

Petition for change

FREE PEOPLE

First Amendment

think

ACLU Annual Banned Book Report

take action

READ FREELY

seek clarity

challenge censorship

Assemble peaceably

FREE PEOPLE READ FREELY

The 14th Annual Report on
Challenged and Banned Books in Texas Public Schools

2009-2010 School Year

Includes an exclusive interview with ...

MARY MCDONAGH MURPHY, AUTHOR OF

Scout, Atticus & Boo: A Celebration of Fifty Years of 'To Kill a Mockingbird,'

... AND PRODUCER OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & 'To Kill a Mockingbird'

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A FEW THOUGHTS

From ACLU of Texas Executive Director *Terri Burke*

This year marks the 50th anniversary of one of the greatest examples of American literature: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I'm old enough to have read it shortly after it was published.

Thirty years later we gave each of our daughters their first copies and our conversations about the book – and the human condition it exposes – remain a deep family bond. This is a book that delved into issues of race in the Deep South, of discrimination, of class, of injustice, and also of courage. It is a book that challenged the status quo of society at the time and how folks thought. Published in 1960, this book – narrated by a six-year-old girl named Scout – tells the story of a black man tried on the basis of little solid evidence for raping a white woman in rural Alabama. “Mockingbird” won a Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and was made into a film in 1962.

In this year's report, we are honored to feature an interview with film and television writer/producer Mary McDonagh Murphy who has written a new book, *Scout, Atticus & Boo: A Celebration of Fifty Years of 'To Kill a Mockingbird'*, and produced a new documentary film, *Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & 'To Kill a Mockingbird.'* Ms. Murphy is an expert on *To Kill a Mockingbird*; we are delighted to discover what this book means to her and why she feels it is so important for people to read today.

Sadly, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is also a book that has been repeatedly challenged or banned in schools not only in Texas but across America since it was published. The American Library Association has reported that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was number 21 of the 100 most frequently challenged books of 2000–2009, despite its classic status. In 2001, it was challenged by a Glynn County, GA School Board member because of “profanity.” It was challenged at the Brentwood, TN Middle School in 2006 because the book contains not just “profanity” but also “adult themes.” And right here in Texas, back in 1996, it was banned from the Lindale, TX advanced placement English reading list because the book “conflicted with the values of the community.”

I don't need to tell you that attempts to remove *To Kill a Mockingbird* or any book from our schools' classrooms and libraries, based on narrow-minded, ill-considered objections of a person or group, is a threat to our First Amendment right to freedom of expression, of speech, and of ideas. And it is these challenges to books in Texas that we highlight in the ACLU of Texas' *14th Annual Banned Books Report: Free People Read Freely*.



In liberty,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Terri Burke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping initial "T".

Terri Burke
Executive Director

By Dotty Griffith, Public Education Director

Just as this year's report was ready for final editing, the questionable cancellation of a very popular community event, the Teen Lit Festival in Humble, a Houston-area suburb, reminded us that censorship comes in many guises.

For the 14th year, this report documents censorship challenges to books in Texas public schools. Some of these challenges result in books being banned, usually permanently. That's disappointing enough for those of us who believe that parents have the right to decide what their children read but shouldn't be able to dictate to other parents what their kids may not read.

Even more disturbing is the situation in Humble where the censorious views of a few deprived an entire city of the prestige and fun of a book festival that attracts best-selling authors. Abandonment of the Teen Lit Festival, geared to middle and high school students, sends a very negative message to age groups that should be encouraged to find inspiration and self-discovery in literature.

Based on news reports and conversations, here's what happened. Last summer, best-selling author Ellen Hopkins was un-invited from appearing at the January 2011 event. Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo said a few parents complained that Hopkins' books weren't appropriate for middle schoolers. To avoid controversy, Sconzo asked that Hopkins not attend.

Hopkins' books deal with difficult issues. *Crank*, her first novel and a New York Times best-seller, is based loosely on her older daughter's addiction to crystal meth and depicts "a good girl's fall from grace." It is, said Ms. Hopkins, "a cautionary tale. All my books are cautionary tales."

