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 L533: Library Materials for Children and Young Adults
 Fall, 2002

References for Censorship Debate Notes for Team Preparation

- Adams, Lauren. Rev. of *Go Ask Alice*, by Beatrice Sparks. *Horn Book Magazine* Sep/Oct 1998: 587-592. (Vol. 74 Issue 5—sorry, format confused). Retrieved from EBSCOhost on Oct. 28, 2002, their item #1026548.
Adams recalls her own intense reaction to Go Ask Alice at age 12, and its phenomenal success when originally published, but now considers the book a fraud (written by Sparks). Kids today have more exposure to issues surrounding drug abuse, and better material is available for them than this book.
- Banta, Lynn. “*Go Ask Alice* (Anonymous).” *Connecticut English Journal* 15.1 (1983): 482-85. Special issue: *Rationales for Commonly Challenged Taught Books*.
Written to support teachers using challenged books in classrooms. Provides helpful analysis of the book and its use in the curriculum. We may be able to mine these articles for reasons to object to our books.
- Becker, Beverley C., and Susan M. Stan. *Hit List for Children 2: Frequently Challenged Books*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002.
Roald Dahls’ The Witches is discussed on pp. 14-16. Includes summaries of 9 challenges (none successful); references to 6 reviews; 5 background articles; awards and general references; and a note of its inclusion in Gillespie’s 1998 Best Books for Children: Preschool through Grade Six (6th ed.). Grounds for challenges: conflict with religious/moral beliefs; objections that children’s misbehavior is never addressed; on a list of books considered satanic; desensitization to witchcraft; depicting witches as ordinary-looking women; potential to entice into the occult; violence, use of the word “slut”, the subject of witches, and the fact that the boy remains a mouse.
- Bosmajian, Hamida. “Tricks of the Text and Acts of Reading by Censors and Adolescents.” *Children’s Literature in Education* 18, no. 2 (summer 1987): 89-96.
Uses The Catcher in the Rye, A Hero Ain’t Nothin But a Sandwich, and Go Ask Alice to discuss issues of reading style (reader-dominated, text-dominated, reactive, and mutually interactive). Concludes that each of these books actually reinforces traditional values, because the plights of their transgressive protagonists only point to the desirability of traditional home and family (and what can happen to you when you are alienated or separated from them). Alice, in particular, constantly longs for home, dislikes herself on drugs and looks back with horror and disgust on her journal entries while high, and

keeps returning to her family for redemption (where she is invariably accepted and helped).

Conclusion on p. 95: "The censors can be assured that all will be well: Holden will be adjusted by the psychiatrist, Alice's death will be vindicated by her parents' publication of her diary as an object lesson, and Benjie will remain in the ghetto.... In these and other young adult fictions, the adolescent will find himself or herself momentarily addressed, even to the point of the shock of recognition, but at the same time and by unorthodox means these narratives lead the rebellious youths to accept the nature of our social order and disorder. Yes, these texts are subversive, but not because of what the censors find in them! At best they will maintain the tension between 'community values and respect for authority' and the 'transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment.'"

Culley, Jonathon. "Roald Dahl—'It's about Children and It's for Children'—But Is It Suitable?" *Children's Literature in Education* 22 (1991): 59-73.

I do not yet have this article in hand. Reference from Becker & Stan.

Edwards, June. "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou: Awareness of Displacement: A Reader's Rationale." *Celebrating Censored Books*. Ed. Nicholas J. Karolides and Lee Burrell. Racine: Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, 1985. 61-63.

Contributors to this volume give personalized accounts of their experiences with these books and challenges to them, with defenses of their value in school programs. Like the Connecticut English Journal articles, we may be able to build arguments from statements here.

On p. 63: "Those who believe that the purpose of books is to instill a particular set of right and wrong values will find Caged Bird to be a wicked book indeed. Angelou neither condemns or [sic] condones the lifestyle of her family or herself."

Homstad, Wayne. *Anatomy of a Book Controversy*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Education Foundation, 1995.

Profiles a challenge to Go Ask Alice in 1987 after it was added to a 7th-grade reading list by a long-term substitute teacher (covering maternity leave). Relies on interviews with all participants in the challenge. The superintendent broke with policy by immediately removing all copies of the book from the school after it was protested by a parent. Community debates and correct procedure followed. The book was eventually returned to the school library, but was no longer on assigned reading lists.

Isaacs, Kathleen T. "Go Ask Alice: What Middle Schoolers Choose to Read." *The New Advocate* 5, no. 2 (spring 1992): 129-43.

Uses GAA in the opening of the article to launch an analysis of patterns in a comment card program from 1988-1990 at an independent school north of Baltimore. Emphasizes the power of word of mouth, and the surprising preponderance of older titles chosen by kids. Quoted comments from kids about

how they responded to GAA could be helpful for us—most of the kids respond to it as if it were real, even though it is shelved in the fiction section and the librarians and teachers do not consider it a “true story”.

Lesesne, Teri S., and Rosemary Chance. *Hit List for Young Adults 2: Frequently Challenged Books*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002.

Go Ask Alice pp. 29-31; I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings pp. 34-36.

McCune, Esther. “Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck.” *Connecticut English Journal* 15.1 (1983): 64-65. Special issue: *Rationales for Commonly Challenged Taught Books*.

Written to support teachers using challenged books in classrooms.

Provides helpful analysis of the book and its use in the curriculum. We may be able to mine these articles for reasons to object to our books.

