyndham was remarkably prescient to have imagined that this shared experience could lead to a revival of religious fundamentalism. The Chrysalids is also remarkable for anticipating the role that questions of ecology and biology have come to play in modern politics and life; in the controversies that rage over issues as various as abortion, genetically modified food, cloning, and euthanasia; even that perennial favorite, the teaching of evolution.

The conclusion of The Chrysalids finds David and his second-sighted brethren flying towards a new future, where the blind superstition with which they grew up will presumably be transcended. The book, in other words, ends on a straightforward note of faith in progress. It even goes so far as to construe evolution as a process of improvement rather than of adaptation. That this fundamentally misconstrues the scientific understanding of evolution misses the point. What is of greater interest to me here is that this affirmation of Wyndham’s is no less an article of faith, and no more open to proof, than David’s father’s cruel and ruinous strictures. Reason, too, ends in devotion. Then again, perhaps Wyndham is not in fact as sanguine as I suppose. Towards the end of the book it is suggested that the higher form of life the new psychically improved generations will constitute will, inevitably, come into conflict (and presumably destroy) their more blinkered ancestral stock. Simply put: we are all last year’s model in the making—a suitably troubling conclusion to an exciting and rewardingly complex book.

About the Writer

EDWIN FRANK is the editorial director of the NYRB Classics series and the NYRB Children’s Collection.
Thank you for this opportunity, and thank you for the work you do. While I am neither teacher, nor librarian, I know a little bit about your work as my wife and our oldest daughter are teachers, and our other two teenage daughters are in high school and in your care. I commend you all for your investment of time and energy in service of the positive, the constructive, and our collective future.

My focus is the future, as well. I have spent the last few years writing a novel about America’s possible future entitled, *The Age of the Conglomerates*. It is set in a time when the corporate culture has consumed the culture at large and the political administration of the nation has been assumed by the private sector. The economy is shattered and society holds accountable the generation responsible for the unpaid debts that have brought on the collapse. The elderly become the sole reason for society’s problems and are the target of group scorn on a massive scale. The Coots, as the elderly are labeled, are removed from their homes and lives and placed in government run communities for reasons of cost control and family relief. The practice proves a success and the precedent is set to exclude another family problem, the troubled youth. So the Conglomerates set policy to discard the disorderly, the Dyscards, and start anew with a child conceived as a result of advances in genetic corrective surgery.

This idea got me wondering what an America like this would be like and how the Conglomerates, the name I give the political party, marshal their message and accomplish their goal? The answer was marketing: subtle, deep, sensational and endless. They would market their campaign of economic martial law and exclusionary social structure as not only socially acceptable but as forward thinking and, in fact, right. Censorship and propaganda would be administered by a power well versed in the social science of marketing. And censorship could be subtle when the message was completely consumed. I thought about privacy and individual rights in a time when the identity was captured and stored in profiles and browsing histories. Could one make an independent decision when the selection is limited to a preconceived result? What would it be like to live in a time where one purchased convenience with individual liberty? I thought of a society so adept at advertising that it was able to fill the senses to the point there was no space, time, or emotion for an original, different, or opposing point of view. I wondered, what if this entire process seemed perfectly acceptable because from my earliest age I had been personally directed to what worked best for me? My fashion, how I appeared, the games I played, the content I read?

As those of us who live and work with young people know, the future is now. And the only way I can know anything about the future is from what I know now. Can it really be so different? The human condition and matters of the heart are ageless, even in the age of the Conglomerates. The individual can and will triumph over the collective consciousness. But, it is an individualism built on the strength of relationships to, and with, other individuals, and how they communicate with one another to piece together their personal victory over the will of the state. The technique my characters use is one of direct communication, conversations, and writing: from poetry, to dairy, to email. (Sound familiar?) They speak to one another, they write and they listen. I guess that too is the same in any age. As we all deal with new media in a time when it is not new to some, the techniques have changed but communication is the same. Direct from one’s heart to another’s head and heart.

I find it a wonderful coincidence that I write this note during the Fourth of July Weekend. There may be no better way for me to honor America than to exercise my right of free speech as I have here and as I try to do in my book. As I mentioned, my wife and I have children, 14, 17 and 24 and I hope my story appeals to them and their friends. And if I can impart one suggestion upon them, it is that there is a way through the censors, the media, the marketing and the hype. It is right in front of them another person: one to talk with, listen to, love and learn from. But you know that already, it’s your job to do just that, and you do it very well.

So, again, thank you teachers and librarians, you keep the voice alive.

**About the Writer**

THOMAS NEVINS was born and still lives with his family in Brooklyn, New York. Nevins has been in the book business for most of his life. He has worked in libraries and bookshops. He has been a buyer, store manager, rep and novelist. The Age of The Conglomerates is his first book.
In my early years as a writer for young people, I occasionally received letters from people who wondered why I had used a “bad word” in a book. I always wrote back, explaining that an author tries to reflect reality, and so book characters have to speak the way real people would speak; it didn’t mean, I always explained, that the reader should speak that way, or that the author does.

When I wrote The Giver, it contained no so-called “bad words.” It was set, after all, in a mythical, futuristic, and Utopian society. Not only was there no poverty, divorce, racism, sexism, pollution, or violence in the world of The Giver; there was also careful attention paid to language: to its fluency, precision, and power.

The reaction to the book was startling. It was startling in the number of letters and responses I received almost immediately, but it was even more startling in the degree of differences in the responses.

A Trappist monk wrote from his monastery that he and his brothers were reading the book as a Christian metaphor and finding it profoundly significant as a message of redemption.

At about the same time, a parent in California demanded that it be taken off the library shelves of her child’s school because of its immorality.

A private school in Michigan made it required reading not only for all the upper-school students, but for their parents.

At the same time, a teacher wrote to me that the Newbery committee should be chastised for their awarding the 1994 medal to a sensationalistic piece of trash.

The children of Belgium and France chose the book, in translation, as their favorite of the year.

A parent wrote to me that I should be ashamed for exposing children to “messy data.”

What’s wrong with this picture? I found myself thinking.

I went back and re-read the book myself. I tried to figure out whether these disparate people were, in fact, all responding to the same thing: whether there was actu-
ally a theme in the book that people found either uplifting or terrifying, or maybe both. And I discovered that it was the concept of choice. *The Giver* is about a world where those decisions are made for them. It seems very safe and comfortable, and I bet a lot of parents—later to object and censor—liked the book until they were two-thirds of the way through it.

Then it got scary. It got scary—and they decided to take it away from their own kids—because it turned out that it wasn’t safe and comfy to live in a world where adhering to rigid rules is the norm. It turned out, in the book, that such a world is very, very dangerous, and that people have to learn to make their own choices.

I sympathize with the fear that makes some parents not want that to be true. But I believe without a single shadow of a doubt that it is necessary for young people to learn to make choices. Learning to make right choices is the only way they will survive in an increasingly frightening world. Pretending that there are no choices to be made—reading only books, for example, which are cheery and safe and nice—is a prescription for disaster for the young.

Submitting to censorship is to enter the seductive world of *The Giver*: the world where there are no bad words and no bad deeds. But it is also the world where choice has been taken away and reality distorted. And that is the most dangerous world of all.

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**About the Writer**

**LOIS LOWRY** is a multi-award-winning author who has written many books. She is the author of the popular *Anastasia Krupnik* books and was the recipient of the Newbery Medal for both *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. She is also the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award which honors an author for his or her lifetime contribution to young adult literature.
When I began to write, thirty years ago, I didn’t know if anyone would publish my books, but I wasn’t afraid to write them. I was lucky. I found an editor and publisher who were willing to take a chance. They encouraged me. I was never told what I couldn’t write. I felt only that I had to write the most honest books I could. It never occurred to me, at the time, that what I was writing was controversial. Much of it grew out of my own feelings and concerns when I was young.

COMMUNISM?
There were few challenges to my books then, although I remember the night a woman phoned, asking if I had written Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret. When I replied that I had, she called me a Communist and slammed down the phone. I never did figure out if she equated Communism with menstruation or religion, the two major concerns in 12-year-old Margaret’s life.

But in 1980, the censors crawled out of the woodwork, seemingly overnight, organized and determined. Not only would they decide what their children could read, but what all children could read. Challenges to books quadrupled within months, and we’ll never know how many teachers, school librarians, and principals quietly removed books to avoid trouble.

FEAR
I believe that censorship grows out of fear, and because fear is contagious, some parents are easily swayed. Book banning satisfies their need to feel in control of their children’s lives. This fear is often disguised as moral outrage. They want to believe that if their children don’t read about it, their children won’t know about it. And if they don’t know about it, it won’t happen.

Today, it’s not only language and sexuality (the usual reasons given for banning my books) that will land a book on the censors’ hit list. It’s Satanism, New Age-ism and a hundred other “isms,” some of which would make you laugh if the implications weren’t so serious. Books that make kids laugh often come under suspicion; so do books that encourage kids to think, or question authority; books that don’t hit the reader over the head with moral lessons are considered dangerous.

Censors don’t want children exposed to ideas different from their own. If every individual with an agenda had his/her way, the shelves in the school library would be close to empty. I wish the censors could read the letters kids write.

Dear Judy,
I don’t know where I stand in the world. I don’t know who I am. That’s why I read, to find myself.
—Elizabeth, age 13

But it’s not just the books under fire now that worry me. It is the books that will never be written. The books that will never be read. And all due to the fear of censorship. As always, young readers will be the real losers.

(Source: www.judyblume.com)

About the Writer
JUDY BLUME’s books have won many awards and have sold over sixty-five million copies worldwide. Judy Blume has received the National Book Foundation’s Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. Ms. Blume is a tireless supporter of the First Amendment. She divides her time between Key West, New York City, and Martha’s Vineyard.
Books by Judy Blume

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT’S ME, MARGARET
Yearling, DG, 978-0-440-40419-4, 160pp., $6.50
Laurel Leaf, MM, 978-0-440-90419-9, 160pp., $6.50
Available in Books on Tape, Unabridged, 3 CDs, 978-1-4000-8994-9, $30.00

BLUBBER

DEENIE
Laurel Leaf, MM, 978-0-440-93259-8, 144pp., $5.99

HERE’S TO YOU, RACHEL ROBINSON
Laurel Leaf, MM, 978-0-440-21974-3, 208pp., $6.50
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All the World is a Stage” is a truism and, conversely, the stage—and the classroom—often reflects what’s happening out in the larger world. So we recently asked four leading Shakespearean scholars to discuss the Bard, his work, and the impact of censorship on the two both during their time, and up through to the present day. What emerged was fascinating, informative and, in many ways, instructive. And this conversation will only continue. So, we invite you, the teacher, to share your thoughts on these topics as well as general feedback to the authors’ remarks, by writing to highschool@randomhouse.com with the subject line “RHI Roundtable Reaction.”

What kind of censorship did Shakespeare face during his career as a playwright?

DAVID BEVINGTON: Shakespeare’s main brush with authority had to do with Richard II during the Essex Rebellion of 1601; the play—not to be confused with his better known Richard III—was seen as sanctioning, or at least dramatizing, the removal of a king from office. But no penalties fell on the company or on Shakespeare. He had written the play several years earlier.

ERIC RASMUSSEN: Yes, I believe the pivotal dethroning scene in Richard II was apparently considered “dangerous matter” politically and was censored from every edition of the play published during Queen Elizabeth’s reign.

Also, Anthony Munday’s original 1590s manuscript of the play Sir Thomas More—about the man of the same name—was rejected by Edmond Tilney. The then Master of the Revels was concerned that its insurrection scene might incite real violence against foreigners living in London. Shakespeare was later brought in as one of several “play-doctors” who made the necessary changes in the text.

The 1606 “Act to Restrain Abuses of Players” forbid the use of “the holy Name of God or of Christ Jesus” in stage plays. In the dramatic manuscripts that had been written before 1606, instances of “God” were systematically changed to “heaven” in phrases like “God knows.” After 1606 playwrights wrote within the parameters of the prohibition, much in the same way that modern prime-time television writers understand that there are certain words prohibited by the FCC.

BRANDON TOROPOV: Yes, this legislation forced Shakespeare to go back and revise passages in some of the plays that were in his company’s repertory at the time, notably Othello.

RON ROSENBAUM: I’d argue (tentatively) that the censorship of references to God in oaths may have had a cumulative subtle effect of secularizing Shakespeare; for readers of the later (post-1606) versions of the play (and for later versions of Shakespeare the writer) removing a richness of reference (even in debased form) to holiness, to the spiritual realm that is so present in Hamlet and Macbeth for instance. Blasphemy, after all, pays tribute to the reality of the God it invokes.

Also, we should consider whether the prohibition against oaths straitjacket, or at least inhibit, the naturalness of Shakespeare’s language—and by extension that of his characters. Perhaps this caused him to pause and inhibit himself, each time resulting in minor acts of self-censorship. It might be interesting to get students to compile lists of colorful oaths in pre-1606 Shakespeare and see if their absence makes for a blander, less highly charged linguistic fabric.
I think this conjecture could be the basis for getting students to discuss the broader—still open, still important—questions of Shakespeare’s attitudes towards the supernatural: ghosts, Purgatory, spirits, God, and what he referred to as the “divinity that shapes our ends/Rough hew them how we may.”

TOROPOV: On a political level, Shakespeare had good sense; he knew whom to flatter and when, and was well connected. All of this helped him to manage censorship problems when they arose. His careless decision to depict a historical figure—Sir John Oldcastle—as a drunkard and a braggart in *Henry IV, Part One* led to problems. Shakespeare had to rename the character in a subsequent draft of the play, and insert a disclaimer soothing the feelings of Oldcastle’s living relatives. The show went on. (We now know the fat knight as Sir John Falstaff.)

**Since his death, what themes in Shakespeare’s plays have drawn the attention of political and cultural censors and how has the focus of these censors shifted over the years?**

TOROPOV: *King Lear* was absent from the English stage for a long stretch in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century because it raised uncomfortable parallels with George III’s bouts of mental illness.

ROSENBAUM: In Peter Brook’s brilliant but polemical film of *Lear*, which I think students would find thrilling to watch, he exercises a kind of esthetic censorship. He puts his fingers on the scale, so to speak, all in service of his bleak Beckett-like view of *Lear* (read Jan Kott’s *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, the book that became Brook’s guide to the landscape of the play). Brook makes a point of cutting those small but key gestures of humanity—like the servants bandaging Gloucester’s bleeding eye sockets—that argue that there is some good to be found in human nature.

On the other hand there was the 17th century editor who presented a version of *Lear* which “censored by addition,” you might say. In order to make the irredeemable tragedy of *Lear* more “palatable” he gave it a happy ending, with Cordelia not dying tragically in Lear’s arms but living to marry the “good guy” Edgar.

I’ve presented actors doing both version of the endings of *Lear* and the audience debate that followed has been stimulating. Which ending did they prefer? How did each ending affect the total experience of the play? The natures of these questions, as well as the answers they have garnered, allows students who engage in this manner a much deeper understanding of the play.

BEVINGTON: Rewriting Shakespeare went on everywhere; and, oftentimes, it was simply a matter of shifting tastes toward refinement. *Lear* was indeed recast by Nahum Tate in the Restoration, but not because of any official censorship; it was rather that audiences could not bear the injustice of the death of Cordelia. Lots of plays were rewritten similarly. The *Henry VI* plays were re-presented as an indictment of civil war, again not through censorship but instead to address...
audience concerns. The Trinculo-Stephano-Caliban plot of The Tempest became a kind of allegory of civil unrest, recalling the civil wars of mid 17th century.

RASMUSSEN: Hamlet was banned in Russia during Stalin’s regime because Hamlet’s “indecisiveness and depression” were seen to be incompatible with the Soviet spirit of “optimism, fortitude, and clarity.” In 1989, Hamlet was banned at an Israeli detention camp for Palestinians because the famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy was seen as advising the audience to take up arms rather than suffer silently.

Other Twentieth century examples are: in 1951, The Merchant of Venice was banned from high schools in Buffalo, New York following protests from Jewish groups. Similarly, the play was banned in Midland, Michigan schools in 1980; in 1986, the teaching of Macbeth was challenged in Jefferson County, Colorado schools because it focuses on “Death, suicide, ghosts and Satan”; and in 1996, Merrimack, New Hampshire schools banned Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night because its cross-dressing heroine was in violation of the school board’s “prohibition of alternative lifestyle instruction.”

TOROPOV: Othello’s theme of cross-cultural love has attracted much criticism over the years, especially in the American South during the period of segregation. At that time, a kiss between the black Othello and the white Desdemona was seen as a political statement. According to some sources, a black actor did not actually play the part on stage in the United States until the 1930s. The first such production in South Africa appears to have taken place in 1987.

Ultimately, every director of Shakespeare is technically a “censor,” choosing to emphasize some elements of the original material over other elements. Kenneth Branagh had his reasons for cutting out vast chunks of Love’s Labor’s Lost when converting it to a modern motion picture in 2000. Thomas Bowdler had other reasons for cutting passages when converting the same work to the family reading room, circa 1820. Who was “right”? I think you are when you went back to the best text available and read it for yourself.

Who was Thomas Bowdler and what is his relevance to Shakespeare? What was the significance of Bowdler’s work and how does it resonate today?

BEVINGTON: Yes, his expurgated version of Romeo and Juliet has had lasting effects, turning up in varying forms in later editions and stage presentations. He also edited Gibbons’ The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire in a similar way! Interesting only as a quirky note in editing history and reception. This all was so infamous and oddly funny that it gave rise to the verb, to bowdlelize. He is not an individual whom editors take seriously today.

RASMUSSEN: He proclaimed that his earnest wish was to render his plays unsullied by any scene, by any speech, or, if possible, by any word that can give pain to the most chaste, or offence to the most religious of his readers.” The irony of Bowdler’s work, however, is that he failed to expunge some of the most salacious passages: Isabella’s sadomasochistic lines in Measure for Measure, for instance, were not removed. “The impression of keen whips I’d wear as rubies / And strip myself to death, as to a bed.”

ROSENBAUM: I would argue that his greatest influence today—the greater problem today—is what I would call a “reverse Bowdlerism.” It refers he over-sexualization of Shakespeare, by those determined to, well, reverse Bowdlerism. In many cases this takes the form of imposing the perverse Bowdlerism of Freud’s simpliminded sexual interpretations, however discredited Freud is now.

The prime example has been the so-called “closet scene” in Hamlet. Laurence Olivier (in his film version)
was the earliest and most prominent of reverse Bowdlerists: he made it a heavily Freudian, ridiculously overheated love scene between Hamlet and his mother the Queen. All too many unthinking Freudian devotees have applauded this alleged daring, which reductively oversimplifies a deeply complex relationship. (Why not show students Olivier’s version and ask them to discuss what they think the relationship is?)

TOROPOV: Interestingly enough, the issue of Bowdler, and the subsequent debates, all began with a childhood experience: Bowdler’s father’s readings of Shakespeare to his family. Upon reading the plays on his own, the young Bowdler realized that his father had been making impromptu editorial decisions, seamlessly excising sensitive material without his own, his mother’s, or any of his siblings’ knowledge.

The impulse to give kids something to read—to give parents something to read to kids—is, at the end of the day, something to praise, as is the impulse to draw some kind of line somewhere; where to draw these lines is part of an ongoing discussion.

Condensed and expurgated versions of Shakespeare, meant for younger readers, will be with us forever, just as the originals will always be there for the curious who wish to see the larger picture. The “edited” versions often serve as the best advertisements for the full texts.

Bowdler’s book ultimately stands as a fascinating barometer of nineteenth-century mores, and perhaps—just perhaps—as a point of entry in today’s culture war over the regulation of media content.

If you were a high school teacher, what themes or text of Shakespeare would you approach with sensitivity? How would you address these issues in a classroom?