When Hopkins spread the word of being dropped via her blog, four other popular "young adult" genre authors -- Pete Hautman, Melissa de la Cruz, Tera Lynn Childs and Matt de la Pena -- cancelled their appearances in protest. After that, Sconzo says school librarians who organized the event asked that it be cancelled because of "negative press."

So now there's no controversy. And no Teen Lit Festival. Wouldn't it have made more sense to let parents, who in virtually all cases accompany their middle school-age students to the Festival, decide whether Hopkins and her books are suitable for their children? No one would have had to attend her presentation or buy her books. Instead a whole community has been denied a book festival because a few parents disapproved of an author and everyone was afraid to say "no" to the censors.

Sconzo says he's gotten "a lot of hate mail" accusing him of censorship. "I don't see it that way," Sconzo asserts, because "it is a voluntary event. We get to choose who to invite or not to invite." Under the Humble circumstances, many would choose to call that censorship.

DEDICATION

Leah Siegel and Myra MacPherson

This year's Banned Books Report, *Free People Read Freely*, honors a mother-daughter duo that devoted their lives to the First Amendment and freedom of the press. Myra MacPherson gained prominence as a reporter at *The Washington Post* profiling the Watergate burglars, covering women's rights and other social issues. She has written four books, including the classic *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* and the acclaimed biography, *All Governments Lie: The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I. F. Stone*. Her daughter, Leah Siegel, followed in her mother's journalistic footsteps as an Emmy award-winning producer for ESPN. Myra became a steadfast friend of the ACLU of Texas in 2008 when she moved to Texas from Washington, D.C. to be nearer Leah.

At age 41, Leah had been diagnosed with advanced breast cancer following the birth of her third child. One day at a time, Leah insisted on living her life to the fullest, with gallant realism and wit. Myra did the same, dividing her time between Austin and Dallas where Leah and her husband, Eric Loehr, resided with Teagan, 6, Wyatt, 3, and Oliver, 2.

The prognosis had been grim and Leah lost her hard-fought battle last July. Tributes from all over the country were testament to the impact of her professional acumen and personal courage. Her CaringBridge blog, filled with hope and humor, reached not only friends but inspired strangers; there were an amazing 60,000 visits to her site.

To this day, Myra remains determined. During Leah's illness, she gave a big piece of her time and talent to an ACLU of Texas report, *Missing the Mark: How National Security Strategies in Rio Grande Valley Border Communities Sacrifice Basic Human Rights and Fail to Make Texans Safe*.

Myra traveled with ACLU colleagues. We wrote and edited together. We cried together. Yet it wasn't until several months after Leah's passing that Myra was able to speak about another of her works, published in 1999. *She Came to Live Out Loud: An Inspiring Family Journey Through Illness, Loss, and Grief*, the inspiring and highly-praised chronicle of the final years of another 40-something mother who died too young of breast cancer. Leah helped edit Myra's book. In a sense, they wrote Leah's final chapters before they lived them.

Thank you, Myra, for your time, talent and example of the way to live, work and carry on.



Dotty Griffith
On behalf of the ACLU of Texas

AN OVERVIEW OF CENSORSHIP IN TEXAS

“Books and ideas are the most effective weapons against intolerance and ignorance.”

— LYNDON B. JOHNSON

“All around us, matters of national and international importance are crying out for creative solutions, from saving the Gulf of Mexico to bringing peace to Afghanistan. Such solutions emerge from a healthy marketplace of ideas, sustained by a populace constantly contributing original ideas and receptive to the ideas of others.”

— NEWSWEEK,

July 2010 cover story on declining creativity in American education

“You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.”

