



Censorship Report

In the April 2005 issue of *American Libraries*, Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* headed the list of the most censored books this year. Other children's and young adult books are: *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers, the Captain Underpants series by Dav Pilkey, *What My Mother Doesn't Know* by Sonya Sones, *In The Night Kitchen* by Maurice Sendak. *Of Mice And Men* by John Steinbeck and *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. The Office of Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association reported they received 547 formal challenges this year, reports filed with a library or school.

What does this mean for the very good young adult books just coming out that have profanity and/or explicit sex? I know that it is easier to get these books on the shelves of public libraries; but can we get these books on the shelves of school media centers, on the shelves of classroom libraries, or as books being taught in class sets or as part of thematic units?

I am not exaggerating.

At a meeting of the New Jersey Council of Teachers of English, I

spoke with a number of teachers and asked how many were using Chris Crutcher books, which are among the best being written today? I received no replies. As one teacher stated: "We are afraid for our jobs. Do you know what it is to be brought before a superintendent, a group of hostile parents, and a Board of Education?"

My answer was, "Yes, I do."

I have had strong issues with Boards of Education and even state department officials. Once I had Neil Postman and Nat Hentoff as keynote speakers on a college campus at an English conference. Once these gentlemen started speaking, a group of teachers arose, walked out, and the next thing I knew, my college president wanted to speak with me. An audio tape of the speakers had been made, and I was asked to turn this over to him, and then the tape was sent to Trenton. I never heard anything else about this incident. The tape was never returned. Was I now on the infamous FBI list?

Now this brings me to a major point about today's literature. I cannot get straight answers from a number of publicists about the issues that some of the books on

their new lists are making. A few wanted to change the subject. One had a great answer: "It's freedom of expression, like all art."

I told them about my experience in one school where the media specialist said, "All that these kids want to read about is sex. I can't and won't reduce my library to that level." So the library in some schools are used for research purposes, and the number of books that are being purchased are very carefully scrutinized.

Just to Get Started . . .

Be that as it may, I must admit there are some very good books being turned out. If sex and profanity are going to bother some people, they will have to look among the new books for ones that won't offend. There are plenty of those also.

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff (Delacorte) is a love story between cousins. One is a New Yorker, Daisy, who is going to visit cousins in England, and she falls in love with Edmond. She's just fifteen, but she's willing to accept the fact that love conquers all and age has nothing to do with it. She is not

happy at home with her new pregnant stepmother. The freedom she feels in England is thrilling, even though a war is threatening everybody and Aunt Penn is off to a trip to Oslo. So the kids are left alone. Cousin Piper adores Daisy and enjoys being with her. This is quite a different environment than the one she left. But there is a time she needs to return to New York. And although relationships have improved, she missed Edward and Piper and her other cousins and Aunt Penn. So she decides to return to England. Things have changed considerably. The story is moving, romantic, and has its surprising moments,

Me And Orson Welles by

Robert Kaplow (Penguin) is the story of seventeen-year-old Richard Samuels, a stage-struck young man, who accidentally meets twenty-two year-old Orson Welles as he is preparing the opening of The Mercury Theatre's production of *Julius Caesar*. Richard falls in love and witnesses the variety of emotions that flow from Orson as he readies for opening night. Kaplow seems to have captured the tumultuous Welles as he shows readers the actor's-director's unexpected behavior. Here is one of those rare novels for me which shows the turbulent and talented nature of theater people. The only way to describe this novel for me is to say I couldn't put it down. Welles is hypnotizing. Richard is lost in the glow of his debut. What a time! Kaplow has done an excellent job in recreating the era and characters.

The Search For Belle Prater by

Ruth White (Farrar Straus Giroux) is a sequel that was well worth

waiting for. When Belle disappeared out of the blue in ***Belle Prater's Boy***, (Farrar Straus Giroux), I wondered what was going to happen to Woodrow and how he and Gypsy and the rest of the family would get along. While the concept is serious, Ruth White's writing is anything but heavy. There is plenty of humor. This is a warm story, and one can't help but feel for the broken homes and the poverty surrounding events and several characters. I loved the way Cassie has her "insights." Miz Lincoln and Joseph add to the hope in the story and show how these country people seem to pull together to help people in need. A good read.