TOROPOV: By asking good questions, even about tough or controversial issues, and then waiting to see what the kids come up with in response. For instance: Great questions about the objectification of women are still waiting to be asked in response to The Taming of the Shrew; great questions about being an outsider are still waiting to be asked in response to The Merchant of Venice. A good teacher uses the text of a Shakespeare play as a starting point, not an ending point, for a series of explorations about larger themes: identity, betrayal, loss, and belonging, among them.

ROSENBAUM: I’ve argued that there’s no way to rescue Merchant from the anti-Semitism that is basic to the DNA of its language. I’m not arguing for censorship; to the contrary I think that modern efforts to “rescue” the play by erasing its anti-Semitism are themselves a kind of censorship. Pathetic attempts to make it a play that’s not “anti-Semitic” but “about anti-Semitism,” such as the recent Al Pacino film, depend on bowdlerizing the anti-Semitism.

Most of them use a conceit that backfires. By making Shylock a “nicer guy”—a stolid “Joe Sixpack Shylock” as I’ve called Pacino, or “The Usurer on the Roof”—the film succeeds (as do most contemporary stage productions) in intensifying the anti-Semitism. They argue, in effect, that in the heart of even a “nice Jew” lies a poisonous hatred of Christians that would drive him to put a dagger through a Christian’s heart (or “near the heart”) to settle a debt.

Is Othello similarly racist? There are certainly racist characters who make racist speeches; who try to make “blackness” into a synonym for evil and barbarity. But Othello himself is in almost all respects noble—unlike Shylock; he is a far more innocent victim of evil white people. Conversely, the evil white people in Merchant are Jews.

I have conflicting feelings about the relationship between the two plays and the two prejudices but comparing and contrasting them in the classroom could make for illuminating debates.
A Letter to the Editor of the Charleston Gazette

I received an urgent e-mail from a high school student named Makenzie Hatfield of Charleston, West Virginia. She informed me of a group of parents who were attempting to suppress the teaching of two of my novels, *The Prince of Tides* and *Beach Music*. I heard rumors of this controversy as I was completing my latest filthy, vomit-inducing work. These controversies are so commonplace in my life that I no longer get involved. But my knowledge of mountain lore is strong enough to know the dangers of refusing to help a Hatfield of West Virginia. I also do not mess with McCoys.

I’ve enjoyed a lifetime love affair with English teachers, just like the ones who are being abused in Charleston, West Virginia, today. My English teachers pushed me to be smart and inquisitive, and they taught me the great books of the world with passion and cunning and love. Like your English teachers, they didn’t have any money, either, but they lived in the bright fires of their imaginations, and they taught because they were born to teach the prettiest language in the world. I have yet to meet an English teacher who assigned a book to damage a kid. They take an unutterable joy in opening up the known world to their students, but they are dishonored and unpraised because of the scandalous paychecks they receive. In my travels around this country, I have discovered that America hates its teachers, and I could not tell you why. Charleston, West Virginia, is showing clear signs of really hurting theirs, and I would be cautious about the word getting out.

In 1961, I entered the classroom of the great Eugene Norris, who set about in a thousand ways to change my life. It was the year I read *Catcher in the Rye*, under Gene’s careful tutelage, and I adore that book to this very day. Later, a parent complained to the school board, and Gene Norris was called before the board to defend his teaching of this book. He asked me to write an essay describing the book’s galvanic effect on me, which I did. But Gene’s defense of *Catcher in the Rye* was so brilliant and convincing in its sheer power that it carried the day. I stayed close to Gene Norris till the day he died. I delivered an eulogy at his memorial service and was one of the executors of his will. Few in the world have ever loved English teachers as I have, and I loathe it when they are bullied by know-nothing parents or cowardly school boards.

About the novels your county just censored: *The Prince of Tides* and *Beach Music* are two of my darlings, which I would place before the altar of God and say, “Lord, this is how I found the world you made.” They contain scenes of violence, but I was the son of a Marine Corps fighter pilot who killed hundreds of men in Korea, beat my mother and his seven kids whenever he felt like it, and fought in three wars. My youngest brother, Tom, committed suicide by jumping off a fourteen-story building; my French teacher ended her life with a pistol; my aunt was brutally raped in Atlanta; eight of my classmates at The Citadel were killed in Vietnam; and my best friend was killed in a car wreck in Mississippi last summer. Violence has always been a part of my world. I write about it in my books and make no apology to anyone. In *Beach Music*, I wrote about the Holocaust and lack the literary powers to make that historical event anything other than grotesque.

People cuss in my books. People cuss in my real life. I cuss, especially at Citadel basketball games. I’m perfectly sure that Steve Shamblin and other teachers prepared their students well for any encounters with violence or profanity in my books just as Gene Norris prepared me for the profane language in *Catcher in the Rye* forty-eight years ago.

The world of literature has everything in it, and it refuses to leave anything out. I have read like a man on fire my whole life because the genius of English teachers touched me with the dazzling beauty of language. Because of them I rode with Don Quixote and danced with Anna Karenina at a ball in St. Petersburg and lassoed a steer in Lonesome Dove and had nightmares about slavery in Beloved and walked the streets of Dublin in Ulysses and
made up a hundred stories in the Arabian nights and saw my mother killed by a baseball in A Prayer for Owen Meany. I’ve been in ten thousand cities and have introduced myself to a hundred thousand strangers in my exuberant reading career, all because I listened to my fabulous English teachers and soaked up every single thing those magnificent men and women had to give. I cherish and praise them and thank them for finding me when I was a boy and presenting me with the precious gift of the English language.

The school board of Charleston, West Virginia, has sullied that gift and shamed themselves and their community. You’ve now entered the ranks of censors, book-banners, and teacher-haters, and the word will spread. Good teachers will avoid you as though you had cholera. But here is my favorite thing: Because you banned my books, every kid in that county will read them, every single one of them. Because book banners are invariably idiots, they don’t know how the world works—but writers and English teachers do.

I salute the English teachers of Charleston, West Virginia, and send my affection to their students. West Virginians, you’ve just done what history warned you against—you’ve riled a Hatfield.

Sincerely,
Pat Conroy

About the Writer

PAT CONROY is one of America’s favorite storytellers, a writer who portrays the anguished truth of the human heart and the painful secrets of families in richly lyrical prose and unforgettable narratives. He is the bestselling author of The Water is Wide, The Great Santini, The Lords of Discipline, The Prince of Tides, Beach Music and My Losing Season. He lives in Fripp Island, South Carolina.
Here's a worthy goal for novelists everywhere: Write a book that's challenging enough and important enough and, above all, true enough to be banned by more than one generation. And for more than one reason.

Mark Twain managed it famously with Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The ink had barely dried on Huck before libraries and school boards began to close their doors to it. Not because it used the n-word—that ugly coinage was common currency in those days, even if not always among the highbrows who protested Twain's work—but because of Huck's unsophisticated speech and poor qualifications as a role model. The boy used the ordinary language of a frontier childhood, and he spoke without regard for proper grammar. He prized the friendship of a black slave, and he repeatedly concealed him from the adult authorities. Today, of course, we recognize these two elements as chief among the qualities that earned Huck its central place in American literature. Twain eschewed his own complex and educated authorial voice, and dared to tell this deeply serious story in the lowest vernacular—and in the voice of a child, at that. No other author, in this nation just then finding its literary feet, had seriously pursued such a project, and no one else could have succeeded half so well. Further, and at even greater risk—for ideas always trump technique in the risk department—Twain dared to give us a subversively humane portrait of the runaway slave, Jim.

So it was Twain's daring invention, both in form and in content, that confounded readers of his own time. (One of our first great media creatures, by the way, Twain understood the value to be mined from protests against his work. Controversy sells books. So he was quick to write needling and very public letters to those who dared rail against Huck's lowbrow language and independent opinions, once advising the Children's Department of the Brooklyn Public Library to consult the Bible for instances of real misbehavior in print, and asking that Tom and Huck be removed from the “questionable companionship” of “Solomon, David, & the rest of the sacred brotherhood.”)

For most novelists, to have drawn fire based on innovation alone would have been achievement enough. But in Twain's case it went further; as his work endured, our understanding of it altered. Aspects of Huck that were unremarkable on publication became burrs under modern saddles. Specifically, Huck's use of n—. It's an ugly term, offensive to contemporary ears, and as the Civil Rights movement took hold, Twain's use of it was criticized. Utterly out of context, of course—as if he might have anticipated our distaste and cut the word in advance so as to spare our sensibilities; or, nuttier still, as if he might have done mankind a favor by forbidding Huck to speak in the language of his own time and social class.

And thus, Huck got his creator banned twice over: First for revealing a secret truth to his own generation, and then for speaking a well-known truth to ours. A person's lifework can't get much better than that.

I have always half-expected my novel, Finn, to get banned from a school or a library somewhere, either for its use of n— (a mere sixty-some instances, as opposed to more than two-hundred in the text of Huck), or for its handling of Huck's racial heritage. Had I managed to follow in Twain's footsteps, the more likely point of contention would have been the one that overturned current thinking; that is, my bi-racial Huck. Giving America's Favorite White Kid a black mother—a kidnapped slave, in fact—provided the answer to a number of problems that had long nagged me about Twain's text. First, it explained what kind of woman, under what straitened conditions, would bear a child...
to the brutal, bigoted, and alcoholic Pap Finn. Second, it provided a defining circumstance that could unhinge and unleash Finn himself, turning him from an ordinary tap-water racist into a Niagara of bigotry.

More than that, though, it placed upon Huckleberry Finn himself—a magical figure in our literature—some of the mingled grace and burden of black culture. This was a job worth doing, and one that I was fairly certain would rangle some readers. But here in the age of Barack Obama, the response everywhere was far more measured and welcoming than I had dared hope. May it always remain so. The Twain scholar R. Kent Rasmussen, writing for the Mark Twain Forum, concluded his remarks on a bi-racial Huck this way: “There is little doubt that Clinch’s making Huck part black will, at the least, irritate scholars and devotees of Mark Twain’s novel. Why, however, should that be so? Instead of objecting to what Clinch has done to Huck, perhaps we should ask ourselves why the idea of his being part black troubles us.”

Which brings us, last and least, to n—.

Whatever aesthetic points of view they bring to the discussion—historical, narrative, linguistic—teachers of English and History have reported that the use of the word in Finn, rather than establishing an obstacle, actually opens useful doors in the classroom. Because contrary to its appearance in Huck, where the word is more or less omnipresent, it in Finn occurs only in the mouths and minds of certain characters. Characters of particular educational and social backgrounds, at that. It never, ever appears in the voice of the narrator, unless he is reporting from deep within the mind of such a character. And this clear distinction establishes the use of n—as a linguistic artifact, setting the stage, particularly in classes that study both books, for an early and enlightened discussion of its historical place. As a former English teacher myself, I find that a gratifying development.

In writing Finn, I didn’t set out to rehabilitate Huck. Or to un-rehabilitate him, come to that. I did set out to reflect on the shifting states of race relations in America, with Twain’s work as my springboard, whether the result meant retracing a few of the Missourian’s footsteps or striking off in altogether new—and often darker—directions. Directions suggested by the source material but left unexplored by prior readers and scholars. If in the process I have expanded some folks’ understanding of Twain’s novel, then I’m honored in the extreme. And if one day I achieve the ultimate in literary impact—and find Finn banned by some school board or library—I know just the kind of letter I’ll send in response.

About the Writer

JON CLINCH, a native of upstate New York and a graduate of Syracuse University, has taught American Literature, been Creative Director for a Philadelphia ad agency, and run his own agency in the Philadelphia suburbs. His stories have appeared in John Gardner’s Mss. magazine. He and his wife have one daughter.

“Finn is as dark, as brutal, as ambivalent, and as insane as the history and legacy of American racial slavery. It is also graceful, imaginative, and relentlessly intelligent.” —Mary Gaitskill, author of Veronica

FINN: A Novel by Jon Clinch

In this masterful debut by a major new voice in fiction, Jon Clinch takes us on a journey into the history and heart of one of American literature’s most brutal and mysterious figures: Huckleberry Finn’s father. The result is a deeply original tour de force that springs from Twain’s classic novel but takes on a fully realized life of its own.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7714-1
320 pp., $14.00

Also of Interest

ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN
by Mark Twain

Bantam Classics, MM, 978-0-553-21079-8, 320 pp., $5.95
Ballantine, TR, 978-0-449-91272-0, 448 pp., $14.95
Children’s Classics, HC, 978-0-517-22999-6, 256 pp., $6.99
Introduction by George Saunders
Modern Library, TR, 978-0-375-75737-2, 304 pp., $6.95
Ballantine, MM, 978-0-8041-1571-1, 384 pp., $4.99
It Began With Cain

Why Violence in Literature Cannot and Should Not Be Banned

By Phil Lamarche

Odysseus, at the end of a twenty-year, pan-Mediterranean tour of lust, narcotic lotus flowers, and fisticuffs, finally gets home to his wife and son, only to strike down the herd of suitors laying siege to his spouse. He eventually goes so far as to lynch the treacherous housemaids and dismember a treasonous beggar—starting with his nose and ears, working on to his hands and feet, finally severing his genitals and feeding them to the dogs.

Beowulf, after tearing Grendel’s arm off with his bare hands, tracks down his mother and lops off her head. For good measure, he beheads Grendel (dead from the previously inflicted injury) and collects the noggin of both mother and son to show off to his crew.

Brutus, Cleopatra, Goneril, Juliet, Lady Macbeth, Mark Antony, Cassius, Ophelia, Othello, Portia, Romeo: all dead by suicide alone in the works of William Shakespeare.

These are the characters and works I was raised on—the wholesome, lighthearted public school canon. And when I was asked to write an essay on violence in literature, they were the first to come to mind. Upon revisiting them, I was both struck by the level of violence depicted—I’d forgotten some of the most graphic moments—and I was also somewhat relieved.

While I was working on my first novel, I attended a writing conference in Prague. I was told that I was obsessed with guns and violence, and that I wrote pornographically. When I considered the few, awkward, uncomfortable sexual encounters that took place in my work, I’d laughed, wondering just what kind of pornography the accuser had been watching. But the violence comment had stung a little. I felt lowbrow and crass, as if I was dragging the genre down, and that I should
have been writing about beautiful people with deep yet tidy metaphysical problems. Looking back at the *Odyssey* now feels good, even redemptive—I’ve yet to sever genitals; it’s been tough, but I’ve refrained from even a single, comic kick between the legs; and I haven’t fed any body parts to the dogs. These works remind me that violence is not something peculiar to contemporary literature, nor is it something to be avoided by serious, meaningful work.

Aside from small pockets and brief periods of time, violence seems inseparable from human existence, and if literature is to represent our experience, it cannot be excluded from the medium. Literature, as a whole, if it is to relate to our reality, can no more exist without violence than it can without love, joy, or hope.

Nor can literature exclude acts of violence if it is to be dramatically potent. Drama is produced through emotional contrast. We do not feel the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet’s passing if we have not first felt the swell of joy in those first nights they shared. We cannot know the glow of Odysseus’ triumphant return if we have not wallowed with him in his aching, tangential journey. We will not truly appreciate peace in a dramatic work if we have not first shuddered at the horror of violence.

The desire to exclude representations of violence often rests upon the idea that violence begets violence—an aged and apt statement—but violence on the page is not violence in the world. Literature is artifice, providing a mediated experience. Reading about a fistfight is obviously not the same as being in a fistfight, and in the experience of reading about a fight, we may be allowed to feel the tragedy of the event without having to fight ourselves. Violence in literature, rather than begetting more violence in the world, may have the opposite effect.

My own novel, *American Youth*, started as a series of short stories depicting violent teenage behavior: fistfights, vandalism, self-abuse. From the beginning my intentions were not to encourage, condone, or romanticize such actions, but rather to explore them, take them apart, examine the parts that made the whole. *What makes the violent teenager tick?* Having been a fighter, a vandal, a self-abuser, writing the book was as much a process of self-discovery as sociological study for me.

Delinquent behavior is often blamed on a moral or intellectual inadequacy, attributed to bad, stupid kids who lack the proper character, but it often has less to do with an individual’s cognitive abilities than their current emotional state. It seems to me that violence does indeed stem from ignorance, from a malfunctioning moral compass, but the often overlooked cause is pain—pain that has no process or path that leads to comfort.

*American Youth* explores this type of pain, dealing with the aftermath of an accidental shooting which claims
the life of a teenage boy. The protagonist of the novel is involved in the shooting, and with some encouragement, lies about the event to protect himself and his family from the law. With this lie, his path to forgiveness is blocked, and he takes many common, troublesome tangents. Like Odysseus trying to get back to the warmth and love of his home, the boy in American Youth struggles on his journey, attempting to find comfort in all the wrong places: sex, drugs, violence, even among the ranks of a fascist, quasi-skinhead youth gang. While I would never claim that the novel is a roadmap for coping with tragedy, it has always been my hope that it would provide a few warning signs for the dead-end roads that present themselves in such situations, and to provide some comfort and camaraderie to someone feeling alone with their pain. On one level, the novel is a letter to my own teenage self. It is a note that says, "I understand, I’m sorry you’re feeling the way you are, but what you’re doing won’t help."

I recently read from American Youth and spoke at a high school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It was a good-spirited event, and afterwards, as I was talking with some of the more outgoing students, a quiet, serious young woman approached me with a copy of the book. She handed it over to have it signed and said, “Thank you. It helped.” At this point, I’d been on a book tour through the U.S. and several other countries, and I’d long grown cynical of all the complimentary smoke-blowing that goes on around a visiting author. What struck me most about the young woman’s comment was its simple earnestness. I felt it. She was gone as quickly as she had come, and again I was swelled with the belief in the power of the literary endeavor, reminded that it is through literature that our collective experience is passed between generations and across cultures. Our textbooks and oral traditions are adequate for a large part of what we have to offer, but our literature carries many of the subtle, difficult, and often unsavory emotional and aesthetic truths. If we limit the spectrum of what information passes from generation to generation, we limit what we are able to teach those who follow us. If we exclude certain subjects such as violence in the hopes of stifling its proliferation, we will instead be creating a disingenuous medium and damning future generations to a dangerous, isolating ignorance.

**About the Writer**

PHIL LAMARCHE was a writing fellow in the Syracuse University Graduate Creative Writing Program, and he was awarded the Ivan Klima Fellowship in Fiction in Prague. His work has appeared in Esquire, Ninth Letter, and the 2005 Robert Olen Butler Prize Story anthology. His story, “In the Tradition of My Family,” has been made into a film by orLater Productions, and his first novel, American Youth, was published in paperback in January 2008. He teaches creative writing at Syracuse University and lives with his wife in upstate New York.

Visit the Author Website: www.phillamarche.com/ and the Book’s Myspace page: www.myspace.com/american_youth

**AMERICAN YOUTH**: A Novel

by Phil LaMarche

American Youth is a controlled, essential, and powerful tale of a teenager in southern New England who is confronted by a terrible moral dilemma following a firearms accident in his home. This tragedy earns him the admiration of a sinister gang of boys at his school and a girl associated with them. Set in a town riven by social and ideological tensions—an old rural culture in conflict with newcomers—this is a classic portrait of a young man struggling with the idea of identity and responsibility in an America ill at ease with itself.

"Phil LaMarche observes boys undergoing the rites of adolescence the way Rick Bass and Jim Harrison investigate the ravages of time on their fathers—with an unflinching but sympathetic eye, sometimes amused, sometimes ashamed, always astonished."—San Francisco Chronicle

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7740-0, 256pp., $14.00
I knew my father was a veteran of World War II, but that’s virtually all I knew. He never spoke about his combat experiences. My siblings and I were admonished never to bring up the subject. A whistling teakettle was even banned from our kitchen—the hissing sound unnerved him.

My parents both passed away in 1990. Like so many others of his generation, my father might have taken his stories with him to the grave. But I got lucky. Cleaning out my parents’ condo, I discovered a rusty old ammo box in the basement. In that box were over four hundred letters my father had written to my mother from the Philippines during the war.