— GANDHI

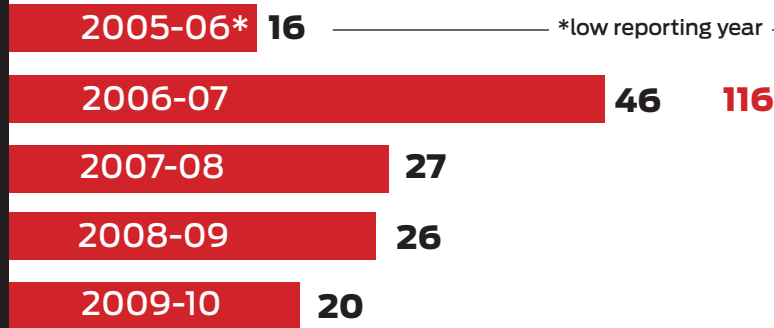
In a world where adults and teenagers are ever more swamped with information, the simple pleasure of getting lost in the pages of a good book has never felt better. In a well-written story, the powerful themes that propel society forward and define the directions of our lives – from love, oppression, and the growing pains of childhood to war and peace – are brought before us. We come out wiser, more compassionate, and more emboldened for having dipped our imaginations, our intellects, and hearts into worlds beyond the confines of our own.

Unfortunately, as the ACLU of Texas’ 14th Banned Books report will show, not all see it that way. The good news is: when it comes to the outright banning of books, this year was better than last year. We have seen a slight but steady decrease in both the number of books challenged and banned since the 2007-2008 school year. The bad news is: of those challenges brought before school administrators this year, 44 percent led to a book being banned or restricted.

This year, we sent out requests to every school district and most charter schools in Texas. We were

BANNED BOOKS

Number of books banned per school year in Texas Public Schools



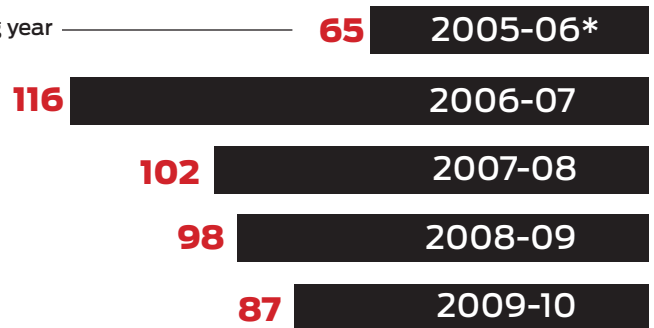
after basic information on whether books have been banned or restricted, and what mechanisms schools use before pulling a book from their library shelves or school curriculum. 954 out of almost 1,300 districts answered our requests for information.

We found that throughout Texas, 87 times books were challenged. Twenty books were banned, while another 16 were restricted. Quite likely, this number is higher as those districts that responded to our survey are probably those with attitudes and policies more protective of free speech and access to books.

In a marked shift from last year, only about a third of the books banned were in elementary schools. The overwhelming majority was in middle schools. While parents, teachers, and librarians are understandably protective of exposing small children to adult content, the worry seems to be

CHALLENGED BOOKS

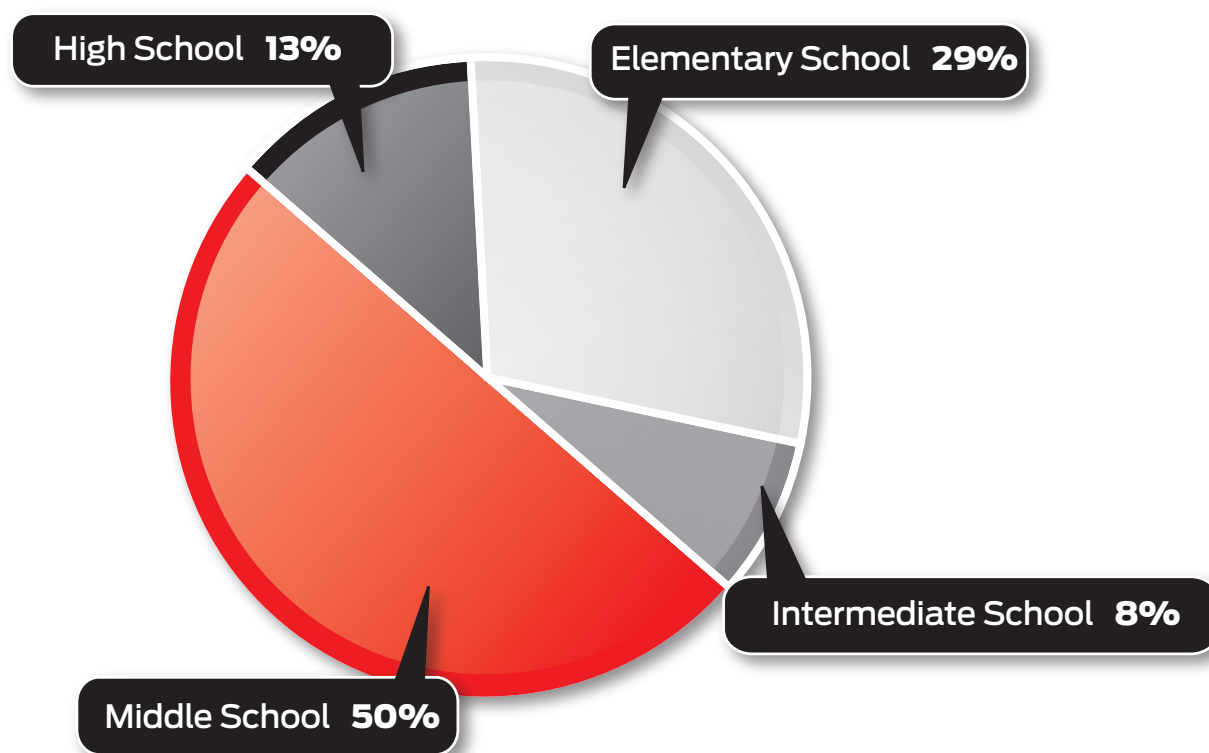
Number of books challenged per school year in Texas Public Schools