Guys Write For Guys Read

edited by Jon Scieszka. Scieszka has devoted a web site and much energy to prove that guys read. He has gathered from many outstanding writers and illustrators a collection of memoirs, essays, and drawings. Proceeds from this excellent collection go to support *Guys Read* website. There is humor, action, sports, and adventures galore...all in short bits... by such writers as Jerry Spinelli, Chris Lynch, Richard Peck, John Marsden, Daniel Pinkwater, William Sleator, Gordon Korman, Jerry Pallotta, Erik P. Kraft, Darren Shan, Ned Vizinni, Graham Salisbury, and plenty more. Once boys start reading this book, they can skip to any author and will soon find something that should appeal. The guys in this book enjoy what they are doing for the important cause to prove that *Guys Read*. Jon is right; the right book in the right hands can get the most reluctant reader to find joy and

success. Perfect in every way.

Flower by Irene N. Watts (Tundra) is a story about a family with its ups and downs. Set in Halifax, the story shows us Katie at times taking refuge in hoping for a major part in the school production of *The Secret Garden*, as well as in the visions she has of a girl showing up in her room when the moon shines through. When she discovers some letters from World War I, she gains some understanding about British orphans being sent to Canada for safety. They were known as "Home Children." War definitely affects the lives of the young who are vulnerable in so many ways. They often don't get answers to many of the questions that disturb them the most. Watts has created a most poignant tale for our times. Today, as children from all over the world are being adopted, (one always hopes for the best), what are the consequences for those adopted, placed in foster homes, or just left behind? This should be a prize-winner.

While I have written about short story collections and anthologies in the past, I have waited until now to refer to the excellent series, ***Rush Hour***, (Delacorte). In ***Sin***, ***Bad Boys*** and ***Face***, each is a collection of literary and artistic pieces which focuses on the theme of that issue. Cart calls it "a cutting-edge literary journal of contemporary voices." Today's young adult readers are bound to be hooked. The authors for these various journals include such renown writers as Brock Cole, Joan Bauer, Tom Feelings, Nikki Grimes, Jack Gantos, E. R. Frank, Jan Greenberg and Sandra Gordon, Ron Koertge, David Lubar, Robert Lipsyte,

Jacqueline Woodson, David Yoo, Blake Nelson, Aidan Chambers, Richard Mosher, Marc Talbert, to name just a few.

Where to begin? (Time and space won't permit me to analyze each volume piece by piece, although I'd love to). From **Faces** I selected David Yoo's "Turning Japanese," the story of a Korean, born and raised in the United States, who is thought to be Japanese co-worker. (Do all Asians look alike?) She wants him to teach her Japanese because the company is bringing over a Japanese guest as part of an international visitation program. He knows no Japanese and tries to fake it and even tries to learn some Japanese so he can pull the whole deal off. It really is quite a funny story. The narrator of the story works one day a week at this company as a temp, and he likes the hours because it allows him plenty of time to work on his book. So he does anything he can to accommodate this co-worker and others. Great fun. Keep these journals coming, Michael. We need them.

Summer and Fall Reading

I'll take the risk of not going along with all of the recommendations that various organizations have made considering "the best books for young adults." I like to put my own stamp on what I recommend for students and teachers to consider.

I know that the late Ted Hippie used to sample ALAN members' opinions about what they thought were the best YA books, and he didn't put copyright date limits on what they listed. This always

interested me, because I did put some time limits on what I submitted. Why? Because Paul Zindel did write more than *The Pig Man*; Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* was matched, in my judgment, by *The Rag And Bone Shop*. I always liked Judy Blume's *Tiger Eyes*. Paula Danziger's *The Cat Ate My Gynsuit* was among her best. But other writers have come along and shown their talents to stimulate my imagination and emotions. That's what reading is to me—a personal matter.

I've written lots of reviews, and I hasten to point out that these are MY OPINIONS, not to be taken as words from any holy mount. I enjoy sharing what I enjoy.

I hope others will think more seriously about what to do to fill the needs and abilities and interests of particular groups of students in their classes.

Peter Abrahams. *Down The Rabbit Hole*. Harper Collins.