The letters ranged widely in tone. In moments of boredom, lying on a hammock on a troop ship, he offered practical advice: what to say to tactless friends whose husbands weren’t away at war, but home making money. During his first days of combat in what would be known as the Battle of Balete Pass, in January 1945, he described the appalling conditions that prevailed in a war zone: “It rained so hard it broke down the stakes supporting our ponchos that were over our holes—our hole began to fill up and we were sleeping in mud. After a while the heat of our bodies made the mud tepid and it was a little more comfortable. The medics cooked some chicken in a helmet—and I had some of it for chow.”

Through his letters, I encountered a side of my father he had never revealed to his four children, a side that was passionate, unguarded, emotional, poetic: “Remember how I used to enjoy the beauties of nature, especially the Heavens at night?” he wrote from Luzon to his young wife, “How we used to like a bright moon and a starry sky? Well it’s so hard for me to enjoy anything now.” The man who wrote these tender letters was different from the man I had known, and my exhilaration at glimpsing my father’s former self was tempered with sadness when I understood how the war had sealed off his emotions.

Each time my father wrote a letter, the military censor read over his shoulder. Each of those 472 letters my mother received in Brooklyn bore the censor’s official stamp. “I have an idea this letter is going to be a very long one. At this stage, the censor must be getting tired,” my dad wrote solicitously at one point.

Military censors looked for any information that could be of value to the enemy—location or planned actions, for instance. My father couldn’t tell his pregnant wife that he was leaving the States until he was already on a troop ship crossing the Equator. To describe his location, he wrote simply “Somewhere at Sea” in the upper right-hand corner of each letter.
My parents learned to read between the lines. There were code words to elude the censor's eyes. Either my parents had agreed upon them in advance, or they counted on each other to decipher the meaning in context. "I'm nowhere near where I can get that gift for Hal Rubin." That "gift," I surmised, was code for combat.

My father may have outwitted the military censor, but when he returned home from war he self-imposed a more pernicious kind of censorship. The taboo on discussing the war was part of his effort to bury the nightmare of what he'd endured during 165 consecutive days of combat. But his memories never left him. He woke with them. He slept with them. He could not and would not talk about his experience. He didn't know how, and neither did his family.

Among my father's letters, I also discovered a silk Japanese flag, a typical war souvenir, covered with specks of rust, perhaps blood. Elegant calligraphy was inked across the fragile square. A Japanese friend translated:

To Yoshio Shimizu
—given to him in the Great East Asian War—to be fought to the end. If you believe in it, you win.

Who was Yoshio Shimizu? Suddenly my father's war took on new dimensions. "For the war to be prosecuted at all," writes historian and World War II vet Paul Fussell, "the enemy of course had to be severely dehumanized." When someone is dehumanized, they no longer have a face, a family, a history, a reason to be alive, or a reason to allow them to be left alive. This was true on both sides of the Pacific War. In contrast, once I knew that my father's enemy had a name—was indeed a person—he became human.

With the help of the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, I was able to locate the surviving family of Yoshio Shimizu—his sisters, cousins, and nephew. Yoshio, I learned, went off to war at the age of 19. He was 21 when he died on Balete Pass.

Yoshio Shimizu's family lived in the village of Suibara in Japan's snow country. In 1995, my husband and I
journeyed to Suibara to return the flag to the Shimizu family. We were embraced by Yoshio’s relatives and the entire community with grace, solemnity, and affection. In Suibara, too, were veterans and their families who’d also lived through decades of self-imposed censorship of any discussion about the war. I met and interviewed villagers who’d never—in fifty years—shared their trauma and losses.

Today in our own country, young men and women are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with life-altering injuries—psychological, physical, and moral. Reading *The Souvenir* reminds us that their personal wars won’t be over any time soon.

After these vets come home, who will listen to their stories? Will they—like my father—bottle them up, erupting into rage at whistling teakettles? Reading *The Souvenir* suggests that we—the community—need to grieve with and listen to these former soldiers as part of a national healing.

This past spring, *The Souvenir* was selected (along with Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*) for the Reads Together program at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, under the theme “War, Loss, Survival, and Reconciliation.” Students, faculty, campus employees, plus the wider Eugene community—Iraq veterans, Vietnam vets, Korea and WWII vets, and workers of all kinds—gathered together for several powerful days of readings, panel discussions, art exhibits, plays, and community dialogue all centered around the book. The experience was exhilarating, exhausting, and necessary.

The narrative of returning the flag raised a lot of questions in students’ minds, as it should. One college student in Eugene told me how her stepfather thought my returning the flag was dead wrong. She listened to his argument, and then informed him she respectfully disagreed. “Your book not only helped me find and define my views of war and peace, but put an understanding in my heart that I did not have before,” she wrote me afterward.

After reading *The Souvenir*, another student decided to talk to his dad, a Vietnam vet, about his combat experience. “I’d never felt comfortable asking him questions before. But now I’m thinking of enlisting, and I want to know what it was like for him,” he said.

Each time *The Souvenir* inspires students to participate in—even initiate—conversations with family or friends about the meaning and the cost of war, I consider it a blow against the censorship of self-imposed silence. It’s a fitting way to honor my father, who carried his war inside him for nearly fifty years.

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**About the Writer**

LOUISE STEINMAN curates the award-winning ALOUD literary series for the Los Angeles Public Library where she also teaches a writing workshop for veterans. Her work appears in many publications including Salon.com, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Magazine, and the New York Times Syndicate. www.louisesteinman.com
WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF THE YOUNG
And Other Books About War for Young Readers

ABSENT by Betool Khedairi
Translated by Muhayman Jamil

Tightly woven and full of vivid, unforgettable characters, this is a moving portrait of a young Iraqi woman living with an aunt and uncle in Baghdad in the 1990s, trying to maintain normal lives, despite the crippling effect of bombings and international sanctions resulting from the Gulf War.
Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7742-4, 240 pp., $13.95

TEARS OF THE DESERT
A Memoir of Survival in Darfur
by Halima Bashir and Damien Lewis

In this harrowing and heartbreaking account by a woman caught up in the war in Darfur, Halima Bashir sheds light on the hundreds of thousands of innocent lives being eradicated by what is fast becoming one of the most terrifying genocides of the twenty-first century. Raw and riveting, Tears of the Desert is more than just a memoir—it is Halima Bashir’s global call to action.
One World, HC, 978-0-385-50625-2, 336pp., $25.00

BEAUFORT by Ron Leshem
Translated by Evan Fallenberg

Ron Leshem makes his American debut with Beaufort, a beautiful and harrowing coming of age story set at an Israeli outpost in Southern Lebanon that won Israel’s top literary prize and is now also an award-winning movie.
Delta, TR, 978-0-553-38529-8, 368pp., $12.00

THE POET OF BAGHDAD
A True Story of Love and Defiance
by Jo Tatchell

Shortlisted for The Costa Biography Award Longlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize Formerly titled Nabeel’s Song

T he Poet of Baghdad traces famed poet Nabeel Yasin’s journey—beginning with his childhood, amid Iraq’s new middle class of the 1950s and early ‘60s—and that of Iraq’s as Saddam Hussein’s rise to power threatens everything he once held dear.

“Jo Tatchell’s moving narrative, from Nabeel’s mouth, tells of endurance, literary resistance and the courage of a loving, close-knit family oppressed by tyranny and war. Behind the deadly statistics and political rhetoric, voices such as his inspire us to pity and pride.” —The Times (London) Broadway, TR, 978-0-7679-2697-3, 368pp., $14.00

THE EAVES OF HEAVEN
A Life in Three Wars
by Andrew X. Pham

Pham does an admirable job of recounting the occupation of Indochina, the World War II Japanese invasion, and the Vietnam War—as he captures the trials of everyday life in Vietnam amid the tragedy, violence, and turbulence of war.

“This is a memoir of terror, triumph and humour as Bul Dau adapts to his new life, learning along the way that differences can be bridged peacefully.”—Windsor Star (Ontario)

GOD GREW TIRED OF US: A Memoir
by John Bul Dau and Michael S. Sweeney

This unforgettable book is the first-person account of a miracle—indeed, a whole series of miracles. One of the young Sudanese boys known as the Lost Boys of Sudan, John Bul Dau was 12 years old when civil war ravaged his village and shattered its age-old society, a life of herding and agriculture marked by dignity, respect, and the simple virtues of Dinka tribal tradition.

Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6773-2, 368pp., $14.95

OH, JOHNNY: A Novel
by Jim Lehrer

Lehrer’s latest novel coming in April 2009 is about young Johnny Wrigley, a newly minted United States Marine, on his way to the Pacific in WWII. While in the service, Johnny accidentally burns a group of women and children alive—an act of such unspeakable horror that it haunts him unrelentingly.

Do not order before 3/24/2009 Random House, HC 978-1-4000-6773-2, 368pp., $26.00

ALSO OF INTEREST

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COMING SPRING 2009

JOKER ONE: A Marine Platoon’s Story of Courage, Leadership, and Brotherhood
by Donovan Campbell

In the tradition of Jarhead and Band of Brothers, an extraordinary story of one marine platoon’s brotherhood, honor, and sacrifice during the battle of Ramadi—arguably the most intense of the Iraq War.

Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6773-2, 368pp., $26.00
Forty years ago, March 1968, I landed at perhaps the busiest airport in the world: Bien Hoa Air Base, Viet Nam.

As an Air Force Sergeant, I was assigned to a Forward Air Control (FAC) unit directing air strikes in support of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division at the base camp of Lai Khe, some 60 km north of Bien Hoa. During my year tour of duty, I made nearly 400 slide images of the war machinery, the general life around me, and the Vietnamese culture.

It would be an understatement to say I had a negative experience in Viet Nam; yet at the same time there was something perversely positive about it. This is something many veterans, of many wars, might recount; but it was especially true in Viet Nam. Today, you couldn’t pay us enough to go through what we saw and did, yet, our experience was priceless.

After my discharge in December 1969, I worked as a veteran advocate and taught middle school and high school life science and earth science, psychology, and social studies. In 1979, I helped establish the Vietnam Veteran Outreach Program in Denver, Colorado, one of six pilot cities providing resource assistance and counseling for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Through the 1980s, I continued to photograph veteran parades, walks, and memorial services throughout the United States. In 1987, I attended the first welcome home parade for the Australian veterans in Sydney. I made my first return to Viet Nam in 1989 and in 1990, I lived for a year in South Korea. In order to document what happened to soldiers of four cultures after the war, I have had to live a nomadic life; accommodating to this chaotic schedule was necessary in order to tell their stories accurately.

For more than 30 many years I have been offering slide presentations for class-rooms and educational conferences about the war and culture of Viet Nam.

As an educator, I’m interested in how we tell the story to our children. I am interested in the methods and materials used in the different countries to teach about the war in Viet Nam—the American War, to some.

In November 2004, I made a conscious decision to choose a date to close my photographic project, “Wounds that Bind: Four Countries after the American War in Viet Nam.” Making photographs and living a nomadic life-style was creating personal stress and strain. I decided to make my last photograph...
of this project on April 30, 2005, in Saigon, Viet Nam.

Although April 30th was significant because of the fall of Saigon 30 years ago, that wasn’t a major concern for my work. The date simply allowed me enough time to plan a return to Viet Nam in order to make my final photograph. However, like many plans, things can and do change.

In March 2005, en route to Viet Nam, I attended the 5th Triennial Vietnam Symposium held at Texas Tech University, in Lubbock. After I delivered my presentation, I was interested in a session about diaries, since I was interested in developing my own skills in writing. The session wasn’t about writing skills. Rather, two brothers, Fred and Rob Whitehurst, both veterans of the war in Viet Nam, discussed two small diaries written in a delicate hand, which Fred had kept for 35 years.

In September 1970, Fred was burning captured documents that had no further value. Ready to toss two small hand-bound diaries in the blaze, Fred’s Vietnamese interpreter said, “Don’t throw these in the fire, Fred. They have fire in them already.” The diaries belonged to a 27 year old female medical doctor from Ha Noi, killed near her jungle clinic in Duc Pho, about 45 kilometers south of Quang Ngai. Fred kept the two small diaries for 35 years, always wondering how to return them to her family. Now, Fred was offering the two small diaries to the Vietnam Center archivist.

After their session, I was moved to offer Fred some sort of consolation for his heart-felt gift: perhaps a photograph of a special location in Ha Noi. They gave me a CD on which both diaries had been scanned. Perhaps I could locate something connecting the past with the present.

A few days later, I arrived in Ha Noi, and went to the Quaker Office asking for help in understanding what was on the CD. My friend, Do Xuan Anh, put the CD in her computer and we briefly looked at some of the pages. I left the CD with Anh, and I went to Saigon to follow my plan to finish my project on April 30th.

Early on April 26th, while in Saigon, I woke to a phone call. Kim Tram introduced herself as Thuy’s youngest sister—the youngest sister of the woman whose diary I had given Anh. Thuy’s Mother and three sisters wanted to meet me in Ha Noi. I agreed to return to Ha Noi the next day.

The CD was waiting at my hotel, and sisters Kim Tram and Hien Tram took me to Mother Tram’s home, which was ironically a few blocks from Anh’s office. After being introduced to the many family members and the press, I opened my laptop computer and started the CD. Thuy’s Mother and three sisters, Phuong, Hien, and Kim proceeded to view the electronic version of her diaries on my computer. After some tears and comments between the women about what they read, I gave them the CD and took my leave.

On April 30th Hien Tram, her husband Ho Nam, and their two sons, Ho Anh and Viet Anh, took me to Thuy’s gravesite on the outskirts of Ha Noi. We did a ceremony for Thuy and several of the surrounding graves; the souls of these soldiers protect Thuy’s spirit. My last photograph on April 30, 2005 was Thuy’s 66-year-old caretaker of the cemetery.

On May 1st, I woke a new person. My 37-year photographic project was complete. I could now return to the
US and create a book of my photographs and stories.

In July 2005, the Tram family published, Nhat Ky Dang Thuy Tram, “The Diaries of Dang Thuy Tram.” Since then, more than 450,000 copies of the diaries have been sold in Viet Nam: a country where a run of 6,000 is a bestseller.

In August 2005, Fred and Rob Whitehurst received a hero’s welcome when they arrived in Ha Noi. The family took them to Thuy’s grave and Duc Pho, the village near where Thuy was killed and which now houses a new medical clinic in Thuy’s name.

In October 2005, Mother Tram, Phuong, Hien, and Kim made a visit to the Vietnam Center Archives in Lubbock, Texas. For the first time, they held Thuy’s diaries. The diaries remain in a special “house” made for them in the Archives.


A good friend of Rob Whitehurst, Neil Alexander, is making a documentary film of the experience (www.findingthuy.com), and a Vietnamese feature film is also being produced.

As you read Thuy’s words, her thoughts, feelings, frustrations, fears, hopes, concerns and dreams of home and family, I believe she appears as an intelligent woman, intent on bringing her country together and forcing out foreign invaders. She has critical words for those above her, yet feels she relates to a culture larger than herself. Ironically, she was kept out of the communist party for a long time due to her educational background.

What can truthfully be said and printed in a time of war, or after, has always been competing with censorship and propaganda. Anne Frank’s diary has faced challenges in the past as “sexually offensive,” a “real downer,” and pornographic. A few years ago, a branch of the Vietnamese government wouldn’t allow a Ha Noi bookstore to order Barbara Kingsolver’s, The Cottonwood Bible. The government officials thought the title was too religious.

As a result of the war in Viet Nam, and the national trauma of 9-11, it seems the psyche of our nation suffers a form of Post Traumatic Stress Denial. From the words and observations of others come the insights that make us remember and feel. Maybe America’s pre-emptive war and occupation of Iraq has prompted someone to keep a diary that will some day explain what happened in their life.

About the Writer

TED ENGELMANN is a member of the 2008 Distinguished Lecturer Program established by the Organization of American Historians (www.oah.org). Ted is available for presentations and his contact information is at www.tedengelmann.com.
This is Dedicated to Those Who Burn Books
(If They Only Took the Time to Read Them)

*Author Charles Bock on himself, Kurt Vonnegut, and all those who get burned*

BY CHARLES BOCK

**MY DAD CALLED.** He’s calls whenever he reads news coverage of my novel, *Beautiful Children*. The book takes place in Las Vegas, where I was born and where my dad still lives. Seventy-four and mostly deaf, my pop likes to keep me updated on local responses. Our conversations are one-sided these days, mostly consisting of stuff he wants to tell me. This time, dad said, “You made the cover of *City Life*.” Referring to the local weekly giveaway newspaper, his voice wasn’t happy. In fact, I could tell he was troubled, trying to figure out how to proceed. “It’s a very provocative cover.” Finally my dad spilled the beans: “They’re burning your book.”

Awkward as the moment was, it actually could have been worse. I was somewhat prepared for the call. Via the wonders of Google Alerts, I knew about the offending photo: some guy in a red shirt roasting my novel over an open spit fire. This hipster-looking guy (black glasses, emo hair, the paper’s managing editor) had written about why, despite a fair amount of accolades and publicity, my novel was, in fact, an atrocity. Apparently, this angle was his entry point as to why nobody had ever been able to write a decent novel about Las Vegas. I use *apparently* because I did not read the article.

The cover photo ended any interest I might have had. That, plus the three other photos that accompanied the text—the first showing yon managing editor holding torn pages of my novel and standing contemplatively in front of the fire, the second capturing the guy leaping, mid-air, preparing to stomp on my novel’s smoldering carcass, and the final one, a close-up, my book’s cover and pages physically burning, half charred, with parts still aflame.

Honestly, looking at pictures of my hard work going up in smoke was enough to make me vomit. Talking my dad out of writing a profanity-laced letter to the editor was no joy, either. But, really, so what? Why does any of this matter to you, the educators of America? After all, that particular book was the guy’s property. He presumably purchased the thing; it was his right to do whatever he wanted to do with it. Freedom of expression includes, say, the freedom to express your dissatisfaction with the political direction of this country by taking a flag and setting it on fire. It includes the freedom to express bitterness with your writing career via ranting about some other guy’s novel. Whether I like it or not, this dude and his newspaper have every right in the world to run those photos. “The first amendment is a tragic amendment,” said Kurt Vonnegut, “because everyone is going to have his or her feelings hurt. Your government is not here to protect you from having your feelings hurt.”

Educators of America, my reason for bringing this occurrence to your attention has nothing to do with my hurt feelings, or even whether someone calls my novel sucky and overrated. No. I bring this to your attention because there is a line that binds that one poor, charred corpse of my novel with Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*—a book which, in 1973, was banned by a school district and then physically taken out and burned in Drake, North Dakota.
Any time a book is burned in a public square, no matter how benign or misguided the motivations, what is actually happening is the literal death of thought. An end point to all the wonderful things that civilization is supposed to provide.

And this is where you come in, dear, underappreciated teachers of America. Because your job is nothing less than to try and civilize your students. I don’t mean civilize in the sense of turning your students into good little robots, drones, or mindless followers. Rather, civilize in the sense that your students will emerge from a day in your class that much better equipped to navigate the world, that much more able to search out a space for themselves in a culture which, at this moment, is awash with the existential dilemma of what Sartre famously referred to as too much freedom.

Right now our culture is so blinking, so instant. Odds are that you won’t get through this essay without breaking to answer an email or two. Learning, serious thought, even the act of reading itself is at odds with this immediacy. Sustaining a mental connection with a narrative, getting lost in a novel—an act which is one of the novel’s fundamental pleasures—is completely at odds with the deluge of options that now present themselves in each and every given moment. Fact is, it’s kind of a miracle when anyone reads for pleasure any more. And things are only going to get faster. None of this is going to get any better.

With this in mind, burning a book—whether it’s done as an act of self-aggrandizement, as an act of aggression, or with the paternalistic intent of somehow shielding innocents from offensive or unwise content—is ridiculous. It’s asinine. And yet, all too recently, intimidation, the attempt to suppress an idea, a song, or point of view, has been far too common. Some examples are easy. Others might be more obscure, but are no less chilling.