spreading to pre-teens now too, some of these actions seem downright over-reactive. Hunt Elementary in Cuero ISD, for example, removed *Time-Life Magazine* from its library. In *Our Mothers' House*, a book about a multi-racial family headed by lesbian parents, was banned at Glen Rose Intermediate, reflecting the tendency to try to wall off adolescent children from anything that deviates from “traditional” family values. Often, a parent or teacher will note that a book is simply not “age appropriate” without providing details as to what exactly they are opposed to.

We are concerned that schools are pulling books from their libraries without evaluating whether they are in fact damaging to kids, whether they contain information that may help prepare children for the future, and whether presenting material in a proper context would be better than banning it.

BANNED BOOKS BY AGE RANGE



Geographically, the greatest numbers of challenges came from Leander ISD, with Round Rock and Cypress-Fairbanks ISDs close behind. In Leander, the entire *Gossip Girl* series by Cecily von Ziegesar was nearly banned for inappropriate language, drugs, and sexual content. The books were challenged not in a middle or elementary school as expected, but at Vandegrift High School by a ninth grader's parent. After bringing the books before the review committee, the committee decided to ban books written after the series had passed from von Ziegesar to a ghostwriter; the reason cited was "poorer literary quality." Other materials challenged in Leander include Jerry Seinfeld's *Halloween*, the *Encyclopedia Horrifica*, *Beyond the Grave*, *La Historia de los Colores*, and a video on drug awareness entitled,