McKiernan, Patrick L. “Lord of the Flies by William Golding.” *Connecticut English Journal* 15.1 (1983): 45-47. Special issue: *Rationales for Commonly Challenged Taught Books*.

Written to support teachers using challenged books in classrooms.

Provides helpful analysis of the book and its use in the curriculum. We may be able to mine these articles for reasons to object to our books.

Patton, Jean. “License They Mean...” A Presentation to a Seminar on “Intellectual Freedom and Censorship”. Indiana University Graduate Library School, February 22, 1984. Bloomington, IN: Jean Patton, 1984.

Self-published, spiral-bound. Jean Patton was (is?) the Indiana Chairman of the Stop Textbook Censorship Committee of the Eagle Forum. This Reagan-era organization fought what they saw as the censorship of traditional educational values, as well as traditional social and personal values, in contemporary schools and libraries. It grew out of the success felt by women who organized to fight the ERA in defense of traditional women’s roles. The ERA buried, they turned their energies to another perceived attack on the integrity of the family: books taught in school.

Their view: Rigorous science and literary classics are being excised from textbooks in favor of dumbed-down material and 20th-century works of which the members do not approve. Harsh language and rude attitudes portrayed in books taught to children are considered corruptions not only of children’s characters, but of literary and societal standards.

Some of the educational trends objected to by this group (such as the training of teachers in behavior modification techniques, as “change agents”) have changed since the early ‘80’s, but it’s clear from all reports (by both liberals and conservatives) that we’re still graduating High School seniors who don’t know when WWII happened or who John Milton was, much less how to write a logically structured essay in formal English.

Patton hates the NCTE, the ALA and the ACLU with a passion, and considers them to be co-conspirators in the intellectual deprivation of our youth and therefore of our society.

Ms. Patton is particularly eloquent (and angry) about the snobbery she finds inherent in the attitudes of “anti-censors”. She resents being demonized as ignorant and uneducated because of her views about literary quality and educational standards. From p.11: “The anti-censors operate by an interesting double standard. Any passage may be omitted from any work [in partial representation of literary and scientific classics] unless it offends traditional standards of decency, patriotism, literacy, or reverence. Offensive passages must be allowed to stand.” (emph. hers) In other words, all the stuff the book-banners object to must not only be allowed but must be taught—but where are their views represented? [The obvious answer: at home...] Everything must be accommodated except that which was once unacceptable among civilized people? Cultural critics like Patton find the coarsening of public society offensive (a not invalid point), and blame it on books like The Catcher in the Rye and the increasing dominance of pop culture media.

Patton concludes with the idea of “conduct unbecoming”, emphasizing standards of behavior once held dear. Her final paragraph, on p. 18: “The American Civil Liberties Union will always pay lawyers to defend your right to buy, distribute, and distribute to children no matter how young books which are illiterate, indecent, blasphemous, treasonable and dangerous to the public safety. But what they cannot do is to eradicate this shame: that you are guilty of Conduct Unbecoming.” [emph. hers]

Patton also objects the intrusion of non-book materials into the life and use of the library. Following the text of her address, she includes a “For Better or for Worse” cartoon from 1984 that spoofs how public library activities often seem to revolve around everything but books, and adds a newspaper clipping of MCPL activities to reinforce her point (she does not recognize storytimes for children as a para-literary activity), plus articles about the library circulating (gasp!) videotapes. She doesn’t like computers, either, but in 1984 we have to admit they were pretty unesthetic tools.

A second collection of supplementary material includes another essay, Patton’s analysis of The Catcher in the Rye (the book Mark David Chapman said motivated his slaying of John Lennon, as a 1981 Indy Star clipping reminds us), suggested reading lists for both students and teachers, Patton’s overview of what’s wrong with English Literature texts considered by the MCCSC in 1983, a selection of magazine articles (one by Ben Stein from 1983) supporting her views, an article on censorship in the Indy Star by Dan Carpenter followed by her letters objecting to points he made, and a list of objectionable words published in Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, including slang definitions of words like “bang”, “cherry” and “cock”.

Rumsey, Jean P. “‘Whatsoever Things are Pure...’: A Case for *Go Ask Alice*.” *Celebrating Censored Books*. Ed. Nicholas J. Karolides and Lee Burress. Racine: Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, 1985. 45-47.

Contributors to this volume give personalized accounts of their experiences with these books and challenges to them, with defenses of their value in school programs. Like the Connecticut English Journal articles, we may be able to build arguments from statements here.

Scarseth, Thomas. "A Teachable Good Book: *Of Mice and Men*." *Celebrating Censored Books*. Ed. Nicholas J. Karolides and Lee Burrell. Racine: Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, 1985. 86-88.

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On p. 86: "Some people believe that the function of literature is to provide vicarious 'happy endings,' to provide in the words a sugary sweetness we would like to have but cannot always get in real life. To such people, true literary tragedy is distasteful."

Slayton, Paul. "Teaching Rationale for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*." *Celebrating Censored Books*. Ed. Nicholas J. Karolides and Lee Burrell. Racine: Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, 1985. 74-76.

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On p. 74: "Whether or not one agrees with the pessimistic philosophy, the egocentric psychology or the fundamentalist theology espoused by Golding in the novel, if one is to use literature as a 'window on the world,' this work is one of the panes through which one should look."

Websites:

Frequently Asked Questions for Maya Angelou

<http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/angelou/angelou.bio.bib.html>

Interview with Maya Angelou by David Frost <http://www.newsun.com/angelous.html>

Official Maya Angelou Web Site <http://www.mayaangelou.com>