For example: In February of 2006, the Arizona state Senate circulated what it called an “academic bill of rights” which allowed students to avoid any book which came into conflict with their system of belief, and be replaced with a different, agreeable book. Arizona’s Senate Committee on Higher Education actually approved this bill. At the committee meeting, state senator Thayer Verschoor cited Rick Moody’s novel The Ice Storm, saying, “There’s no defense of this book. I can’t believe that anyone would come up here and try to defend that kind of material.”

The book was being taught in a course called “Currents of American Life” at Chandler-Gilbert Community College. The teacher made sure his syllabus contained a warning about the adult themes of some of the class materials. But according to Inside Higher Education, the complaining student hadn’t paid attention, either to the syllabus or the warning the teacher gave, during the first day of class.

And that’s just it. Dogma could care less about facts. Dogma does not allow for rational thought. Dogma does not allow for probing, for counters, or an exchange of viewpoints. Dogma does not teach someone to consider the merits (and errors) of a new idea, new premise, or different perspective. Manifestos proscribe, as opposed to absorb; if they change it’s usually a cosmetic change, plastering over holes or flaws. By contrast, the term enlightenment refers to an 18th century philosophical movement, one that

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**BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN: A Novel**

by Charles Bock

In this masterly debut novel, Charles Bock mixes incandescent prose with devious humor to capture Las Vegas with unprecedented scope and nuance and to provide a glimpse into a microcosm of modern America. Beautiful Children is an odyssey of heartache and redemption—heralding the arrival of a major new writer. Visit the official website: http://www.beautifulchildren.net/

Random House, HC, 978-1-4000-6650-6, 432pp., $25.00

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Do not order before 1/31/09

Random House, TR, 978-08129-7796-7, 432pp., $14.00
stressed the use of reason, scrutinized previously accepted doctrines and traditions, and brought about humanitarian reform.

This much is certain: if you teach literature, teach science, teach evolution, or teach anything that actually makes someone think, you are going to get challenged. You are going to get criticized. You might even be censored. It will come from parents. It will come from principals. It will come from school board members. It might even come from state senators who have no more idea of what a novel is supposed to do than they know about life on Mars. That’s a part of your reality. The larger part of your reality, I believe, is how you can engage your students in such a manner as to keep their attention and get their minds working and make them, well, want to learn.

But you already know this. You know that the world is dividing itself into people who read and people who do not, into people who listen and people who do not. You know that people who read are going to be smarter than everybody else, that the people who do not listen are basically going to be a huge headache, for all kinds of reasons, and that the gap between A and B is only going to get wider with time. You know that life is complicated and sometimes the books which best illustrate and draw out that complexity will use profanity. So maybe I’m not saying anything new here.

Books by Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut was a master of contemporary American literature. His black humor, satiric voice, and incomparable imagination first captured America’s attention in *The Sirens of Titan* in 1959 and established him as “a true artist” with *Cat’s Cradle* in 1963. He was, as Graham Greene declared, “one of the best living American writers.” Mr. Vonnegut passed away in April 2007.

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**WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE**
TR, 978-0-385-33350-4, 352pp., $14.00
At the end of the Vietnam War, Vonnegut was one of a handful of people who successfully turned what was supposedly low culture into high art, and his novel *Slaughterhouse Five* became something a flashpoint in the cultural wars. The book tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, an American soldier who is taken prisoner during World War II and survives the Dresden bombing in an underground meat locker. The story moves back and forth through time, and has a middle-aged Billy convinced that he’s been taken hostage by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. Every time there’s a reference to something killed or dying in the book, the paragraph ends with the Tralfamadorian response to death: “So it goes.” When the book came out, many communities condemned it: Rochester, Michigan actually banned the thing in 1973 because it “contains and makes reference to religious matters.” Drake, North Dakota burned the thing. For the next sixteen years, religion, explicit language, sexual references, sexual drawings, vulgarity, violence, and insulting portrayals of women were all cited as reasons for banning this book. The novel has all of these things. It also has a tremendous heart. It has a scene where a German officer tries to get American prisoners to fight for the Germans, against the Russian army. And it has the following three paragraphs, the first two appearing in succession on pages 24-5 of the paperback:

“I have told my sons that they are not under any circumstances to take part in massacres, and that the news of massacres of enemies is not to fill them with satisfaction or glee.”

“I have also told them not to work for companies which make massacre machinery, and to express contempt for people who think we need machinery like that.”

And then this one, from the middle of page 148:

“As you know I am from a planet that has been engaged in senseless slaughter since the beginning of time. I myself have seen the bodies of schoolgirls who were boiled alive in a water tower by my own countrymen, who were proud of fighting pure evil at the time.” This was true. Billy saw the boiled bodies in Dresden. “And I have lit my way in a prison at night with candles from the fat of human beings who were butchered by the brothers and fathers of those schoolgirls who were boiled. Earthlings must be the terrors of the Universe! If other planets aren’t now in danger from the Earth, they soon will be. So tell me the secret so I can take it back to Earth and save us all: How can a planet live at peace?”

Fact is: the books are going to burn. The wolves are going to howl and bark and bay. A free society must include the freedom to destroy itself. And still, in the midst of all this, your job, my poor doomed friends, is to give young men and women a chance for something better. One kid at a time. It is your job to try and save this world.

Good luck.

**About the Writer**

*Charles Bock* is the author of the novel *Beautiful Children*, which was a New York Times and national bestseller, and is basically like the rock-ingeniously cool novel that anybody’s written in a long freaking time. Mr. Bock carries a membership card for the American Civil Liberties Union, although, honestly, the membership ran out and as of this moment, Mr. Bock has yet to renew—he’s going to renew it though (seriously.) Charles lives in NYC with his beautiful wife Diana. She sometimes tells him to turn down his music, but always does so with love.
never thought of myself as a writer about religion until a religion came after me. Religion was a part of my subject, of course; for a novelist from the Indian subcontinent, where the supernatural and mundane coexist in the streets and are considered as being of the same order of reality, how could it not have been? But in my opinion I also had many other, larger, tastier fish to fry. Nevertheless, when the attack came, I had to confront what was confronting me, and to decide what I wanted to stand up for in the face of what so vociferously, repressively and violently stood against me. At that time it was often difficult to persuade people that the attack on *The Satanic Verses* was part of a broader, global assault on writers, artists, and fundamental freedoms. The aggressors in that matter, by which I mean the novel’s opponents, who threatened booksellers and publishers falsified the contents of the text they disliked, and vilified its author, nevertheless presented themselves as the injured parties, and such was the desire to appease religious sentiment even then that in spite of the murder of a translator in Japan and the shooting of a publisher in Norway there was widespread acceptance of that topsy-turvy view. In spite of all the public calls for violence to be done, not a single person— in Britain or anywhere else- was arrested or charged with any offence. I revisit these bad old days with extreme reluctance, but I do so because now, sixteen years later*, religion is coming after us all, and even thought most of us probably feel, as I once did, that we have other, more important concerns, we are all going to have to confront the challenge. If we fail, this particular fish may end up frying us. . . .

People have always turned to religion for the answers to the two great questions of life: where did we come from? And how shall we live? But on the question of origins, all religions are simple wrong. No, the universe wasn’t created in six days by a superforce that rested on the seventh. Nor was it churned into being by a sky-god with a giant churn. And on the social question, the simple truth is that wherever religions, with their narrow moralities, get into society’s driving seat, tyranny results.

The Inquisition results. Or the Taliban.

And yet religions continue to insist that they provide special access to ethical truths, and consequently deserve special treatment and protection. And they continue to emerge from the world of private life, where they belong, like so many other things that are acceptable when done in private between two consenting adults but unacceptable in the town square, and to bid for power. The emergence of radical Islam needs no redescription here; but the resurgence of faith is a larger subject than that. . . .

Religion is everywhere on the march, but that does not mean we should not confront it. Victor Hugo wrote, ‘There is in every village a torch: the schoolmaster- and an extinguisher: the parson.’ We need more teachers and fewer priests in our lives; because as James Joyce once said, ‘There is no heresy or no philosophy which is so abhorrent to the church as a human being.’ But perhaps the great American lawyer Clarence Darrow put the secularist argument best of all. ‘I don’t believe in God,’ he said, ‘because I don’t believe in Mother Goose.’

*This essay is excerpted from a piece which ran in the 2005 book Free Expression Is No Offence: An English PEN Book by Lisa Appignanesi (Penguin Books Ltd.)

About the Writer

**SALMAN RUSHDIE is the author of eight previous novels:** Grimus, *Midnight's Children*, Shame, *The Satanic Verses*, Haroun and the Sea of Stories, The Moor's Last Sigh, The Ground Beneath Her Feet and *Fury*. He has published a collection of short stories, East, West; a book of reportage, *The Jaguar Smile*; two collections of essays, *Imaginary Homelands* and *Step Across This Line*; and a work of film criticism about *The Wizard of Oz*. *Salman Rushdie's second novel, Midnight's Children, was awarded both the Booker Prize and the "Booker of Bookers," as the best novel to have won the Booker Prize in its first 25 years. His other accolades include the Whitbread Novel Award, the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Austrian State Prize for European Literature. He was awarded a knighthood for services to literature in the Queen's Birthday Honours on June 16, 2007.*
MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

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This novel is at once a fascinating family saga and an astonishing evocation of a vast land and its people—a brilliant incarnation of the universal human comedy.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7653-3, 560 pp., $14.95

“The literary map of India is about to be redrawn….
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When I look at the American Library Association’s list of the 100 most challenged books at the end of the twentieth century, I marvel that we allow each other to read anything at all. In addition to a number of undisputed classics—The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn comes in at #5, while Steinbeck’s poignant Of Mice and Men ranks #6—the list is a showcase of children’s books and young adult novels that, apparently, offend a few grown-ups while delighting millions of kids: Alvin Schwartz’s bestselling Scary Stories series tops the list and Daddy’s Roommate by Michael Willhoite—well, who’s really surprised to see it at #2? In a more recent list—the top ten challenges from 2006—not much has changed. And Tango Makes Three (the famous gay Penguins) gets the gold for “featuring” homosexuality and a message that is “anti-family.” In fact, nine of the ten books on this list have been challenged for homosexuality and/or sexual content. The only book on the list whose offenses aren’t sexual? The Scary Stories series, for “occult/Satanism, unsuited to age group, violence, and insensitivity.”

It’s enough to make you cry or laugh, or both. Yet whenever I encounter the various lists of challenged and banned books, I always look to see if one of the most widely read yet subversive books in American literature, The Scarlet Letter, has landed in the dog house. Wondrously, mysteriously, thankfully, it rarely does. How to explain that some parents and community leaders get worked up about a tale of two penguins taking in an orphaned chick, while a novel that ridicules religious authority gets assigned again and again in sophmore lit? This is not to say The Scarlet Letter never goes unchallenged. A quick Google search turns up cases from the 1990s when the book faced challenges for “conflicting with the values of the community.” (How Hawthorne would have relished the irony of that language!) In fact, ever since the book’s publication in 1850, various people have spoken out against its sympathetic portrait of an adulteress. Yet given the book’s unmistakable message about the fallacy of religious authority, and the hollowness of piety, how is it this book goes mostly unbothered when so many others face outcry?

I first read The Scarlet Letter when I was fifteen. In it I found a familiar vision of religious intolerance to the one around me. I grew up in the 1980s, when
teleevangelists, with their fluffed up hair and their tears, self-righteously denounced all kinds of sinners, reserving a special, full-throated enthusiasm for gay people. No matter how outrageous the televangelists’ claims, or how tacky their clothes, many Americans, including much of the media, allowed the TV preachers a moral authority simply because they were of the clergy. (This was before they began to fall, one by one, inevitably ensnared by sexual hypocrisy and unpaid taxes.) Once, I remember flipping the channels, counting the number of men at the pulpit condemning gays. We didn’t have a remote, and I sat cross-legged before the TV, pressing the channel button again and again. On one Sunday afternoon in 1984, five men of God were simultaneously broadcasting to millions of Americans that I better pack my handbasket—for I was on my way to hell.

Which is why when I read The Scarlet Letter that year in sophomore lit, I felt a surge of recognition. It’s no accident that the first people to speak in the novel are the Gossips—the sanctimonious women of the Puritan community, “self-constituted judges” Hawthorne calls them, who show no capacity to forgive. These women open the novel like a Greek chorus, wailing on and on not about a great battle lost or a hero destroyed, but about Hester Prynne’s sin of adultery, calling her a “brazen hussy”, a “malefactor”, and, most bitchily, a piece of “naughty baggage.” As one old woman puts it, “I’ll tell ye a piece of my mind.” Boy, does she ever.

And they’re just the warm-up! Next come the senior clergy, who, of course, also have a few things to say. And finally, timid, pallid, “godly” Arthur Dimmesdale, the “tremulous” reverend whom the Puritans adore, as much for his religious eloquence as for his soft, pretty, nearly feminine features. The entire community—all of Puritan America, it seems—turns to him to cast judgment on Hester Prynne standing defiantly before them on the pillory. Indirectly, the good Reverend Dimmesdale tells the people what they want to hear: she is a sinner and the rest of you are superior because of it.

And yet brilliant Hawthorne has a little secret up his narrative sleeve: of course Hester’s lover is the good reverend himself! Of course he is the father of bastard Pearl. Who else could it be? As a teenager, what I loved about Hawthorne’s vision—and still love today—is how he makes the community terrifying (I have to believe Shirley Jackson loved this book too, and wrote “The Lottery” in homage), but also manages to insert irony, so that readers like my fifteen-year-old self can interpret. It’s not easy to scare the bejesus out of a reader while simultaneously making him laugh, but that is what Hawthorne does, even when I re-read the novel’s opening chapters today. How cool he seemed to this sophomore all those years ago: at a time when the country let those TV preachers go on and on shilling hatred, Hawthorne was there to tell me my instincts were right. Those guys on TV? Full of crap. The mass media remained silent, while a book almost 150 years old spoke out forcefully.

This experience partly explains why I became a fiction writer and, perhaps, what led me some twenty years later to write a novel called The 19th Wife. Several years ago I first heard about Ann Eliza Young, a once-famous woman who was derided and celebrated for being Brigham Young’s outspoken 19th wife. Born into the Church of Latter-day Saints (or Mormons) and raised in a family with five wives, Ann Eliza in 1873 divorced her powerful husband, who was also her spiritual leader, and apostatized from the only church she knew. Leaving her family and her community, Ann Eliza embarked on a national crusade to, as she put it, tell the truth about American polygamy. She played a significant role in forcing the Latter-day Saints to abandon polygamy, one of the central tenets of early LDS belief. Ann Eliza was a controversial figure in her day, and remains so today. To some, she is a hero; to others, a traitor and a liar. Many Latter-day Saints believed then, and continue to believe today, that her stories about polygamy warped the truth about what was primarily a spiritual practice. On the other hand, many women and children who suffered in polygamous households believed she exposed only the half of it. As a teenager I found myself morally fortified by Hester Prynne. Twenty years later she inspired me to write about another woman who faced community ostracism for defying her religious authority. Like Hester Prynne before her, Ann Eliza Young is a powerful yet imperfect symbol for the cost of living according to one’s beliefs.

A cynic might claim that people who challenge books don’t really read them and therefore have misread The Scarlet Letter’s message, wrongly believing it is about the punishment of sin. I’m not so sure about that. Rather, I think Hawthorne’s ultimate vision of faith lets the book go, more or less, unchallenged by those who might
otherwise be so offended by it. For despite the religious hypocrisy he exposes, despite the decidedly un-Christian Christians he portrays—even in the face of all this, Hester Prynne maintains her faith. After being released from prison, she has little use for clergy or a house of worship or any of the community rituals of religion, yet she still believes in God, in her own terms. When Pearl—named for the Pearl of Great Price, a parable in Matthew—asks who her father is, Hester answers determinedly, “Thy Heavenly Father sent thee!” Hester’s church has abandoned her, yet she continues to believe. Hawthorne’s message is a remarkable statement about the true nature of faith. This is the case, too, with Ann Eliza Young and many of the characters in *The 19th Wife*: even after encountering an overwhelming number of reasons to doubt, each maintains, in his or her own way, a unique sense of faith. Perhaps it is the ultimate testament of the power of belief: we can face scorn in the name of it or we can turn away from it, we can be lied to under the banner of it and we can deny it, and yet even after all these tests our hearts can remain full of private, powerful belief.

As we ponder censorship and rightly assess the dangers it poses, it is also worth noting the unnotable, a statistic that does not—in fact, cannot—exist. For every banned book, how many more millions sit proudly on the shelf, unchallenged and widely available to readers? True, every time a book faces a challenge or a ban, all books are at risk. Yet even in today’s climate, our society can mostly tolerate the nuances and subtleties of a book like *The Scarlet Letter*, despite the painful truths it continues to reveal about that most sensitive of subjects, religion. And perhaps this explains why I have received so many warm responses from Latter-day Saints after they have read *The 19th Wife*. Not long ago I met the great-great-great-grandson of Brigham Young’s 12th wife, a devout Latter-day Saint who sparred with Ann Eliza and publicly fought for the right to engage in polygamy. Although this young man, himself a Latter-day Saint, did not fully agree with *The 19th Wife*, he had read it fairly, commending it for what he said was its complex approach to a complex story. He didn’t want to challenge or ban *The 19th Wife*—he wanted to discuss it.

Recently I was re-reading *The Scarlet Letter* on an airplane. My seatmate, a man named Zach, said, “Oh my son is reading that in school.” I asked what grade he was in, although somehow I already knew the answer. Zach’s son, of course, was a sophomore. As I returned to my book, my mind wandered and I looked out the airplane window: we were 30,000 feet above the heart of America, and I began to imagine the classrooms and libraries below where, thankfully, thousands of fifteen-year-olds, one by one, are still free to encounter Hester Prynne.

**About the Writer**

DAVID EBERSHOFF is the author of the novels *The Danish Girl*, *Pasadena*, and *The 19th Wife*. His fiction has won a number of awards and has been translated into a dozen languages. He teaches in the graduate writing program at Columbia University and is an editor-at-large at Random House. Visit author’s website: [http://www.ebershoff.com/](http://www.ebershoff.com/)
Once, American narratives influenced global culture. Now Japanese visual forms, such as Manga, increasingly influence Western narratives, shaping what we see in our culture, from *Street Fighter* video games to *Gorillaz* pop videos, and from *The Matrix* to tiny mobile phones.

Beginning in the mid 40s, Manga introduced cinematic framing, composition and filmic story telling techniques to comic books. It, unlike western comic books which are text heavy, relies more on visuals to tell the story, hence its cinematic quality—the drive in the narrative coming primarily from the visuals rather than the words. This rather suits young people who are used to fast moving images as seen in video games and internet media.

Unfortunately, much like traditional comic books were in the '50s, Manga has also increasingly become a convenient scapegoat for some in government and within the media. So, with this in mind, my colleagues and I have decided to enter the fray with *The Manga Bible*—and I am quite proud that we were the first to do it in English.

Some commentators view *The Manga Bible* as a watered down rendering of biblical narrative for children, and others may see it as heretical. Both points of view, I must say, are outmoded and misinformed.

From the 50s up to the early 80s, comics had been relegated to children readership; since the 90s, however, adults in the UK and the States have been a growing demographic. Manga, being the fastest growing within the graphic novel sector in the West, appeals to both children and young adults and includes a huge and notoriously difficult female demographic.* This appeal to the video game/internet generation is manga’s strength; a strength, I believe, that education institutions should see as an opportunity. And the format is maturing, as it increasingly covers more sophisticated material and offers more meaningful content.

* Until recently, the Video Game and Comic Book media formats have proved difficult to sell to girls and women in the West. Nintendo’s current console generation Wii bucked the trend with its innovative and highly interactive controllers. *Manga* had led the way previously with its *Shojo* genre variant. It is worth noting that these two break-through entertainment media are Japanese inventions. As America led the cultural narratives of the modern era, Japan leads the cultural narratives of the young in the post-modern era.
And to those who may view this project as heretical, it's important to remember that the stories of the Bible were originally conveyed in an oral form, then written down in an ancient or ancient version of a contemporary language, and then re-rendered in numerous and sometimes conflicting vernacular translations. This newest rendering is simply a continuation of a long line, one suited to a more visually-oriented generation.

