

Censorship Report
Quarter 1 FY2015, Including a Comparison to Quarter 1 FY2014
By Millie Davis

This was an unusually busy quarter of challenges; in fact, we fielded a total of eighteen challenges, including some still active from previous quarters. In addition, during September NCTE's Intellectual Freedom Center cosponsored [Banned Books Week](#) with this year's focus on graphic novels, and the September #nctechat, [Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom](#), featured guest hosts Laura Jimenez (@booktoss) and Matthew Holm (@mattholm), cocreator of the *Baby Mouse* and *Squish* series. Intellectual freedom was the topic of three entries on the [NCTE Blog](#): [The Right to Read](#), [Literature Is More Than the Sum of Its Parts](#), and [Comics Are Real Reading](#).

Continuing its collaboration with other freedom-to-read groups, NCTE sent letters this quarter in favor of keeping a number of books in the classroom. The groups we worked with included the National Coalition Against Censorship ([NCAC](#)), the American Library Association ([ALA](#)), the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression ([ABFFE](#)), the Association of American Publishers ([AAP](#)), the [PEN American Center](#), the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund ([CBLDF](#)), and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators ([SCBWI](#)). An example of one of these collaborative letters is [our letter on the removal of John Green's Paper Towns from the Long Middle School \(FL\) summer reading list](#). This censoring evoked quite a lot of press on television network news as well as in print publications, including this article from the Los Angeles Times "[Green's 'Paper Towns,' prompts outcry](#)." The good news is that the book was reinstated!

There have been several dicey challenges this quarter. One was to the AP US History Curriculum in Jefferson County (CO) that was countered with student and teacher protests and critiqued by many besides NCTE and our coalition of organizations. For example, James Grossman, Executive Director of the American Historical Association, for example, wrote this passionate [New York Times blog](#). This challenge is not yet finished as the Board of Education (source of the challenge) has decided to review the curriculum itself. A second big challenge was to *Persepolis*, which is used in a 12th Grade English Course for a Human Rights Unit in the Ball-Chatham District (IL). For this challenge, NCTE sent its own letter and also [signed on one with the coalition led by NCAC](#), and ALA sent its own letter. The text was retained and I received thank you notes from the superintendent and a board member for our letter. A third challenge occurred in Highland Park ISD (TX) is to seven books on the approved high school reading list. [This article](#) from the *Dallas Morning News* outlines what happened initially. The books are now back in the curriculum but are still undergoing review. On October 14, NCTE, ALA, and NCAC all sent letters to the board concerning the situation and NCTE also signed on [the NCAC letter](#). The Highland Park challenge is a classic example of a district not following its policies and the challenge is far from finished.

More and more we are called upon to defend texts in schools and districts that have chosen to ignore their own policies for handling these challenges. This, of course, puts everyone at a disadvantage because in these situations arbitrary, unfair, and often uninformed decisions are made by principals, superintendents, and school boards while teachers are faced with the difficulty of having to decide whether to risk their standing in the school/district by speaking up.

Another "challenging" situation has arisen when some participants in a challenge have decided that a good solution to parent complaints about texts is to rate all the texts using a system like the MPAA ratings for films. (Note that MPAA ratings are *not* by their own design educational ratings.) We call this

bad idea “red-flagging” and the [NCTE position statement](#) on this practice has been quoted and cited in many letters since the policy was adopted last year. Selecting a text with an unsavory character or unpleasant happenings never means that the school or teacher advocates for the behavior or speech of a that character or for any events the involving the character. Books, movies, plays, and all other texts used in schools are part of the curriculum because of their entirety, not because of something on p. 43—they are there because they are thoughtfully chosen to meet the ends of the curriculum by educators with the expertise to make those choices.

Below is a chart comparing the Quarter 1 FY2015 and the Quarter 1 FY2014 challenges and numbers of challenged texts. A few things to know as you compare the numbers are the following:

- *Number of challenges = number of individuals who reported challenges.*
- *Number of works challenged is usually higher because often challenges involve more than one work.*
- *Censorship Challenge Reports by quarter are available on the NCTE website.*

July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	Q1 FY2015 Totals
6 challenges—8 texts; 1 reporter request	5 challenges—8000+ texts;	7 challenges—13 texts; 2 resource requests	18 challenges—8000++texts; 1 reporter request; 2 resource requests
July 2013	August 2013	September 2013	Q1 FY2013 Totals
1 challenge—1 text	0 challenges	6 challenges—6 texts	7 challenges—7 texts

Listing of 1st Quarter Challenges Reported July-September, 2014

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie (HS, NC, 6/3/2014). Contains material that offends religious beliefs. Signed on [letter with NCAC and others](#). The review committee recommended the book be retained and in September the board voted to retain the book for students aged 13 or 9th grade and older.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie (English Reading list, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. Sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they’re under review.

Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (Grades 6-12 Supplementary Reading List, ID, 9/4/2014) [NCTE signed on letter with NCAC and others](#). Board voted to retain the book on the 10th grade list subject to parental permission and other restrictions.

An Abundance of Katherines, John Green (English Reading List, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. Sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they’re under review.

AP US History Curriculum (AP US History, CO, 9/26/2014). Several board members voiced objections to the contents (and "lack of contents") of the materials included in the curriculum by.

[Signed on letter with NCAC and others](#). The Board of Education will review curricular the materials.

The Art of Racing in the Rain, Garth Stein (English II, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. MD sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they are being reviewed.

Book Weeding (Middle School Library, WI, 8/5/2014). [Racine Public School libraries weeded out 8000 books](#). Concerned former principal and teacher of English requesting information.

Chinese Handcuffs, Chris Crutcher (Grade 10 AP English, WI, 8/4/2014). Sexual Content. [Signed on initial letter with NCAC and others](#) and later a [second letter about "red-flagging"](#).

Board to meet 8/20

Glass Castle, The, Jeannette Walls (Grade 10 Honors, IL, 8/7/2014). Language, sexual content and abuse. Parents want book removed. Teacher will meet with parents and administrator.

Glass Castle, The, Jeannette Walls (English I, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. Sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they're under review.

Handmaid's Tale, The, Margaret Atwood (, , 8/14/2014). Adult nature, "grossly inappropriate content." [Signed in letter with NCAC and others](#). Board removed book.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot (Grade 11 Honors English, OH, 7/30/2014). Explicit Content-physical and sexual abuse, Parent wants a different book assigned.

Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini (Grade 10 AP English, WI, 8/4/2014). Sexual Content. [Signed on initial letter with NCAC and others](#) and [a second letter about "red-flagging"](#). The Board decided to keep the book in the classrooms and libraries of the district.

Little Brother, Cory Doctorow (Grade 11 Honors, FL, 12:00:00 AM). Principal concerned parents might protest--book was removed. [Signed on letter with NCAC and others](#). The teacher who reported the challenge is being investigated for "misconduct."

Looking for Alaska, John Green (Grade 10 AP English, WI, 7/18/2014). Sexual Content, [Signed on an initial letter with NCAC and others](#) and [a second letter about "red-flagging"](#). The Board decided to keep the book in the classrooms and libraries of the district.

Miseducation of Cameron Post, The, Emily Danforth (Grade 9, DE, 7/7/2014). Profanity. [Signed on letter with NCAC](#). Board removed from summer reading list.

Monty Python's Spamalot, Monty Python (Play, PA, 9/17/2014). Homosexual themes, [Signed on letter with NCAC and others](#).

Cancelled production

Nineteen Minutes, Jodi Picoult (Grades 9-12, PA, 8/27/2014). Controversial and painful topic (school shooting), Signed on letter with ALA and others. Selection committee voted to keep the book in the library

Nineteen Minutes, Jodi Picoult (English II, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. Sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they're under review.

Paper Towns, John Green (Grade 8, FL, 6/23/2014). Vulgar language, [Signed on letter w/NCAC and others](#) and Millie Davis spoke with reporter. The book was returned to the summer reading list.

Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi (HS English, IL, 9/26/2014). Sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). Superintendent and board recommended book to stay in the curriculum.

Siddhartha, Hermann Hesse (, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. MD sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they're under review.

Silent to the Bone, E.L. Konigsburg (Grade 8 English, VA, 9/9/2014). Parent claimed it had no moral value. Sent rationale and resources. Superintendent removed book from curriculum

Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. Sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they're under review.

To Kill a Mocking Bird, Harper Lee (Grade 10 Honors, IL, 8/7/2014). Language, sexual content and abuse, Parents wants book removed. Teacher will meet with parents and administrator.

Working Poor: Invisible in America, David K. Shipler (English III AP, TX, 9/15/2014). Sex, profanity, rape. MD sent rationale and resources. NCTE wrote its own letter and also [signed on a letter with NCAC and others](#). All books have been returned to the reading list while they're under review.