Farah Ahmedi. *The Story Of My Life: An Afghan Girl On The Other Side Of The Sky*. Simon Spotlight.

Mary Amato. *The Word Eater*. Holiday House.

Gigi Amateau. *Claiming Georgia Tate*. Candlewick.

Laurie Halse Anderson. *Prom*. Viking.
M. J. Auch. *Wing Nut*. Henry Holt.

Andrew Auseon. *Funny Little Money*. Harcourt.

Alex Bradley. *24 Girls In 7 Days*. Dutton.

Joseph Bruchac. *Code Talker*. Dial.
Ed Butts. *She Dared: True Stories Of Heroines, Scoundrels, And Renegades*. Tundra.

Kate Cary. *Bloodline*. Razorbill/
Penguin.

Judith Clark. *Kalpana's Dream*. Front Street.

John Cooper. *Season Of Rage: Hugh Burnett And The Struggle For Civil Rights*. Tundra.

Alison Croggin. *The Naming*. Candlewick.

Gillian Cross. *The Dark Ground*. Durtton.

Louise Erdrich. *The Game Of Silence*. Harper Collins

K. L. Going. *The Liberation Of Gabriel King*. Putnam.

Adam Gopnik. *The King In The Window*. Hyperion.

Carol Gorman & Ron J. Findlay. *Stumptown Kid*. Peachtree.

Nikki Grimes. *Dark Sons*. Hyperion.

Louise Hawes. *The Vanishing Point*. Houghton Mifflin.

Stephanie Hemphill. *Things Left Unsaid*. Hyperion.

Carl Hiaasen. *Flush*. Knopf.

Tracy & Laura Hickman. *Mystic Warrior*. Warner.

Charlie Higson. *Silverfin*. Miramax/
Hyperion.

Jeanette Ingold. *Hitch*. Harcourt.

Steven Krasner. *Play Ball Like The Hall Of Famers*. Peachtree.

David Laroche. *Absolutely, Positively Not*. . . . Scholastic.

Sofie Laguna. *Surviving Aunt Marsha*. Scholastic.

Julius Lester. *Day Of Tears*. Hyperion.

David Lubar. *Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie*. Dutton.

Alfred C. Martino. *Pinned*. Harcourt.

J. D. McNeil. *The Last Codfish*. Henry Holt.

Lauren Myracle. *Rhymes With Witches*. Amulet/Abrams.

Per Nilisen. *You & You & You*. Front Street.

David Patneau. *Thin Wood Walls*. Houghton Mifflin.

Adam Rapp. *33 Snowfish*. Candlewick.

Dietlof Reiche. *Ghost Ship*. Scholastic.

Marilyn Sachs. *Lost In America*. Roaring Brook.

Graham Salisbury. *Eyes Of The Emperor*. Random House.

Alan Lawrence Sitomer. *The Hoopster*. Hyperion.

William Sleator. *The Last Universe*. Amulet Books/Abrams.

James Smith. *The Boys Of San Joaquin*. Atheneum.

Gary Soto. *The Afterlife*. Harcourt.

David Stahler, Jr. *A Gathering Of Shades*. Harper Tempest.

Tammar Stein. *Light Years*. Knopf.

Amy Stolls. *Palms To The Ground*. Farrar Straus Giroux.

Theodore Taylor. *Billy The Kid*. Harcourt.

Jean Thesman. *Singer*. Viking.

Ann Turnbull. *No Shame, No Fear*. Candlewick.

Judy Waite. *Trick Of The Mind*. Atheneum.

Sarah Weeks. *So Be It*. Harper Collins.

Michael Winerip. *Adam Canfield Of The Slash*. Candlewick.

Rick Yancy. *The Extraordinary Adventures Of Alfred Kropp*. Bloomsbury.

Jane Yolen & Patrick Nielsen Hayden, eds. *The Year's Best Science Fiction For Teens*. Tor.

And I stop here. There are so many more. But this will allow teachers to get monies for their classroom libraries, I hope.

Series Books

I grew up to be a reader because I loved The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, and wonderful comic books. (I say

welcome to the graphic novels.) I wanted to read everything in the series. And then I read Big Little Books. I read. There is something wonderful about following characters from book to book.