The following pages highlight key moments from the book and I think give you a feel for the style and content. I invite you to consider using *The Manga Bible* for educational purposes, so please also take a look at the teaching guide provided by Youth Alpha, an organization promoting a practical introduction to the Christian faith: www.themangabible.com/images/ER_youthgroups.pdf although this resource was designed for the New Testament, it demonstrates how *The Manga Bible* can be utilised as educational resource.

**About the Writer**

SIKU—artist, theologian and musician—is one of Britain’s leading comic book creator/conceptualists. His works are published in several books, including prominently in Dez Skinn’s *Comic Art Now*, a compilation of the best of international contemporary comic book art.

He dreams of flying one day, just like Superman. Until then, he’ll make do traveling around on the London Underground network.

For more information on the Manga genre, check out this article from RHI Volume I:

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—Andrew Salkey, author of A Quality of Violence, on Black History for Beginners
For the past year and a half, the Persian edition of my memoirs, *Funny in Farsi*, has been one of the top-selling books in Iran. If a book sells 2,000 copies there, it’s considered a bestseller. In its first year, my book sold over 30,000 copies. The government is not happy.

Like all books published in Iran, *Funny in Farsi* had to receive permission from the censor’s office. Iran is an Islamic theocracy, and topics like sex, political satire, or anything offensive to Muslims must be avoided in print. Beyond that, there are no rules. Since there are no written censorship guidelines, every book is at the mercy of the individual censor.

My manuscript was processed and returned after only six months, which was a quick turnaround. A translation of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* has been with the censor’s office for seventeen years!

Anyone who has read *Funny in Farsi* knows that it is a humorous and gentle memoir about shared humanity and the love of family. It is currently on the reading list of many junior high, high schools and colleges in the United States; Touchstone Studios has optioned it for a sit-com. It would be difficult to find anything offensive in the book, but the Iranian government has managed to do so.

I consider the soul of my book to be a chapter entitled, “The Ham Amendment.” In that chapter, my father, a Muslim who developed a taste for ham as a Fulbright Scholar in Texas, tells me that it doesn’t matter what we eat, it’s how we treat our fellow man that matters. He also says that there are good and bad people in every religion, and that each person must be judged individually, not by his or her religion.
The Iranian government found my father’s words so scandalous that my publisher was forced to remove that entire chapter. He had no choice but to comply. After a few other minor changes, my book was finally published.

That should have been the end of the government’s involvement with my book, but it wasn’t.

The book was an instant hit in Iran and quickly went through multiple printings. Everyone was talking about the book about the Iranian family who moves to the United States and has all sorts of adventures in the land of freeways, clean bathrooms and huge supermarkets. I received endless emails from readers in Iran telling me that my life is their dream.

After the third printing, government employees came to my publisher demanding proof that he had received permission from the censor’s bureau. My publisher showed the official permission certificate. My book had gone to the censor’s office at the beginning of President Ahmadinejad’s term, at a time when the government was more lenient. One would think there was nothing the government employees could do once the book was cleared by the censor, but one would be wrong.

The government controls the paper supplies in Iran and, from time to time, they claim there is not enough paper for my book. Between printings, there is occasionally a gap during which my book is available only on the black market. This has, of course, made it even more popular.

Most recently, a news website run by the government featured a long article condemning me and my book. My publisher is not sure that my next book, *Laughing Without an Accent*, will receive permission from the censor’s bureau. This makes me very sad. Judging from the emails from Iranian readers, I know that my stories have brought much needed levity and laughter to a population suffering under restrictions unimaginable in the West. Who would have thought that a tale of love and family—humor could be so scandalous?

---

**About the Writer**

Firoozeh Dumas was born in Abadan, Iran and moved to the United States at age seven. Aside from writing books, Firoozeh travels the country reminding everyone that our commonalities far outweigh our differences, and does so with humor. She and her French husband are raising their three American-born children in Northern California, where they regularly enjoy dim sum.

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To read Firoozeh’s article from RHI about using humor to reach reluctant readers, go to:

The Censor’s Perfect World

BY LLOYD JONES

I WAS A RECENT VISITOR TO THE KAFKA MUSEUM IN PRAGUE. That such a museum exists should come as no surprise. After all, Kafka spent most of his life in Prague. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine this one-time insurance employee turning into the writer of such novels as *The Trial*, *Metamorphosis*, and *The Castle* without Prague’s Byzantine cobbled streets and tightly packed neighbourhoods influencing his creative wellsprings.

Yet, this same city, under the aegis of State paranoia banned publication of Kafka’s titles after World War II. For nearly half a century, Kafka simply disappeared off the shelves. It required the “purple revolution” in 1989, and the dissolution of the Communist regime for Kafka to be reinstated. His books are now back on the shelves. In fact, you can also buy Kafka t-shirts, posters, and key rings from the shop appended to the museum. How the wheel turns.

Still, I hadn’t known about the censorship of Kafka. My initial shock came as a reader and writer. How could such wonderful books be locked away in the proverbial cupboard for so long? The answer, of course, is the danger of the writer leading avid readers to places the regime would prefer they not visit or dwell. The writer might lead the reader to ideas antagonistic to the regime.

The censor is congenitally afraid of what may be exposed as much as by what might be lost. The status quo is at stake; and the status quo always looks like a perfect world to those who control it.

Parents are our first censors. More often with the best will in the world, parental censorship seeks to protect. A parental control device on Internet access is not such a bad idea when a child is but two or three clicks away from pornographic sites. As parents and educators, we might join in a wider crusade and argue that less violence on screen might be a very good thing.

As parents, we may even occasionally over-step the mark, such as what happens in my novel, *Mister Pip*. Set on a small Pacific island during a period of civil war, a mother conceals a book from her daughter, Matilda. The book is *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Up until its concealment, Dickens’ great classic is read to Matilda and her classmates by Mr. Watts, the last white man on the island.

The reading provides Matilda with her first powerful imaginative experience. She never expected to “feel the breath” of a made-up person, or discover that a book can deliver you to another world. She has found a friend in Pip, who normally she might have expected to find up a tree rather than in a book. Obsessed by Dickens’ character, she creates a small shrine on the beach and carves Pip’s name out in the sand.

She tries to interest her mother, Dolores, in the book. Each night she recounts the chapter read to the class earlier in the day. The book fails to extend its spell to Dolores. More alarming, at least to Dolores, is the evident impact of the book on her daughter. Matilda has access to a world beyond her own reach, a world she can not access let alone understand. Matilda is growing in a wholly new and unexpected direction. Her world has expanded—grown beyond the village, beyond the island, beyond real time to Victorian England. In other words, it has grown beyond the grasp of the mother.

Dolores turns jealous. She is jealous of her daughter’s expanding world, and at the same time bewildered and disappointed that her daughter is more interested in a made-up person than her own relatives. To restore the old
order, to bring her daughter back to the observable reality of their everyday lives, Dolores steals the book from the classroom and conceals it. She is willing to sacrifice the enjoyment of others for her own daughter. In a power struggle with Mr. Watts, the presenter of *Great Expectations*, she is attempting to bring Matilda back under her wing. Matilda is her daughter—not Mr. Watts’. *Great Expectations* is hardly the issue as much as control over her daughter.

The consequences of Dolores’ action are far-reaching. She has concealed the book, thereby reducing its influence—at least she hopes. (Mr. Watts responds by setting his class the task of remembering the book so that they might collectively put it back together.) She has also removed a crucial piece of evidence.

When soldiers turn up to the village and take down the names of everyone in it, the whereabouts of Pip is demanded. After all, they know he exists. His name is written in big letters down at the beach. A Kafkaesque situation results with the commander of the soldiers giving the villagers two weeks to produce Pip. The book that might explain the misunderstanding cannot be found, and the consequences are devastating.

**About the Writer**

*LLOYD JONES* was born in New Zealand in 1955. His novels and collections of stories include the award-winning *The Book of Fame, Biografi*, a *New York Times Notable Book*, *Choo Woo, Here at the End of the World We Learn to Dance*, *Mister Pip* and *Paint Your Wife*. Lloyd Jones lives in Wellington.

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International Writers Speak Out About Censorship:

Q&A with Two Award-Winning Authors

Elizabeth Subercaseaux

Elizabeth Subercaseaux was born in Chile, the great-great-granddaughter of the German composer Robert Schumann. She is the best-selling author of ten books. Her nonfiction includes Michelle, a biography of the first woman to be elected president in Chile, and the amusing feminist manifesto, The Ten Things a Chilean Woman Should Never Do. She lives in Pennsylvania.

Q: Please describe the state of governmental control and restriction in Chile under Pinochet.
A: During the Pinochet dictatorship some opposition news magazines were allowed to exist: for example, Análisis, Hoy and APSI, for which I worked. All of these were funded by foreign organizations but their texts were reviewed by a group of (anonymous) government censors and if they found an article, interview, editorial or chronicle deemed displeasing to the government the magazine was immediately shut down. Journalists of the opposition were constantly persecuted, threatened and even some of them, like José Carrasco, who worked for Análisis, were murdered. Newspapers like El Mercurio, La Nación, La Segunda, and Las Últimas Noticias, all controlled by the political right, did not inform the public but rather censored any news related to human rights abuses. Television—all of its channels—was not inform the public but rather censored any news related to human rights abuses. Television—all of its channels—was completely under the control of the military government.

Q: How were artists, writers and journalists treated, and to what degree were they considered to be a threat?
A: The great majority of Chilean writers of the period went into exile. Those of us who stayed behind had to send our texts, before publication, to the government where they were either subjected to the greatest of scrutiny by faceless censors or simply left forgotten in a drawer. Without even the courtesy of a reply. Of course, we could take the risk of publishing a book against the dictatorship, knowing that it could be requisitioned, burned or prohibited, as happened on so many occasions.

Another serious problem of the period was that there was practically no publishing house that would stand up for the writers of the opposition, with the exception of Galinost. It was the only one that dared to assume great risks in this regard. For this reason we published very little during those years and whatever Chilean literature did exist was produced, for the most part, in exile (e.g. Isabel Allende, Poli Delano, Ariel Dorfman etc.) Toward the final years of the dictatorship I wrote a novel entitled El general azul (The Blue General). Zig-Zag, a very important publishing house at the time, bought the rights to the book even before I had it written, but once they read the novel they refused to publish it. They considered it too negative regarding Pinochet, and so the novel remained in a drawer at Zig-Zag until they sold it to a publisher in Argentina where it was published three years later. For all intents and purposes this novel didn't exist in Chile.

Q: What are your personal experiences with censorship and persecution?
A: I was persecuted as a journalist more than as a literary writer. The regime’s henchmen even came to my home one Sunday night and beat me up because of a story I was preparing for APSI. Threats on the phone were a constant. They would call at two, three, four in the morning and leave terrifying messages. Instilling fear was the weapon of choice in dealing with journalists.

Q: Contrast your international experiences and worldview with your observations about censorship in North America. How does censorship manifest itself here?
A: Censorship of the press certainly does exist in the United States and it is due principally to the control exercised by corporate interests who finance the country’s means of communication, particularly in the case of the mass media. These are interests that have little or nothing to do with the public’s need to be well informed in a truthful and timely fashion.

Q: What advice would you give to tomorrow’s budding journalists and writers?
A: Only one: it’s not a question of what can be said or not said. Everything must be said. Let others censor you, let them fire you, but you, you must never censor yourself.

Other Press, HC, 978-1-590-51288-3, 224pp., $22.95

This extraordinary tale of love, death, deception, and resilience walks the line of suspense from page one to the unexpected, haunting ending that ponders the mysteries of a woman’s heart, where truth is a lie and a lie is truth.

Note: Contains mature subject matter

A WEEK IN OCTOBER
by Elizabeth Subercaseaux
Translated by Marina Harss

RHI: Censorship & Banned Books
Karen Connelly

Karen Connelly lived for almost two years on the Thai-Burma border, among Burmese exiles and dissidents, many whose stories on which The Lizard Cage draws. She won the Governor General’s Award for Nonfiction for Touch the Dragon, A Thai Journal, published in the United States as Dream of a Thousand Lives, a New York Times Notable Travel Book. The Lizard Cage is her first novel and was a finalist for the 2006 Kiriyama Prize for Fiction.

Q: Please describe the state of governmental control and restriction in Burma during the 1990s.

A: Complete censorship. No free large-scale public media. Small magazines and all books have to be approved by the Censorship Board. Certain names, songs, and books were and continue to be completely outlawed. Even painters and singers have to submit their works before they can show or sing them publicly. There was, and continues to be, very little access to the internet.

Q: How were artists, writers and journalists treated, and to what degree were they considered to be a threat?

A: Artists, writers and journalists were and continue to be routinely harassed, arrested and imprisoned without due process, sometimes tortured, occasionally executed in prison. Sometimes they’ve died of the results of torture or mistreatment or lack of medical attention. All of this because they had written or publicized material—or been involved in political meetings that the dictatorship didn’t approve of. Sometimes these writers were very young—in their teens or early twenties.

Even for those who remained free suffered an internalized censorship, and a lot of anxiety over what might happen to them or their families because of their work. Young artists and writers talk about how paralyzing it is to try to become an artist in Burma, because so much is off-limits, not allowed to be said, explored, drawn, painted. It’s very sad to talk to these talented, intelligent, and trapped people.

Q: What are your personal experiences with censorship and persecution?

A: The Lizard Cage is a novel about a young singer-songwriter who becomes famous during public protests against the military dictatorship. His protest songs become songs of the movement. He is eventually arrested and imprisoned—the novel is about his struggle to remain free even in the prison. It’s also about a young illiterate boy in the prison who is a child labourer; he and the young singer become friends.

In researching this book, I spent hours talking with Burmese people of all ages and backgrounds whose entire lives were censored because the military regime that rules Burma continues to deny its crimes. I learned that the most important thing a person has—the thing that belongs to them most deeply and gives them their true identity—is the story of their life. If you cannot tell the true story of your life, something is seriously wrong with your society, not with you.

Q: Contrast your international experiences and worldview with your observations about censorship in North America. How does censorship manifest itself here?

A: Well, a lot of people here cannot tell the true stories of their lives either. Or the truth of those stories is denied—people don’t want to hear it. The poor and marginalized are censored all the time, because they don’t have access to power. Or they don’t know how to use their power. Children are often censored, particularly in situations where they are being abused. If you learn censorship very young, it goes inside you and works on its own; there doesn’t need to be a bad government or a bad parent to enforce it.

More traditional censorship is still at work, too. Parents’ groups still call up school boards and say that Harry Potter is a frightening book about witches and The Golden Compass is anti-Roman Catholic. I read banned books. Books that have been banned in the past, and books that are banned today. We should all read banned books. There has to be something interesting in them if they’ve been banned.

Q: What advice would you give to tomorrow’s budding journalists and writers?

A: Read good books. Read good journalism. Go into the past. If what you want to write about is too difficult, or is driving you crazy, consider talking to a good counselor or therapist. (You won’t be the first.) Find a writing mentor. Go to workshops. Travel, even if it’s just around your own block, with open, honest, accepting eyes. Believe that it is possible. Follow your bliss. Follow your bliss. Remember your gift. Give thanks. Be generous. Be daring.
The oud is a lute-like instrument that, according to legend, was invented by the sixth grandson of Adam. Its music is part of the cultures of civilizations both ancient and modern (an oud player from Albuquerque has been nominated for a Grammy). On May 1, 2008, the New York Times reported that Iraqi musicians who play its fabled strings must do so in hiding or risk death—not to mention the destruction of their instruments—by Muslim fundamentalists. I mention this, rather than the burning of Harry Potter books by Christian fundamentalists last year in parts of the U.S., or the prohibition of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Catcher in the Rye, and The Grapes of Wrath by any number of American school systems, because the banning and burning of books is really not about suppressing books, but ideas. It is about trying to crush and control the creative spirit in whatever form it may manifest itself. Whether expressed in story, poem, or painting, in music or dance, it is artistic freedom that’s at issue.

My book The Writer’s Brush: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture by Writers tries to make the point that artistic disciplines are not sharply divided. Paintings tell stories—and as writer-artist-wood craftsman Patricia Highsmith pointed out, so do music and dance. Stories and poetry give us images, and words not only have shape—after all, letters were pictures first—but are musical in their rhymes and rhythms.

The subjects of the book are hundreds of great writers who are also artists—and who happen to be composers, musicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and other professionals, besides. They are very creative people who move from one form of expression to another. For example, poet Odysseus Elytis, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1979, studied law and worked in business. When Greece fell under a military dictatorship in 1967, and during the years of censorship that followed, Elytis began to express himself in images, creating collages like the one reproduced here.

D. H. Lawrence, whose Lady Chatterley’s Lover was famously banned, couldn’t escape the censor with his painting either. Thirteen of his works were seized by police from London’s Warren Gallery in 1929 and the books were dragged off to court to be tried as obscene, to be burned on conviction. Lawrence saved them by agreeing never to show them in England again. Now they’re in Taos, New Mexico, and a detail from one, reproduced in The Writer’s Brush, appears opposite.

Books have been banned and burned since there were books. (It was a very successful way to control ideas before there was a printing press.) For centuries,
only certain paintings depicting approved subjects were allowed. When music had to be composed under church rules, it could only be for voices since instruments weren’t allowed, and even certain chords were taboo: a four-voice chord that was a diminished seventh, for instance, was forbidden as satanic. Fourteenth-century England instituted bans on Irish piping and arrested pipers as a means of cultural suppression.

Dances are under seemingly constant censorship. Our contemporary thoughts run to the high school students in Footloose, but consider that the waltz was editorialized in the London Times in 1816 as “…an obscene display… only suitable for prostitutes and adulteresses.” For the first time, a man and woman danced as a couple and not as part of a group—the man with his arm around the woman. Irish step dancing, driven into secrecy by British penal laws, was then modified by church censors to require stiff arms. Priests saw arm movements as provocative and demonstrating insufficient restraint.

Recently, Salman Rushdie spoke at an International PEN celebration in New York. Mr. Rushdie’s award-winning novel The Satanic Verses was banned in India, burned in the UK, and inspired Iranian officials to issue a fatwa calling on the world’s Muslims to murder him. He has so far escaped execution, although his Italian and Japanese translators were both stabbed, the latter fatally. Mr. Rushdie, who I’m told is also an artist, informed the audience that there are thirty-nine Chinese writers imprisoned for expressing views the Chinese government doesn’t like, and PEN is trying to free them before the Olympic Games. Gao Xingjian, the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 2000), and another subject of The Writer’s Brush, served six years of hard labor during the Cultural Revolution in a reeducation camp where he was forced to destroy a suitcase full of his manuscripts to avoid recriminations.

For Teachers

Introduce your students to the ancient concept of ekphrasis by having them capture the essence of a work of art and re-present it, in their own way, in a different medium. They might, for example, render in pencil or paint the images in a poem or piece of prose, write out the text they discern in a painting, the story in a dance, or express the colors or shape of a piece of music in word or image. They will see how each discipline aspires to be another. The idea is to use one form of expression as a means of entering into a work of art that was created in a different form—as a way of deepening the experience and, not least, making it their own.
He turned to painting in ink on rice paper as a means of “. . . returning to the artist’s instinct; returning to feeling; returning to life. . . .” One of those paintings is reproduced right.

The problem with the way we often talk about censorship is the use of what is called the passive voice—that is, we speak as though books and paintings are burned, or music forbidden, without emphasizing that it is people who do it. Among the more notorious are Thomas Bowdler, a rich nobody who became a vocabulary word (bowdlerize: to prudishly censor) by editing Shakespeare into a version suitable for the whole family; and Anthony Comstock, a church-supported zealot who was appointed a special postal agent, given a gun, authorized to seize our mail and to arrest distributors as he saw fit, and whose record of burning 160 tons of books and nearly four million pictures still stands. Comstock’s original slogan was “morals, not art and literature,” although he expanded his reach to science, burning medical texts along with Shaw, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, and his federal anti-obscenity legislation (enacted in 1873 and still in effect today) barred physicians from dispensing birth control information to women in medical need until 1936, when the courts declared that part of the law unconstitutional.