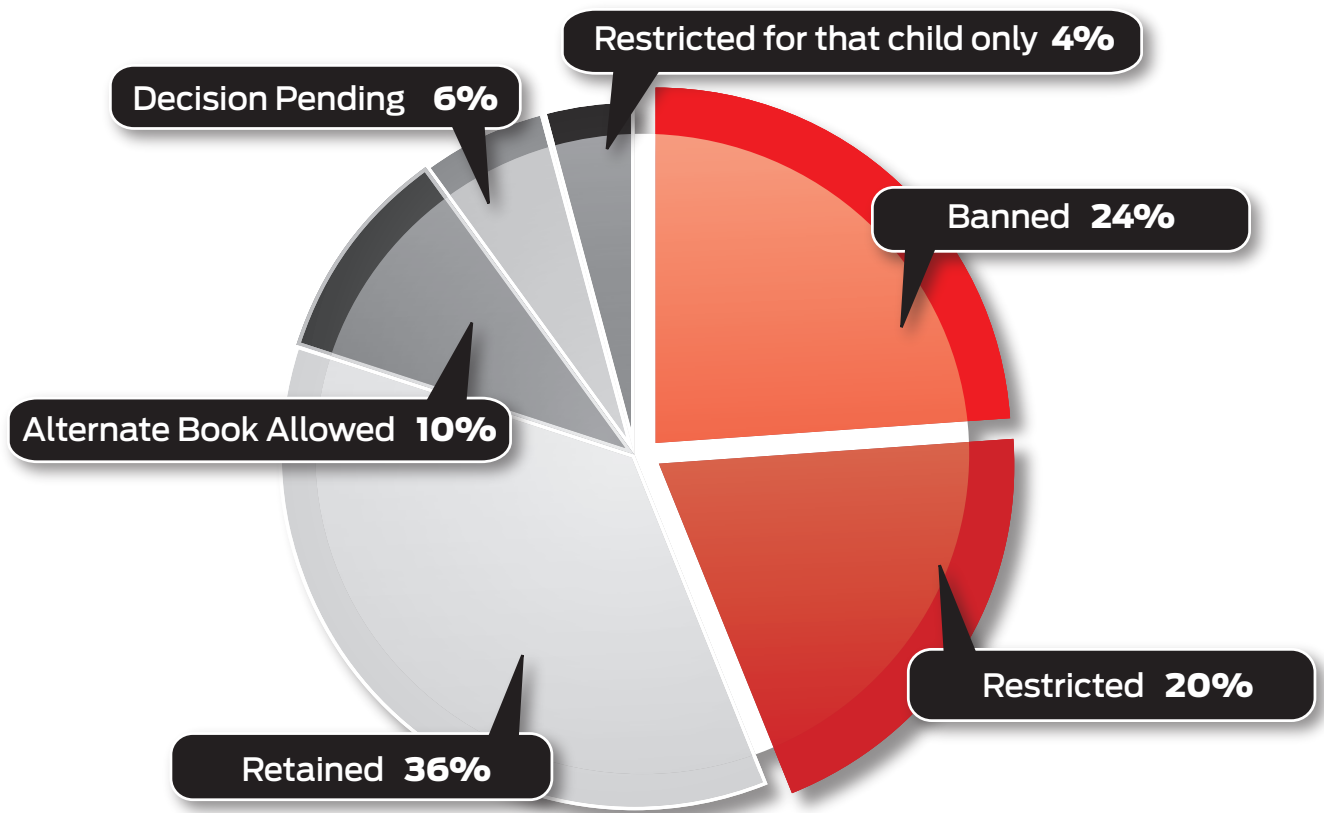
Reality Matters: Under the Influence.

Nearly every challenge was initiated by a concerned parent or guardian with a few exceptions, where teachers or students brought the book to the administration's attention.

At Canyon Vista Middle School in Round Rock, in two cases, a parent wanted a book banned but refused to read it in order to discuss it with school administrators.

In another instance, a parent objected to a picture showing a girl with her "back exposed" and "bra unhooked." There were complaints about a book that dealt with suicide – a topic one parent felt hit too close too home – and the unseemly

OUTCOME OF CHALLENGES



language in a memoir by an 18-year-old Iraq War veteran.

Some districts indeed take matters of intellectual freedom and a student's right to read very seriously. Though there were six challenges in Round Rock ISD – including *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Suck It Up*, and the *Guinness Book of World Records*, mostly for

profanity or horror – no books were restricted or removed.

Similarly, we were pleased to see that Houston ISD, the largest school district in the state and the one with the most challenges just two years ago, reportedly had no incidents of books being challenged or removed in 2010.