Here are some of the series that I still enjoy:

Eoin Colfer. The Artemis Fowl series. *Artemis Fowl; The Opal Deception*. Hyperion/Miramax.

Cornelia Funke. The Inkheart series. *Inkspell*. Chicken House.

Anthony Horowitz. The Alex Ryder series. *Scorpia*. Philomel.

Erin Hunter. Warriors series. *Warriors: Midnight*. HarperCollins.

Catherine Jinks. The Pagan Chronicles. *Pagan's Scribe*. Candlewick.

Katheryn Laskey. Guardians of Ga'Hoole. *The Shattering*. Scholastic.

Jeff Mariotte. Witch Season series. *Winter*. Simon Pulse.

Daniel Parker and Lee Miller. Watching Alice series. *Find The Miracle*. Puffin.

Tamora Pierce. The Trickster's series. *Trikster's Queen*. Random House.

J. K. Rowling. Harry Potter series. *The Half-Blood Prince*. Scholastic.

Alex Sanchez. The Rainbow Boys series. *So Hard To Say*. Simon & Schuster.

Lemony Snicket. A Series of Unfortunate Events series. *The Grim Grotto*. Harper Collins.

DK

DK is a British publisher who has produced some of the most fascinating nonfiction books for American readers. The heavy use of

pictures and photographs has made this very easy to read and very appealing to students and teachers. The publisher has done many genres in the nonfiction field, and I thought it might be fitting to recognize just a few of their exceptional books.

Peter Ackroyd. *Kigdom Of The Dead*. (Ancient Egypt)

Mike Evans. *Elvis: A Celebration*.

Tim Haines. *Walking With Prehistoric Beasts*.

James C. Humes. *Winston Churchill*.

Patrick Morris. *Wild Africa*.

Tony Reichhardt. *Space Shuttle*.

Sister Wendy Beckett. *The Story Of Painting*.

In the DK Biography Series:

Anne Frank.

Helen Keller.

John F. Kennedy.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Abraham Lincoln.

George Washington.

There are plenty of books on science, several done in conjunction with The Smithsonian Museum. And there are books on many aspects of American and world history and geography. Travel books galore. A good series for teaching geography.

I have never singled out one publisher before. But I think these are such unusual books in concepts and design that they should be mentioned

Listening Library

In a recent article in *The New York Times*, an editor mentioned that The University of Texas was getting rid of the book collection and replacing these with technology, mainly computers. There is so

much up-to-date information by which students can get up-to-date information, that a reconsideration of the library for research has led to the donation of these books to other libraries.

More and more schools are buying good audio tapes. These enable readers of all abilities to keep up-to-date with current books and to hear good stories read aloud. Who doesn't appreciate a good storyteller? A number of years ago I was privileged to go to Broadway to hear the late Charles Laughton do readings and the telling of stories. He held the audience in the palms of his hands. Storytelling is a skilled art.

Among the audio tapes I would like to recommend for listening and practicing the art of storytelling are:

Stand Tall by Joan Bauer (Read by Ron McLarty)

Girls in Pants: The Third Summer of The Sisterhood. (Read by Angela Goethals)

Last Shot by John Feinstein (Read by the author)

Seek by Paul Fleischman. (A full cast production.)

47 by Walter Mosely (Read by Ossie Davis)

The Land by Mildred Taylor (Read by Ruben Santiago-Hudson)

And Finally . . .

Sara Nelson has written *So Many Books, So Little Time: A Year Of Passionate Reading* (Putnam), which tells of her plans to read a book each week and how the plan fell apart. But she learned much

about her reading efforts, discovering the personal joy in the freedom to select books of all kinds for her many moods and minutes. Just discovering the variety of books, classics and modern, books for kids, books for adults.

While I said I wrote about books that touched me personally, I should have also said, I find a passion in the storybook world. "Once upon a time" turns my mind to all kinds of possibilities. Reading, when started young, lets us travel on and on and on. As Dr. Seuss would have said, "Oh, the places we could go!"

M. Jerry Weiss is Professor Emeritus at Jersey City State College in Jersey City, New Jersey, and recipient of the 2003 Ted Hipple Service Award.