In 1999, it took a federal judge to stop New York’s mayor Rudy Giuliani from illegally cutting off funding to the Brooklyn Museum of Art because he found a collage offensive. “There is no federal constitutional issue more grave than the effort by government officials to censor works of expression and to threaten the vitality of a major cultural institution as punishment for failing to abide by governmental demands for orthodoxy,” declared the court. In 2002, Honolulu banned a painting from a public exhibition since it showed a nude woman on a cross.

When writers and artists and musicians are imprisoned, or censored or suppressed, it is not just they who suffer from their lack of expression—it is all of us as well. We are deprived of their stories, poetry, music, and art. But it is good to remember Comstock and the lesson that freedom-suppressors are rarely satisfied with the arts, but want to stop scientific and medical inquiry as well. And suppression of ideas is often just the start: “Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings,” wrote the prescient German Jew Heinrich Heine in 1821. His books were burned along with tens of thousands of others by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s as they were preparing their death camp ovens.

The Writer’s Brush: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture by Writers
by Donald Friedman
In The Writer’s Brush, author Donald Friedman has gathered 400 paintings, drawings, and sculptures by more than 200 of the world’s most famous writers, including 13 Nobel laureates.

Whether viewing the beautiful landscapes that Hermann Hesse credited with saving his life, or the cancan dancers secretly drawn by Joseph Conrad, readers of The Writer’s Brush will gain new insights into the lives and minds of their favorite writers and the nature of the creative process itself.

Accompanying the artwork are fascinating biographies that provide little-known details of the writers’ lives in the visual arts, bringing together for the first time both worlds of these vastly talented individuals. The Writer’s Brush is also an essential reference work, with alphabetical and chronological listings of its subjects and an extensive bibliography, completing this definitive work of the writer-artist.

Mid-List Press, HC, 978-0-922-811-76-2, 480pp., $40.00
How do governmental and religious thugs gain their authority over us? All too often it’s because we give it to them. We yield control to people whose self-righteousness hides a boundless cruelty, an impulse to destroy that drives them into religions and governments that they hope will protect them from themselves (but too often fail). We do this out of fear. We are afraid of forces outside ourselves and of feelings within. Most of all, we are afraid to have to think things through for ourselves. We expect someone to tell us what literature is, what art is, and who’s entitled to make it.

But as the great art historian E. H. Gombrich opens with in The Story of Art: “There is no such thing as ‘Art.’ There are only artists.” Who are these artists—the painters and poets, dancers and storytellers, musicians and actors? Well, they could be you and me just as easily as Jack Kerouac, Patti Smith, Charlotte Brontë, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Conrad, Amiri Baraka, or any of the other 270 writers in The Writer’s Brush. To paraphrase poet-artist-photographer Allen Ginsberg (whose great poem “Howl” was suppressed until freed by a federal court): Art isn’t art really. Art begins by messing around.

Victor Hugo understood that. The author of Les Misérables and The Hunchback of Notre Dame would take his morning coffee grounds, dump them on a paper, throw in some fireplace ash, and draw in it with a matchstick. (See the Hugo work above.) Russia’s greatest novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the country’s most revered poet, Alexander Pushkin, drew all over their manuscripts. (See two pages from Dostoevsky’s Devils right.)

Everyone should make art, if only, as Kurt Vonnegut said, “because it’s been known to make a soul grow.” So tell a story, make up a song, glue some junk together. Play with paint, do your own dance (and be sure to move your arms), and doodle on everything. Have fun. And be careful who you put in charge.

About the Writer

DONALD FRIEDMAN is the author of the widely acclaimed The Writer’s Brush: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture by Writers, which the American Library Association’s Booklist in its starred review called “a grand feat of research and interpretation,” and the New York Times described as “a subversive jewel of an idea, sparkling audaciously on every page.” He had a successful career as a trial lawyer before publishing his award-winning first novel, The Hand Before the Eye.
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How would you define censorship?

TAIBBI: In my mind there are two forms of censorship—direct and indirect. Direct censorship would be a state organ actually stepping in and forbidding some kind of public speech on either political or ideological grounds (as opposed to forbidding someone to scream “Fire!” in a crowded theatre, for instance). We have very little experience with direct censorship in this country—although there are occasional instances, like the Pentagon Papers incident.

Indirect censorship I’d define as a private entity placing speech limitations on an employee or a client—restricting speech on its private property. And we have tons of that in the United States. We have companies that prohibit employees from speaking publicly about its indiscretions, forcing them to sign non-disclosure agreements and the like. More commonly, we have journalists and performers who are told they can’t say or report something because it conflicts with the interests of his or her publication’s owner or an advertiser.

SIEGEL: I define it as the obstruction of free expression. Not free abuse, free hate speech, free slander, or free libel. Free expression: for example, rational discourse—even if couched in the most outrageous idiom. Lenny Bruce represents free expression. Don Imus, in his notorious remarks a year or so ago, does not.

MANSBACH: I've had a few. When I was on tour for my novel *Angry Black White Boy*, a white supremacist group sent letters to every venue I

What are your personal experiences with censorship?

MANSBACH: I’ve had a few. When I was on tour for my novel *Angry Black White Boy*, a white supremacist group sent letters to every venue I

THE END OF THE JEWS: A Novel

A bold fictionalization of Jewish assimilation, this is one family’s story of fierce individuals.

Spiegel & Grau, HC, 978-0-385-52044-7, 320pp., $23.95

Paperback forthcoming March 2009
TAIBBI: I lived in Russia for ten years, between 1991 and 2002. I had my life threatened for writing about gangland figures (one often overlooked form of censorship) and was also the subject of community boycotts at the hands of American expatriates who thought my newspaper, the eXile, was too vulgar. Several Russian colleagues of mine were assassinated, including two I knew fairly well: Anna Politkovskaya and Yuri Schekochikhin. A Russian newspaper I wrote for, called Stringer, had its entire editorial staff fired (including myself) for offending a powerful Russian politician. In America I’ve had very few experiences with censorship.

SIEGEL: I had a similar experience of being suppressed by what you might call censorship from below. While writing a weekly TV column, and then a blog for the online version of the New Republic magazine, I was shouted down, abused and libeled, by an angry mob of commentators.

TAIBBI: I believe free speech should be absolute, and that the increasing encroachment of private property rights upon speech are a serious threat to democracy. There is a new legal concept called “dilution” which I perceive to be the most serious: it argues that writers may not “dilute” the value of a product by writing negatively about it or satirizing it. This idea is catching on in some lower court rulings and may soon become widely applied. (Come to think of it, I have had items taken out of one of my books by an American publisher for this reason.)

MANSBACH: Writers need to keep the public discourse vital, fresh, and as diverse as possible in terms of the views and topics discussed.

In my new novel, The End of the Jews, my character, Tristan Brodsky, is a novelist who finds himself ostracized by the Jewish community in the early ’50s after he writes a novel about the voyage of a Jewish-owned slave ship to America with a hold full of captured Africans. The critics are irate; they ask how he can write a novel so out of step with what the morality of the times demands. His response is that to understand evil in the world, we must first recognize it in ourselves. He’s trying to create a conversation folks aren’t willing to have, and it effectively ruins his career.

TAIBBI: Regarding the second part of the question, I don’t think writers have any particular responsibilities at all in a democracy—citizens do. Writers, I think, have a responsibility to write well. Normally that involves telling the truth on some level; be that artistic truth or literal truth. If that instinct is restricted, writers can’t function and they should protest and fight until that right is restored.

What do you see as both the emerging opportunities and the growing pitfalls for freedom of speech in a rapidly changing media-world?

TAIBBI: Obviously the internet will make free speech of the absolute variety almost impossible to restrict. But here’s the problem: because we now live in vast media landscapes, mass societies whose citizens can only be moved to change public opinion via prolonged, coordinated campaigns of major media outlets, it will become increasingly important to think about free speech in terms of volume and reach. In other words, free speech is somewhat meaningless if you’re only allowed to say what you want in obscure websites that only a few people read.

MANSBACH: Absolutely. The paradox of media proliferation and diversification is that speech becomes freer, but also potentially less meaningful. There are more outlets, more opportunities, and more self-reliance; but in the absence of hierarchy it becomes hard to know what to trust, how to distinguish reliable reportage from phony, or...
how to wade through the cacophony of voices. I think people are savvy enough to figure some of this out—which internet news sources are legitimate, whose blog is worth reading, what news station is a mouthpiece for what agenda—but it takes time, and the proliferation may be faster than the ability to sift.

SIEGEL: Agreed. In a world where popularity, the bottom line, and the “wisdom of the crowd” now shape the media—all these trends hastened by the internet—I fear for the lone, dissenting, individual voice. On the other hand, the internet can certainly be used to combat these oppressive trends. But internet users have to learn to ignore popularity, the bottom line and the “wisdom of the crowd.” They have to learn to think for themselves.

TAIBBI: The real trick is in seeing how restricted the speech is on major cable networks and major newspapers. Increasingly, those who have political power understand that they can safely permit almost any kind of speech, so long as it’s in obscure publications (or even in one-time articles in well-known publications). That is why the issue of corporate ownership of media outlets is so important; if only a few people control all the major media, they will control the national debate no matter how free the speech is on yourownwebsite.com.

MANSBACH: There used to be three networks that people watched for news, and they all took seriously the imperative to be fair and ethical—didn’t always succeed, but understood themselves in that context. Now, your personal ideology determines your news source. And it goes beyond media; you’ll shop at different supermarkets and see totally different products depending on your politics, your economic class, and so on. It’s a kind of de jour cultural segregation, and the enormous decrease in public space—much of it replaced by virtual public space, which is not the same—exacerbates the balkanization.

How can today’s teachers co-opt the energy and ubiquity of media in a non-fearful, useful, and educational manner?

TAIBBI: Good luck with that. I don’t know. Certainly the smartest way is to adopt the “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” attitude here—teachers should become experts on the technology of modern media and offer students the chance to get involved in creating the kind of media that they probably grew up only consuming. Teachers would do well to encourage kids to start web pages, submit film/video projects to Youtube and similar sites, do their own desktop publishing, and so on. The beauty of modern media is that anyone anywhere can become famous and influential overnight; teachers should embrace that situation and help young people develop and express their ideas for public consumption.

SIEGEL: The media will find its way to children and young people, or they will find their way to the media. Teachers should not feel that they have to train students to use the internet and so forth. What they should be doing is instilling a spirit of skepticism about the media in young people. They should subject the new media to the same scrutiny to which they subject everything else that they teach. And they should teach them the values of print culture—i.e. humanistic culture—so that when their students inevitably immerse themselves in the digitalized new world, they will be able to infuse it with values that will make it humanly worthwhile.

MANSBACH: I think the most important thing to teach young people is how to be active, rather than passive, consumers. Media literacy is a crucial skill, because young people are bombarded from all directions. If you can teach them to reflexively analyze whatever they’re presented with, however—to ask themselves what they’re being offered, what tactics are being used to make it attractive, what assumptions those tactics are based on, how effective they are, and so on—you can turn the overwhelming power of the media around. You can make confronting it an empowering thing; a way to understand the world.
Learning (and Unlearning) the Lessons of Katrina

Sifting Through Myths, Distortions and Suppressed Truths

by Jed Horne

Most of us who live down here have always known about wind and water and the terrible toll hurricanes can exact in a place like New Orleans. A lesson from Katrina that caught some of us by surprise was this: the flow of information—accurate information, warped and misleading information—can have consequences as critical as the flow of wind and water. It can injure and even kill.

Here’s something else we learned. Government efforts to suppress or spin the truth are only one form of censorship that follows a disaster like Katrina. There is self-censorship. And then there are the stereotypes—racial, ethnic, geographic, political—that merge with other impediments to warp clear thinking, at a time when clear thinking is so urgently needed. Stereotypes are a self-derived version of the spin-meistering we have gotten fairly good at spotting among double-talking politicos and government functionaries. Ironically, we seem to have a harder time purging it from our own thinking.

One of the central tasks I took on in writing *Breach of Faith* was to try to set the record straight, to sift truth from fiction and to understand why there was so much of the latter floating around on worldwide media following the storm. Some of it is out there to this day.

I am reminded of that as I visit schools and universities that have begun to embrace *Breach of Faith* as an all-purpose text for studying Katrina. It is a wonderful thing to see that teachers are unwilling to follow the lead of the federal government and pretend that Katrina is old news.

Katrina must not be relegated to what George Orwell, in *1984*, called the “memory hole,” the place where we file what we want to forget. The flooding that followed the hurricane is the worst disaster ever to have befallen an American city and New Orleans remains a deeply wounded place. Katrina in New Orleans—the Mississippi Coast had a different experience—was not a “natural disaster,” though in the storm’s aftermath the Army Corps badly tried to convince us, and itself, that it was. It was not a question of a hurricane being simply “too big” for the system of levees and other flood defenses that had been built to fight it. In fact, the levees fell apart before the storm had reached full strength and, even at full strength, Katrina was not as strong a storm as the levees were “engineered” to survive.
The catastrophe known as Katrina may have been triggered by a hurricane in a particularly vulnerable part of the country, but one of its central lessons is about the deep challenges we face in maintaining—or failing to maintain—the infrastructure all across America: not just levees, but also bridges, dams, roadways, public water systems—all of it. It can’t happen here? We don’t get hurricanes? Ask the good people of Minneapolis. They watched friends and neighbors die when a major bridge collapsed. Much more of that lies ahead without major reinvestment in America’s public assets.

Deep shame over the failure of the levee system it had designed explains the Army Corps’ initial instinct to pretend that the levees had been “overtopped.” Breach of Faith explores the eventually successful crusade by independent scientists and engineers to prove that the Corps was hiding its failure behind falsehoods. It’s a real-world detective story. One of the crusading scientists even went through the flooded areas retrieving stopped clocks so that he could recreate the path of destruction minute by minute, block by block.

Immediately after the hurricane, we were treated to another species of equally unhelpful rumor mongering: the claim—by the mayor and the police chief, no less—that New Orleans had become a scene of mass rape and murder. Sobbing on Oprah’s shoulder before a worldwide audience, the police chief spoke of an epidemic of “babies getting their throats cut.” Of course news media picked up on the hyperbole—badly undercutting public support for a city that, more than ever, was dependent on the kindness of strangers, to borrow a phrase from Tennessee Williams’ famous play about New Orleans, “A Streetcar Named Desire.”

Another piece of propaganda: To this day there are people in New Orleans, including educated people who should know better, convinced that the white elite blew up the levees on purpose to drive out poor blacks.

Drawing heavily on work by colleagues at the newspaper where I worked, Breach of Faith chased these rumors to their roots—some as old as the Mississippi River flood of 1927.

I came to think of this stuff—these lies and misinformation—as analogous to the debris—shingles, sign posts, cars and trees—that fly through the air as a hurricane passes by, harmful and gravely compounding the damage from wind and water.

A hurricane, my scientist friends explained to me, is a giant cyclone, a funnel of whirling wind much, much bigger than that other kind of whirling wind, the one we call a tornado. The cyclonic wind creates a vacuum that draws the ocean up into itself in a giant rolling dome. The really horrendous destruction of the type seen in coastal Mississippi happens as that system reaches land and the dome rises high in coastal shoals and then crosses the shoreline, destroying everything in its path: houses, trees, cars, marinas full of boats. The information-age analogue to that vacuum was the one created...
by the complete collapse of New Orleans communications infrastructure: phone lines, cell towers, broadcast antennas. If nature abhors a vacuum, so, it seems, does the human mind. The information vacuum drew up into itself not a dome of sea water but the demons and biases and bogeymen that lurk in the depths of our own subconscious.

Reporters who spent the 1990s in workshops sensitizing themselves and their media to racial and gender stereotyping, fell back into old habits with startling ease and portrayed impoverished, majority-black New Orleans as a city of animals. Based on misinformation—that storm victims were firing on emergency helicopters, for example—FEMA relief workers suspended their rescue work and bus drivers, en route to complete the city’s evacuation, held back. Delays of even a few hours assured that the death toll was going to be higher among the frail and the elderly.

The demonizing of Katrina’s victims also played into the initial—and continuing—reluctance by Congress and the Bush administration to commit wholeheartedly to the rebuilding of New Orleans. As explained in an epilogue to the paperback version of Breach of Faith, three years after Katrina, those attitudes still have a retarding effect on the recovery.

But even without the unstinting government help that was promised and then withheld, local residents and the tens of thousands of volunteers who have swept into the city have turned New Orleans into a laboratory for the reinvention not just of a beautiful old Southern city but of cities everywhere.

The public education system—a disaster long before Katrina—has been completely revamped thorough a controversial, but so far promising, reliance on charter schools. Political corruption has been attacked; structures of governance overhauled; health care rethought; housing codes revised; housing projects demolished—not without bitter, even momentarily violent, controversy.

The post-Katrina experience repays close study, both of what must be done and of the processes through which a city and a nation have informed themselves of the truth that underlies myths and distortions. As I travel from campus to campus, it is a source of special satisfaction to this school teacher’s son to discover that America’s educators are taking up that challenge. The challenge is also an opportunity. Katrina is a fascinating story, but the lessons extend far beyond the flood plain.
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When I was a kid, I loved what I learned about the Bill of Rights, especially the First Amendment. To be free to express yourself must be close to almost every child’s heart. Proud to live in a country that granted freedom of speech to all its citizens, I also loved the stirring story of the American Revolution. I liked to imagine myself as Paul Revere riding across New England, at great risk to life and limb, to warn my compatriots that the British were coming. I was fond of quoting Patrick Henry’s fiery words uttered at the end of a speech calling for revolution: “Give me liberty or give me death.” These were my earliest action heroes, models of courage and conviction that I wished to emulate.

The founders of American democracy were gigantic figures to me, larger than anyone, I believed, whom I had ever met or even hoped to meet. I thought I would have little opportunity in my own life to demonstrate the bravery in the cause for freedom that they displayed. As a child I was taught that, since the American Revolution had been fought and won, the right to free speech would belong to every citizen, including me, for all eternity.

Nevertheless, I found other ways to engage in democracy. As I write in my recent book, Wrestling with the Angel of Democracy: On Being an American Citizen, I was such an enthusiast for freedom of speech that I memorized Robert’s Rules of Order, the procedural manual for fair discussion that had, by that time, been used for over seven decades by self-governing bodies in America. I raised my hand to call out, “Point of Order!” so frequently that, though my teacher was initially impressed, she finally had to discourage me from the practice.

Still young in the middle of twentieth century, I was not aware that an intense battle over the right of free speech was being waged. Some of the battles were even occurring in Hollywood, not far from the heart of Los Angeles, where I lived. Later, I would even meet a few of the participants in this drama. Since my father and I loved to go to the movies together, I had seen films starring actors and actresses such as Stella Adler and Edward G. Robinson, and written by countless screenwriters who were being targeted by McCarthyism.

But my only knowledge of Senator McCarthy’s infamous hearings, and the ones held in Congress by the House Un-American Activities Committee, came from sitting occasionally with my grandfather as he watched these sessions on TV. He got red in the face and blustered as he told me his opinions, delivered as if they were indisputable truths, that Communists and whoever else had socialist ideas constituted a grave threat to our country. McCarthy and his cohort, he claimed, were just protecting us from the “red scourge.”

