



BANNED BOOKS WEEK

September 24-October 1, 2005

American Civil Liberties Union • www.aclu.org/banned2005

A History of Fighting Censorship

2004: Robert Cormier's "The Chocolate War" tops the list of most challenged books of 2004, according to the American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom. Parents and others complained about the book's sexual content, offensive language, religious viewpoint and violence. This year marks the first in five in which the Harry Potter series does not top or appear on the ALA's annual list.

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom received a total of 547 challenges (defined as formal, written complaints, filed with libraries or schools requesting that the material be removed because of content or appropriateness) last year, compared with 458 the year before. The number of challenges reflects only incidents reported, and for each reported, four or five remain unreported.

2003: Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's Alice series – about a fictional character coping with many of the problems young girls experience "growing up" in such books as "Achingly Alice," "Alice in Lace," and "Alice on the Outside" – topped the list of most challenged books of 2003, ending the four-year reign of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, according to the American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom. As usual, Judy Blume's outputs such as "Forever" and "Then Again, Maybe I Won't" came in for challenges. The Alice series drew complaints from parents and others concerned about the books' sexual content. "Achingly Alice" was restricted in one district, for instance, to students with signed parental permission.

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2002: The Vietnam Reader, various authors
Due to the ACLU's vigilance, the North Kitsap School District in Washington created a policy to provide a fairer process for considering book challenges. This was prompted by an incident in which a parent complained about passages from The Vietnam Reader that included violence and were sexually explicit. The district's Instructional Materials Committee had deleted four readings without opening the discussion to members of the community.

Sophie's Choice, William Styron
The Norwalk-La Mirada High School District in California removed Sophie's Choice from the La Mirada High School library shelves after a parent complained about sections of the acclaimed novel. When students expressed concerns that their First Amendment rights were being violated, the ACLU wrote a letter to the school district asking that the book be returned to the school library shelves. The book has since been returned.



2001: Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians, various authors

On behalf of two students, the ACLU sued an Anaheim, California school district for pulling the biographical series Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians off a school library's shelves. The school agreed to put the books back and amended its policy regarding censorship of library books.

2000: Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling

A Zeeland, Michigan school district banned students in grades K-4 from taking the Harry Potter books out of the school library and required students in grades 5-8 to obtain parental permission before withdrawing the books from the library. The policy also forbade teachers from reading the books out loud during classes. After the ACLU sent letters to the public schools, the district formed a committee to review the issue and rescinded the policy.

1986: As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner

Faulkner's classic was banned in a Mayfield, Kentucky school district because it was deemed offensive and obscene. After intense pressure from the ACLU, the school district reversed its decision.

1973: Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut

The ACLU successfully sued a North Dakota school district on behalf of a teacher who taught Slaughterhouse Five, which was called "a tool of the devil" by a local minister.

1957: Howl and Other Poems, Allen Ginsberg

Poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti contacted the ACLU to defend the publication of Howl. U.S. Customs officials had seized the books, stating, "You wouldn't want your children to come across it." A state court judge ruled that the poem could not be suppressed as obscene by local authorities.

1950: Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn, Henry Miller

The director of the ACLU of Northern California attempted to import Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn. U.S. Customs officials seized the books and the director, Ernest Besig, went to court to defend the work against obscenity charges.

1939: The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck

Along with several other groups, the ACLU protested the Kern County, California Board of Supervisors' resolution banning The Grapes of Wrath. The board argued that the book "offended our citizenry." Kern County is in the center of the agricultural region featured in the novel.

1933: Ulysses, James Joyce

In perhaps the organization's most famous case, the ACLU defended Joyce's Ulysses after U.S. Customs officials seized copies of the novel, calling it obscenity "of the rottenest and vilest character." After a decade long struggle, it was ruled that Ulysses was not obscene. ?