I neither believed nor disbelieved my grandfather. Nothing he said compelled me like the stories of the Revolution or the newsreels of World War II I had seen. Was it intuition, an almost animal sense of something off-kilter in his attitude? I’ll never know. Since his arguments did not appeal to me, I simply ignored the whole subject until, not many years later, I began to meet other students in my high school who were the children of actors, writers, artists, and even dancers who had been persecuted by McCarthyism. One of the parents I met had gone to jail for a few years until the Supreme Court overturned his conviction as unconstitutional. Others had lost work in the film industry or were forced to write under pseudonyms, sometimes at half the pay; singers like Pete Seegar; and many other performers, were blackballed from many theaters; writers including Dorothy Parker, Lillian Helman, author of The Little Foxes, or Dashiell Hammett, who wrote the Thin Man series of mysteries, were persecuted and hounded not only by HUAC, but also by the IRA.

I realized then that the struggle for free speech in
America was hardly over. Along with the brave men and women who had risked their careers for the right of free speech, I became aware of the atmosphere of fear and repression in which I had grown up. I knew that just before World War II, the Nazis had burned books they called subversive. Now, many hid the books they owned or discarded them for fear of being labeled as too liberal.

Not long after I became aware of this titanic struggle for freedom, I began to attend college at the University of California, Berkeley, which had already become the epicenter of resistance to politicians who wanted to dictate what books you could read, what you said, and even what you thought. The semester before I arrived, a group of students had staged a protest at San Francisco’s City Hall, whereHUAC was interrogating union leaders and others who had spoken out for a number of liberal causes. I joined a campus group these students had organized. We debated current events, ran candidates for student government, participated in marches for banning atomic weapons, and joined picket lines protesting racial segregation.

One night, a group of us went to see a propaganda film that was being shown on campus. With ominous music, and a warning tone, it was intended to raise the fear of communism, and in this way, defend the illegal witch-hunts that were being conducted against American citizens. From the audience we asked questions, shouted out comments, and posed a challenge to the misinformation and open lies the film was promoting. As the battle continued in many forms, I became part of it. By the time I graduated from college, the FBI had accumulated a thick file on me, listing all the protests in which I had participated. But the tide was turning. In 1964, another documentary film named after the debating strategy I so favored as a child, Point of Order, exposed McCarthyism as an assault on the First Amendment. And in the fall of that same year, students would organize a massive strike at UC, Berkeley, to protest limitations on free speech on campuses.

In 1992, along with Stephen Most and the director, Mark Kitchel, I wrote the script for an Academy Award-nominated film called Berkeley in the Sixties, which depicts that history. But the issue of free speech is not just a part of history. The battle is alive and well today. Recently, when I read from my book about democracy at a famous bookstore called Tattered Cover in Denver, I learned that the owner, Joyce Meskis, had resisted a court order to turn over customer purchase records as part of a drug investigation. The case went all the way to the Colorado Supreme Court before it was thrown out on the grounds that the Constitution protects, “an individual’s fundamental right to purchase books anonymously, free from governmental interference.”

As I write now, advocates of free speech struggle against the government’s attempts to read their mail and listen to the private conversations of Americans. As it has been argued many times before, those who would curtail our liberty say that these infringements are necessary for the sake of national security. This is a battle we have fought before, and will have to continue fighting if we are to choose freedom and protect the most valuable legacy we have inherited: democracy.

**About the Writer**

SUSAN GRIFFIN has won dozens of awards for her work as a feminist writer, poet, essayist, playwright, and filmmaker. She is the author of more than twenty books including A Chorus of Stones, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. She is the recipient of an Emmy, a MacArthur grant, and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is a frequent contributor to Ms. magazine, the New York Times Book Review, and numerous other publications. She lectures widely and is a frequent guest on national and local radio programs. She lives in Berkeley, California.
In this groundbreaking new research, Tufts University professor and researcher Richard Lerner refutes societal wisdom to reveal that teens are not inherently difficult or emotionally troubled. *The Good Teen*, based on a far-reaching study of teen behavior, proposes techniques to make adolescence easier on teens, parents, and educators. He presents the personality characteristics, called the 5 Cs, that are proven to fuel positive development: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring.

“This outstanding book, written by one of the nation’s leading authorities on adolescent development, is a critical read for all interested in youth. It merges scholarship with anecdote to produce a volume that is as informative as it is engaging. For any parent, youth worker, educator or health professional as well, *The Good Teen* provides valuable insights that debunk the myth that this is an age of storm and stress.”

—Robert Wm. Blum MD, MPH, PhD, William H. Gates Sr. Professor and Chair Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Assuming that all students learn the same way would be a mistake from which there is often no turning back. Trying to teach an audio learner with hands-on activities will not bring results. Instead of believing that some students “just aren’t smart,” the onus is incumbent upon educators to discover which students need special attention.

Author and Aspergian John Elder Robison is all too familiar with his own distinct learning requirements. In his article, he explains how he turned his experiences and struggles into a means by which to help others. By identifying those students who are neurologically different, educators can ensure they get fair treatment.

Linda Babcock knows the statistics. She knows the gender gap in salary. She also knows that men and women think differently—and that if we can teach our children at a young age to negotiate, we can instill a sense of equity in them.

These articles are as elucidating as they are pertinent.

**DISABILITY OR DIFFERENCE?**
One Aspergian Author’s Crusade to Change the Way We Think and Speak About Autism
by John Elder Robison ................................. 112

**ASK FOR IT:**
Teaching your Students—and Yourself—to Negotiate
by Linda Babcock ................................. 116
Early one million kids in school today have been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, or some other form of autism. What will happen to those kids when they grow up and emerge into the wider world? That’s the big question facing parents, educators, and mental health workers all over the country. It’s easy to panic and lose hope when we see our children struggling mightily with simple tasks.

I know all about struggling, because I was one of those kids. I grew up in the 1960s, before there was widespread understanding of autism in schools. When I struggled, I didn’t get help; I got discipline. I was tagged as lazy or uncooperative. Kids called me a retard, and responded to my differences by teasing or shunning me. Adults tried to understand me until their patience ran out. When that happened, they resorted to a doomed cycle of threats, demands, and discipline. It was an ugly situation.

No one knew why I acted as I did. People could see that I was smart, yet I couldn’t connect. I didn’t have any friends, and whenever it seemed I might make a friend, I said or did something totally bizarre.

Things are better today, but schools are still full of kids who don’t fit in. Name calling, teasing, and bullying remain facts of life—especially for kids with differences, who often seem to become the focal point of such torment. Yet it’s possible to rise above that behavior, as I’ve proven in my own life.

Conditions like autism and Asperger’s have traditionally been called disabilities, but with my focus on success, I prefer to call them neurological differences. Words can be powerful, and by changing the way we talk about autism, we begin thinking about it differently. Eventually, I hope, we will see autistic children differently, and by doing so—by seeing their gifts as well as their handicaps—we will expand their vision of what is possible.

Thanks to our expanded knowledge of autism, adults tend to be more patient and understanding today. But even now, expectations are low for kids with autism. Too often, conventional wisdom dismisses them by saying, “There’s no cure. You can’t expect too much. You have to be happy with little victories.” It troubles me to hear comments like these. The implication is that kids with autism aren’t any good, and they won’t get better. There’s no hope.

Worst of all, those remarks are often uttered by parents and teachers with good intentions. Yet their effect on kids is corrosive.

The fact is, these well-meaning adults are just plain wrong. Over the course of my life, I have gotten tremendously “better.” For me, “getting better” is a process that continues even today. And I know plenty of other Aspergians who feel the same way.

That is the reason I wrote, Look Me in the Eye. I...
wanted others to see autism as I experience it, not as a dark and profound disability. Although some people are profoundly impaired by their autism, most of us are more mildly affected. The majority of people on the autism spectrum do indeed grow up to lead good lives.

In my book, readers first meet me as a struggling child. At age four, my disability was obvious to everyone, and I originally expected readers to see me as a freak in those early chapters. But something interesting happened when people read my stories. Almost everyone, it seems, saw themselves in my words.

That realization provided a profound life lesson. I had always assumed that I was some kind of weirdo, that my very thought processes were alien to those of a normal person. The overwhelming response to Look Me in the Eye showed how wrong my thinking was.

As a person with mild autism, I sometimes act in ways that appear strange or unfathomable. But underneath, I now know that my thoughts and feelings are just like yours or anyone else’s. We all share the same humanity, however different we may look. Things that make you happy make me happy, and things that make you sad make me sad. However, autism may cause me to express my sadness or happiness in peculiar ways. Sometimes I don’t show any emotion at all, even though I feel it inside.

I developed unusual abilities as a teenager. I had an extraordinary aptitude for electronics and cars, and I found a love of music, though I was too clumsy to play an instrument. I now see how those abilities were enhanced by my Asperger’s.

My gifts didn’t help me much in school. In fact, they may have hurt because I wanted to study my special interests and ignore everything else. Eventually, I dropped out, left home, and began the process of finding my way.

When I left home, I joined a band, and within a few years my unusual talents had taken me to the top—designing special effects for KISS and others. After that, I took a job designing electronic games, and then I started a business repairing and restoring Land Rovers, Rolls Royces, and other exotic European cars. I did all that without any diagnosis of my condition. As an adult, I was still eccentric, but people appreciated my unique skills, which allowed me to become a success.

Look Me in the Eye also tells the story of how I got married, started a family, and, at the age of forty, finally...
learned that I had Asperger’s. The knowledge of why I am like I really set me free, and I describe how my life took off following that insight.

I believe the book has some strong messages that resonate with educators, parents, and young people. Students who read the book see how traits that may cause a kid to be ridiculed as a “geek” or “nerd” can, once he’s out of school, carry him to the top of the world. That was certainly the case for me. Thousands of young people share my dreams of being in a big band, designing games, and working with fine cars, and many have written to tell me that they were inspired by seeing how I triumphed over adversity.

Another important message of my book is that you should always set goals and never lose sight of them. Focus is one of the key traits that got me where I am today. (Among other things, my focus helped me avoid drugs and liquor even when they were all around me.) I also learned to take responsibility for my own life, and build upon my strengths rather than dwell on my weaknesses. Finally, I think my book vividly drives home the importance of understanding and accepting differences in people.

I hope that Look Me in the Eye will show readers what it’s actually like to live with a condition like Asperger’s, and by extension, what it’s like to live with other neurological differences (autism, ADD, ADHD, PDD, etc.) At the same time, the insights from my story may help people understand, live with, and work next to individuals with Asperger’s. With an incidence of one in one hundred fifty people in America with autism, this condition is everywhere (CDC, 2007). Nearly every teacher in the United States either works with or teaches people on the autism spectrum, often without knowing it.

**EXCITING NEWS ON THE PAPERBACK EDITION**

Seeing the response to the hardcover, I’ve made a number of changes to the paperback edition for younger readers, their parents, and the academic market:

- At the suggestion of several educators, I’ve cleaned up the language in some thirty passages, leaving the stories themselves unchanged. The hardcover version will remain as I originally wrote it, but the paperback is now free of profanity.
- I’ve written a postscript that talks about some of the things I’ve learned in the year since Look Me in the Eye was published, including my discovery that there is a distinct, “voice of autism,” which is apparent on the audio version of my book.
- The Reading and Resources section at the end of the book has been enhanced and expanded.
- Finally, the paperback contains a reader’s group guide and there are additional educational support materials on my website, including an extensive database of Asperger’s and autism support organizations.

I am supporting the paperback release with extensive additions to my website, www.johnrobison.com. In addition, I have a busy lecture schedule, speaking to schools and educational and health groups all over the country. I’m available to run programs with students alone, or students and faculty. I also do faculty-only talks and seminars, including speaking to boards of education and special needs societies. Finally, I speak to mental health and medical professionals about the messages in my stories, and our need to recognize, help, and appreciate all people with neurological differences.

I encourage you to read testimonials from past speaking engagements on my website, or the site of my lecture agent, www.thelavinagency.com.

You’ll find my current schedule, news, conversation, and the latest scoop on the sequel to Look Me in the Eye on my blog, jerobison.blogspot.com.

*School administrators can contact Lauren Verge, my lecture agent, at The Lavin Agency, 800-762-4234 or lverge@thelavinagency.com*
That being the case, you might ask, *Are there any other messages teachers should take away from this story?*

First, be aware that kids are not always what they seem. If you speak to a kid on the playground, and he does not seem to acknowledge you but just stares at the ground, don’t assume he’s just ignoring you or being defiant. He may have autism and be unable to connect with you like an average kid, even though he hears every word you say. Undiagnosed adults may also manifest this behavior. Such people often have reputations as rude or standoffish, when in fact they are just different.

I cannot overstress the importance of sensitivity in these situations. Kids’ psyches are fragile and easily damaged by what they see as harsh criticism of a behavior they don’t even understand. Be sensitive and gentle, and remember that children aren’t the only people you meet with autism. Diagnostic knowledge of autism spectrum conditions is fairly new, so the world is full of middle-aged people with mild autism who never got a diagnosis, or got a wrong diagnosis.

Second, be aware that, like any other neurological difference, there are both good and bad aspects to autism. It’s easy to lose sight of this, especially as a primary school teacher. At that age, almost all we see are the disability aspects of conditions like autism. As kids get older, those annoying fixations turn into wonderful career talents, and emotional blindness may be offset by brilliant logical thinking and creativity.

For example, some of the neurologists I know have speculated that as many as one-quarter of the students in engineering programs at Harvard and MIT may well have Asperger’s. And many of those kids were misfits and even seen as failures in grade school.

I urge you to keep this in mind, particularly around kids’ families. Parents hear so much negativity about autism and Asperger’s; try to give them a positive and encouraging message. I can assure you from my own life experience —it is not all bad. Far from it. My own neurological differences are what set me apart, made me unique, and took me on a remarkable life journey, leading me to where I am today.

After receiving his honorary high school diploma from the Monarch School in Houston, Robison proudly walks down the aisle with two Monarch students.

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**About the Author**

**JOHN ELDER ROBISON** grew up in an era when Asperger’s was not diagnosed in children, and no one had answers about his often inexplicable behavior. Having dropped out of high school, he went on to design special effects guitars for the band KISS in the late 1970s, and then worked as an engineer with a major toy and game company for a decade. For the past fifteen years he has run an independent automobile repair business, J E Robison Service, specializing in Mercedes, BMW, Jaguar, Land Rover, Rolls Royce, and Bentley motorcar work. His company is known nationwide for its restoration and customization work, and he proudly identifies himself as a "machine aficionado." He and his wife live next door to his brother, Augusten Burroughs, in Amherst, Massachusetts.
Ask for It
Teaching your Students—and Yourself—to Negotiate

By Linda Babcock

When my daughter was five and finishing kindergarten, we visited a “summer opportunities fair.” While I browsed through the booths for local day camps, she ran straight to the display for a sleepover riding camp for girls. Very excited, she begged me to let her go away for two weeks to ride horses. “Absolutely not!” I said. My daughter is a strong-willed child—very like her mother—and I expected her to put up a fight. Instead, she surprised me. Rather than crying or trying to argue, she said, “I think I know what your concerns are. You think I can’t handle it, don’t you?”

“You’re only five,” I said. I told her I was worried that she’d get homesick. She didn’t know how to bathe herself. She was just too young to go away by herself for that long.

She said she understood my fears and asked what it would take to convince me that she could do it. Together we devised a series of tests, such as sleepovers at the houses of girls she didn’t know well and washing her own hair. She passed them all with flying colors, sailed off happily to sleepover camp for a week (we compromised on the length of time she would go), and had such a good time that she didn’t want to leave. When she did come home, it was clear the bathing issue had been a real one—she smelled like a horse. Otherwise, the camp negotiation was a complete success.

This got me thinking about the potential benefits of negotiation training for children. I’ve been teaching negotiation to college students and professionals for almost twenty years, and I’ve written (with Sara Laschever) two books specifically aimed at teaching negotiation skills to women. The first, Women Don’t Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change, showed that women are far less likely than men to negotiate for the things they need. This disparity helps maintain the wage gap between men and women and keeps the glass ceiling firmly in place. Our new book, Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want, presents a four-stage program to help women overcome this block, become comfortable and adept negotiators, and learn to use negotiation strategically and effectively—at work and at home.

Convinced that learning to negotiate was probably like learning a language—the earlier you start the better—I founded a nonprofit organization called PROGRESS, with the goal of teaching young girls to negotiate. The members of my PROGRESS staff—researchers, educators, and social workers—have developed numerous curriculum products, including practice exercises, a computer game that teaches children to negotiate, and role-playing scenarios. One role-playing exercise (appropriate for elementary school children) centers on a conflict about which game to play at recess. The students break into groups, and the members of each group receive separate instructions about how to try to reach an agreement. The members of one group are advised to use
lose/lose tactics (everyone staunchly defends his or her own position—and no one walks away happy), another group receives instructions that will produce a win/lose outcome (some give way while others don’t), and a third group is taught how to take a win/win approach, which enables them to work together to find a solution that makes everybody happy. This exercise allows teachers and students to discuss the advantages of using negotiation to uncover options that work well for everyone. Like the role-play scenarios we’ve developed for every age group, the object is to help kids look for alternative ways of resolving conflicts and peer relationship problems. Although the materials were created with girls in mind, most of them turn out to work well for both boys and girls.

While using these materials and studying their impact, we noticed that developing good negotiation skills doesn’t just benefit kids. It can also be a huge boon for people who work with kids because it reduces conflict and promotes cooperation. You may think that children negotiate a lot, especially if you’re also a parent, but children typically negotiate in an argumentative and competitive way that prevents real problem solving. The PROGRESS training helps them learn how to take a more constructive approach.

Ayana Ledford, the director of PROGRESS, works with student groups every day, and she hears many stories about how negotiation training helps kids. A middle-school student told Ayana that a teacher had given her detention because she’d skipped class and failed to turn in an assignment. When this had happened before, the student had yelled at her teacher and stormed out of class. This time she decided to ask the teacher how she could avoid going to detention. The teacher talked to her about the importance of coming to class, helped her think about ways to complete her schoolwork on time, and agreed to cancel the detention and give her a chance to catch up. The student felt proud of the way she handled the situation and told Ayana she was going to try hard not to fall behind in the future.

Another girl, after joining one of Ayana’s groups, reported that she’d solved a problem that had dogged her throughout high school. She’d always loathed gym class, she said. She hated changing in front of the other girls, especially for swimming, and so she routinely skipped gym. Then she learned that her school wanted her to repeat gym class over the summer. She needed to work during the summer and planned to skip the class again until she discovered that this could prevent her from graduating. Instead, she decided to ask her gym instructor if there were any other way for her to make up the credit. Her gym teacher agreed to let her write a report on health and nutrition and present it to the class. Problem solved.

The PROGRESS training materials, including an instruction manual for teachers, are available for use or free download on our site (www.heinz.cmu.edu/progress). There’s also another great way for teachers to impart good negotiating skills to their students, and that’s by the time-tested way of modeling them yourself—demonstrating the power of a good negotiator in action. Getting permission to use school space for an impromptu performance, finding funds to pay for special teaching materials, making sure a talented student gets the support she needs, or arguing for the value of an unscheduled field trip—every day probably presents you with situations that involve negotiating. By learning to be an adroit negotiator, you can show your students the
benefits of making negotiation part of their social toolkit, a skill they can regularly employ to make good things happen, improve difficult situations, and push events in the direction they want them to go.

Learning to be a better negotiator at school, and on behalf of your students, can produce huge benefits for you personally as well. Suppose that you’re starting out as a teacher and receive a job offer for $40,000. Instead of accepting it, you negotiate and get the offer raised to $44,000—in essence earning yourself a “negotiation bonus” of $4000. If you receive 3 percent raises every year until you’re 65, that annual “negotiation bonus” will grow to $14,258 by the year you retire because your 3 percent increase each year will be calculated on a higher base salary. If you save your “negotiation bonus” every year in a savings account earning 3 percent annually, by the time you reach 65 that savings account will contain $627,354—a nice addition to your retirement nest egg.

Not all teachers can negotiate their salaries, however, because they belong to unions that do it for them. Still, if you change jobs and school districts, you may need to negotiate the experience “step” on which you’re placed at your new school—your years of service may not automatically transfer to a new district. Outside the workplace, you may want to negotiate for a lower interest rate on your home equity loan, negotiate a good price with contractors who work on your house, or negotiate with your spouse, partner, or housemates over how to split up household chores. An article in the New York Times recently reported that major retail chains such as Best Buy, The Home Depot, and Circuit City are quietly encouraging their sales forces to negotiate with customers who try to bargain for their products. The opportunities to benefit from effective negotiation skills are practically limitless. They can improve your life, make you a better teacher, and provide your students with a skill that will serve them well long after they’ve left your classroom.

About the Writer

LINDA BABCOCK is the coauthor, with Sara Laschever, of Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want and Women Don’t Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change. Author Website: http://www.womendontask.com/

Books By Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever

Women Don’t Ask
The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change
“...a highly readable, thoroughly researched and important book. Women Don’t Ask should be read by anyone with a fear of negotiating, male or female, and by managers who want a better understanding of how 47 percent of the work force confronts the workplace. The book (also) has a more revolutionary goal: to change the social context in which bargaining takes place, so the world becomes accepting of women who ask.”
Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38387-4, 272pp., $14.00

Ask For It
How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want.
Drawing from the stories of real women, the authors present an innovative approach to negotiation that explains how women can identify important goals, takes them step by step through the entire planning and preparation process, and offers strategic advice on the negotiation stage, with tips on managing emotions, confidence-building techniques, and the implementation of an effective collaborative style.
Bantam, HC, 978-0-553-38375-1, 336pp., $25.00
In the following section, you’ll find sneak-peek excerpts from some extraordinary books that you may wish to consider for your use in your classroom! Find something you like? You can browse our website (http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/) for even more advance looks at books; we’ve posted previews of most of our books to the web, along with awards that our authors have won. Enjoy!

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It was raining all night hard and heavy, making the land shiver—all the bare ocotillo and all the prickly pear. In the morning we found a tall yucca collapsed in the front yard. Everything is wet and gray so the day has not made itself known yet. It is something in between. As usual, I’m anxious. Behind the fog are los Franklins. Behind those mountains is my brother. Waiting. On this side we’re waiting, too, my fifteen-year-old nephew, Gabo, and his dog, la Winnie.

Winnie has one eye now. She got it stuck by a staghorn cactus that pulled it right out. Blood everywhere that day. By the time Gabo got home from his after-school bagger’s job at el Shur Sav, I was back from the vet’s with Winnie, rocking her like a baby. You couldn’t blame the dog for being upset, losing her eye and all.

I kept Gabo this time around because I want him to finish high school. I don’t care what the authorities say about his legal status. We’ll work it out, I say to Gabo, who, when he was barely walking I changed his diapers, which I also tell him. He’s still embarrassed to be seen in his boxers. That’s okay. I’m embarrassed to be seen in mine, too. Thirty years of being widowed, you better believe I dress for comfort.

“Stop all this mourning,” my mamá used to say. “You were only married six months. The guy was a drug addict, por Dios!” She actually would say that and repeat it even though Junior died fighting for his country. That’s why we got married. He was being shipped off to Vietnam. If the coroner suggested he had needle tracks, well, I don’t know about that.

Mamá always had a way of turning things around for me, to see them in the worst light possible. It’s probably not a nice thing to say you don’t go they will consider you to be a deserter. When they catch up with you—which they will if you are still in the country . . .” He made a deft flicking sign by his right ear to indicate its removal—the standard punishment for anyone who went awol. “I’ve seen people selling these ears on the black market so that deserters can have them sewn back on. Trust me, they are not a pretty sight.”

Excerpted from Escape from Saddam by Lewis Alsamari Copyright © 2007 by Lewis Alsamari. Excerpted by permission of Crown, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.

Chapter 1: THE INTERROGATION
Baghdad. Nine months earlier

Baghdad military training center lay by a main road on the outskirts of the city. It was large and utilitarian, and I felt dwarfed by it as I approached the main entrance. The sun was burning, and the cars in the busy street had all their windows wound down, their drivers crumpled and oppressed by the midday heat. I wiped a trickle of sweat from my own forehead and looked around up at the high walls of the building: a huge picture of Saddam Hussein returned my gaze. It was a familiar sight, one that had been commonplace in my life for as long as I could remember. The gates of Al-Zahawi primary school, which I had attended as a child, were colorful, painted with a huge yellow bumble bee to welcome the children; but on the walls on either side of the bumble bee were paintings of Saddam. His Excellency smiled down benevolently upon us, and around his head flew birds painted in the colors of the national flag. Inside the walls, high up, were more pictures of Saddam, and the slogans of the Ba’ath party were written large—“One Arab nation with an everlasting message,” “Unity, Freedom, and Communism”—as well as one of Saddam’s favorite sayings: “Always look your enemy in the eye.”

Today, however, the images seemed more imposing and threatening than ever—the very embodiment of everything from which I had been trying to break free.

“I don’t want to be in the army,” I had told my Uncle Saad petulantly when it had become apparent that there was no other option open to me.

“You haven’t got any choice. You’ve been called up, and if you

Excerpted from The Guardians: A Novel by Ana Castillo Copyright © 2007 by Ana Castillo. Excerpted by permission of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.
As deafening explosions made the earth vibrate beneath me and hysterical voices penetrated the walls of the hut, I realized what was happening.

My village was being shelled.

I heard more gunshots and more crying. I knew nobody in the village had a gun, so each report of the automatic rifles could only mean more death for those I loved. I recall having two thoughts. First, I convinced myself that the women in the village had been right: It really was the death for those I loved. I remember having two thoughts. First, I convinced myself that the women in the village had been right: It really was the end of the world. Second, I wondered what had happened to my mother and my siblings.

After two hours, the sounds of attack faded. I took stock of my situation. I had just turned 13. I was naked. I carried no food or water. My village had been destroyed. I had become separated from my mother and siblings. Armed men who spoke a foreign tongue combed the forests and grasslands, and if they found me, they most likely would kill me.

In the 19 years since that August night, as one of the “lost boys” of Sudan, I have witnessed my share of death and despair. I have seen the hyenas come at dusk to feed on the bodies of my friends. I have been so hungry and thirsty in the dusty plains of Africa that I consumed things I would rather forget. I have crossed a crocodile-infested river while being shelled and shot at. I have walked until I thought I could walk no more. I have wondered, more times than I can count, if my friends or I would live to see a new day. Those were the times I thought God had grown tired of us.

In some ways, my story is like those of tens of thousands of boys who lost their homes, their families, and in many cases their lives in a civil war between north and south that raged in Sudan from 1983 to 2005. In some ways, I represent the nearly 4,000 Sudanese refugees who found haven in the United States. But in other ways, my story is my own. I have a job, an apartment, a new family, and a wonderful new country to call home. I am studying public policy and world affairs at university, and I plan to use my education to make life better in Africa and in America. I know I have been blessed and that I have been kept alive for a purpose.

They call me a lost boy, but let me assure you, God has found me.

Chapter One

In the summer dusk, the encampment of the Mongols stretched for miles in every direction, the great gathering still dwarfed by the plain in the shadow of the black mountain. Ger tents speckled the landscape as far as the eye could see, and around them thousands of cooking fires lit the ground. Beyond those, herds of ponies, goats, sheep, and yaks stripped the ground of grass in their constant hunger. Each dawn saw them driven away to the river and good grazing before returning to the gers. Though Genghis guaranteed the peace, tension and suspicion grew each day. None there had seen such a host before, and it was easy to feel hemmed in by the numbers. Insults imaginary and real were exchanged as all felt the pressure of living too close to warriors they did not know. In the evenings, there were many fights between the young men, despite the prohibition. Each dawn found one or two bodies of those who had tried to settle an old score or grudge. The tribes muttered among themselves while they waited to hear why they had been brought so far from their own lands.

In the center of the army of tents and carts stood the ger of Genghis himself, unlike anything seen before on the plains. Half as high again as the others, it was twice the width and built of stronger materials than the wicker lattice of the gers around it. The construction had proved too heavy to dismantle easily and was mounted on a wheeled cart drawn by eight oxen. As the night came, many hundreds of warriors directed their feet toward it, just to confirm what they had heard and marvel.

Inside, the great ger was lit with mutton-oil lamps, casting a warm light over the inhabitants and making the air thick. The walls were hung with silk war banners, but Genghis disdained any show of wealth and sat on a rough wooden bench. His brothers lay sprawled on piled horse blankets and saddles, drinking and chatting idly.

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GOD GREW TIRED OF US: A Memoir

by John Bul Dau

John Bul Dau, one of the uprooted youngsters known as the Lost Boys of Sudan, has written a powerful memoir of his Dinka childhood that shows African life and values at their best, while his searing account of hardship, famine, and war also testifies to human resilience and kindness.

National Geographic, TR, 978-1-4262-0212-4, 304pp., $14.95
Reading Level: 9th Grade

GENGHIS: LORDS OF THE BOW

by Conn Iggulden

The fascinating sequel to Genghis: Birth of an Empire continues the story of the powerful leader as he embarks on a bold new quest to conquer the mighty Chin empire, leaving a trail of devastation behind as he makes his way to Yenking, capital of the empire, and prepares to lay siege to the city and starve it into submission.

Delacorte Press, HC, 978-0-385-33952-0, 400pp., $25.00
Paperback forthcoming February 2009
Reading Level: 8th Grade

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Chapter 1

Six years after the fact, Dr. Paul Edward Farmer reminded me, “We met because of a beheading, of all things.” It was two weeks before Christmas 1994, in a market town in the central plateau of Haiti, a patch of paved road called Mirebalais. Near the center of town there was a Haitian army outpost—a concrete wall enclosing a weedy parade field, a jail, and a mustard-colored barracks. I was sitting with an American Special Forces captain, named Jon Carroll, on the building’s second-story balcony. Evening was coming on, the town’s best hour, when the air changed from hot to balmy and the music from the radios in the rum shops and the horns of the tap-taps passing through town grew loud and bright and the general filth and poverty began to be obscured, the open sewers and the ragged clothing and the looks on the faces of malnourished children and the extended hands of elderly beggars plaintively saying, “Grangou,” which means “hungry” in Creole.

I was in Haiti to report on American soldiers. Twenty thousand of them had been sent to reinstate the country’s democratically elected government, and to strip away power from the military junta that had deposed it and ruled with great cruelty for three years. Captain Carroll had only eight men, and they were temporarily in charge of keeping the peace among 150,000 Haitians, spread across about one thousand square miles of rural Haiti. A seemingly impossible job, and yet, out here in the central plateau, political violence had all but ended. In the past month, there had been only one murder. Then again, it had been spectacularly grisly. A few weeks back, Captain Carroll’s men had fished the headless corpse of the assistant mayor of Mirebalais out of the Artibonite River. He was one of the elected officials being restored to power. Suspicion for his murder had fallen on one of the junta’s local functionaries, a rural sheriff named Nerva Juste, a frightening figure to most people in the region. Captain Carroll and his men had brought Juste in for questioning, but they hadn’t found any physical evidence or witnesses. So they had released him.

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Chapter One

One day scientists found something strange out in space. This thing was pulling millions of galaxies towards it, one of them is the Milky Way which is ours, but the scientists couldn’t see the thing because it was hidden behind lots of dust. They thought “this thing must be huge to pull all these galaxies towards it, and we are getting pulled towards it really fast, it is at millions of miles per hour, but it could be anything, nobody knows, it is a mystery.” They thought “this is strange, this is scary” and then they said “I know, let’s call the thing the Great Attractor.”

The Great Attractor is pulling us right now. I think it is probably a huge black hole, because black holes eat everything, they even eat light so you can’t ever see them, they look just like a piece of really dark night. One day I bet there will be a big disaster, we will go nearer and nearer and then suddenly we will get pulled right in. It will be like a big hand gets us so we will vanish, because nothing can get out of a black hole you see, we will be stuck there for ever. It is strange to think that every day, every minute we are all being pulled towards the Great Attractor but hardly anybody knows. People go about their ordinary every day lives, they have toast for breakfast and go to school, they watch their favorite programs on the telly and they never even guess.

Excerpted from When We Were Romans by Matthew Kneale Copyright © 2008 by Matthew Kneale. Excerpted by permission of Nan A. Talese, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.
Prologue: Ancestors

My family came from the Red River Delta, an alluvial plain of raven earth and limitless water. It was an exceptionally fertile country, though not a youthful land with treasures to be plundered. What riches it had, it yielded solely to sweat and toil. It had known centuries of peasant hands.

Generations beyond recall, my ancestors had tilled this soil where fortunes were made and reversed by countless successions of insurrections, raids, and wars. The rise of our clan began with a great-great-grandfather Hao Pham, a noted officer in King Nguyen Anh’s army. For his battlefield victories against rebellious warlords, he was awarded a vast tract of land after the king’s unification of Viet Nam in 1802. As was customary in the feudal order for the richest man in the area, he won the privilege of lord proctorship over all the villages within a day’s ride by horseback of his home. He assumed the post, raised a big family with three wives, and lived out his days in comfort. When he retired, his eldest son succeeded him, acquiring the same commission. Later, in the French colonial period, when the clan’s property had grown even larger, his grandson became domain magistrate. So it went from generation to generation, both land and titles passed as birthrights. From fathers to the firstborn sons. By the time of my grandfather and father, ours grew to be one of the two richest clans in the province, our holdings spreading out to the horizon.

Still, it was a realm of rice paddies, mud houses, and shoeless peasants. It was a world before the arrival of electricity, banks, and refrigeration. . . . In the material sense, it was a simpler world. There was little, and yet everything, to be desired. Though perhaps as flatlanders we lacked imagination. Folks prayed for good health, good weather, and good crops. And that strange year, the last of the good years, all things were granted. Heaven laid the seal of prosperity upon our land. We were blessed with the most bountiful harvest in memory.

Chapter 1

The women arrive at the salon just before eight in the morning. If it were any other day, I’d still be in bed, trying to sink into a few more minutes of sleep. I’d probably still be cursing the neighbor’s rooster for waking me up again at dawn. I might even still be groaning about the vegetable dealers who come down the street at three in the morning with their noisy, horse-drawn wagons, or the neighborhood mullah, who warbles out his long, mournful call to prayer at four-thirty. But this is the day of Roshanna’s engagement party, so I’m dressed and ready for war. That summer, Uncle Thuan, the head of our clan, confessed to his third wife that he believed the wind of fortune was shifting.

That summer, Uncle Thuan, the head of our clan, confessed to his third wife that he believed the wind of fortune was shifting.

Kabul Beauty School

An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil by Deborah Rodriguez

Soon after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Deborah Rodriguez, a hairdresser and mother of two from Michigan, went to Afghanistan as part of a group offering humanitarian aid to this war-torn nation. In this compelling book, she shows readers the creation of the Kabul Beauty School and introduces them to an extraordinary community of women trying to change the world.

Random House, TR, 978-0-8129-7673-1, 320pp., $14.95

Reading Level: 10th Grade

Eaves of Heaven

A Life in Three Wars by Andrew X. Pham

From Andrew X. Pham, author of Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam, winner of the 1999 Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize, a son’s memoir of his Vietnamese father’s experiences over the course of three wars.

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Harmony, HC, 978-0-307-38120-0, 320pp., $24.95

Reading Level: 9th Grade

THE EAVES OF HEAVEN: A Life in Three Wars

by Andrew X. Pham

THE KABUL BEAUTY SCHOOL

An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil by Deborah Rodriguez

Oxford University Press, New York
THE DESERT RAT: The Libyan Desert May 27, 1942

They huddled in the chill, encased in hard steel, waiting, energized by rumors. Behind them, to the east, the black horizon was visible, silhouetted by the first glow of sunrise. The wireless radio was chattering, the voices of nervous officers far behind the line, the men in tents, who pored over maps, unsure, powerless to do anything about an enemy who might be anywhere at all.

They had climbed into the tank at the first sign of daylight, each of the four men finding his place, their commander perched higher than the rest, settling into his seat just beneath the hatch of the turret. It was still too dark in the west, and the narrow view through the prism of the periscope was too confining, and so he stood, his head and shoulders outside the hatch. The long, thin barrel of the two-pound cannon was just below him, pointing westward, where the enemy was thought to be. He stared until his eyes watered, tried to see the horizon. But it would not be there, not yet, not until the sun had given them enough light to distinguish dull, flat ground from the empty sky.

The air was sharp and cold, but that would not last. Once the sun rose, the heat would come again, and the infantry, a mass of men waiting far behind their armor wall, would seek whatever shelter they had, waking the insects and the scorpions and the snakes. The tank was as good a shelter as a man had in the desert, but there was a price for waking the insects and the scorpions and the snakes. The tank was an enemy who might be anywhere at all.

After a few moments, he was aware that the wagon had come to a halt just as he had pitched away from it, and that it was standing level now, no longer at an angle from the trail. On his right the sheer side of a rock thrust upward; to his left, above the wagon, no more than thirty feet away, was another very like it. He tried to get to his feet, but he slipped to his knees and remained there for a moment more. Still on his hands and knees he saw Charley Hoge sitting erect on the wagon seat, looking out before him, not moving; Miller and Schneider were hanging on the wheels they had pushed; they, too, were looking before them, and they were silent. Andrews crawled a few feet forward, and pushed himself upright; he wiped his bloody hands on his shirt.

Miller turned to him. “There it is,” he said quietly. “Take a look.”

Andrews walked up to him and stood looking where he pointed. For perhaps three hundred yards, the trail cut down between the pines; but at that point, abruptly, the land leveled. A long narrow valley, flat as the top of a table, wound among the mountains. Lush grass grew on the bed of the valley, and waved gently in the breeze as far as the eye could see. A quietness seemed to rise from the valley; it was the quietness, the stillness, the absolute calm of a land where no human foot had touched. Andrews found that despite his exhaustion he was holding his breath; he expelled the air from his lungs as gently as he could, so as not to disturb the silence.

Miller tensed, and touched Andrew’s arm. “Look!” He pointed to the southwest.

A blackness moved on the valley, below the dark pines that grew on the opposite mountain. Andrews strained his eyes; at the edges of the patch, there was a slight ripple; and then the patch itself throbbed like a great body of water moved by obscure currents. The patch, though it appeared small at this distance, was, Andrews guessed, more than a mile in length and nearly a half a mile in width.

“Buffalo,” Miller whispered.

“My God!” Andrews said. “How many are there?”

“Two, three thousand maybe. And maybe more. This valley winds in and out of these hills; we can just see a little part of it from here. No telling what you’ll find on farther.”

Butcher’s Crossing by John Williams

“Harsh and relentless yet muted in tone, Butcher’s Crossing paved the way for Cormac McCarthy. It was perhaps the first and best revisionist western.” — The New York Times Book Review

NYRB Classics, TR, 978-1-59017-198-1, 256pp., $14.95

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I teach eighth grade in a district surrounded by several poorer districts. My students face challenges such as gangs, violence, and poverty. And the book they connect to the most is also the first one I think of when people mention the phrase “banned books”: *The Outsiders*. It’s a wonderful book centered around an Oklahoma gang of teens who become embroiled in a gang war with the rival rich kids. It’s a violent book, but it’s also filled with real heart. The characters love each other and—most importantly—when violence happens, the reader sees the consequences.

This year, my students asked if they could read my novel. Before answering I hesitated. Would these thirteen and fourteen year olds understand that I wanted to make a point with my crime fiction? Would they realize that the violence I’m talking about comes with a fallout as well? My final answer was “Ask your parents.” If the parents supported the kids reading my novel, fine. But I didn’t want to risk my job over letting my students read my book. After all, I wouldn’t be able to guide the kids through the reading. They’d have to handle the dark parts on their own.

The feedback I received was incredible. Not one student complained about the book being too violent. Nor did any parents. In fact, nothing seemed to be taken the wrong way. But around the time the kids started to talk about my book, we had just about finished *The Outsiders*, and I think that talking about the darkness in Hinton’s novel helped the students deal with the darkness in mine.

If we ban books because of violence, we leave students with no way of interpreting the violence they see around them. In attempting to protect them from violence in literature, all we succeed in doing is letting them be exposed to it without understanding.
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