WHY BOOKS WERE BANNED

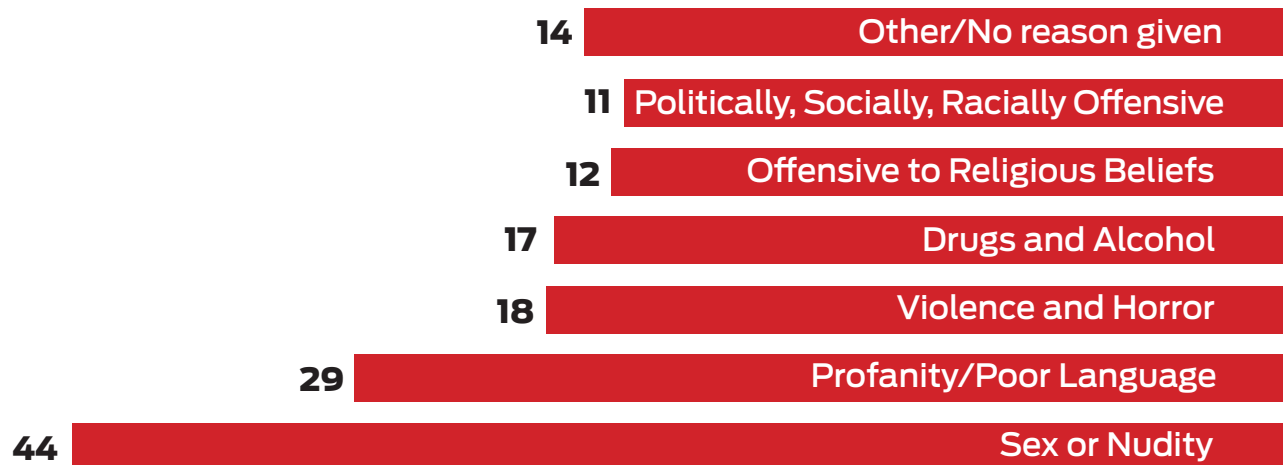
As important as which books are banned is why books are banned. Often, it usually comes down to sex or nudity. Sexual content, however, can be a very loose term. Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* was challenged for a cartoon drawing showing the little boy tumbling in a dream sequence with no diaper on.

Concerns about nudity were also behind an attempt to get the *Guinness Book of World Records* taken out of one elementary school.

We provided schools with 12 common reasons books are challenged along with an "other" category to track why books were challenged. This is what we found:

REASON FOR CHALLENGE

Number of books challenged per reason (books often challenged for multiple reasons)



Judy Blume seems to raise the ire of strict parents year after year for its girl narrators that confront puberty, and the desires and fears of adolescence in diary entries. In 2010, Blume's *Then Again, Maybe I Won't* and *Forever* were banned in Thrall and Cuero ISDs while her *It's Not the End of the World* was restricted for using the word "Goddamn." This is a disappointment; while Blume's books are challenged every year, none were banned in Texas during the 2008-2009 school. In Leander, however, which boasts the most challenges of any school district, a discussion between the school principal and librarian resulted in keeping the ever-popular *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret* at school. Interestingly,

Blume's books contain very little actual sexual content, especially when compared to the way teen sexuality and behavior is portrayed on TV. Rather it is the narrators' willingness to openly admit to questions, fears, and curiosity about sex that seems to threaten would-be censors.

Religious objections were also at the root of many challenges. As Harry Potter was attacked in many districts a few years ago, any book seen to be promoting sorcery, paganism and witchcraft came under fire in 2010. These complaints call into question the line between deeply personal beliefs and the need to develop a curriculum relevant to children from many different backgrounds.

Violence or horror is a similar way to voice the same objection. Together, these two categories make up a quarter of all challenges. While certain segments of Christianity consistently take issue with wizard, ghost, and goblin books, believing they represent the occult, others take these tales for completely fictional fantastical worlds where vampires roam the night, smart kids have special powers, and children are encouraged to use their imaginations to the greatest degree possible.

Vampires, however, seemed to be more objectionable last year – when Stephenville ISD banned all 11 books from Richelle Mead’s *Vampire Academy* and P.C. Cast’s *House of Night* series. We were pleasantly surprised that Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series was only challenged in one school district this year; in that case, the student whose parent objected was assigned an alternative book. As always the question becomes: should the tastes or beliefs of a few rule the reading lists for us all? Should parents have the last word on what their children ought to be exposed to?

Complaints that a book is “politically, racially, socially offensive” were also numerous this year. In the *Lake of the Woods* by Tim O’Brien, whose real life-inspired stories on Vietnam earned him a Pulitzer and National Book Award nomination, made this list. So did *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney, and *Give a Boy a Gun* by Todd Strasser. None of these books, however, were actually removed from schools.

Ellen Hopkins’s books – which includes *Burned*, *Cranked*, *Glass*, *Identical* and *Impulse* – were challenged at several schools. The subject is a dysfunctional family haunted by an abusive, alcoholic father. One district left the book on the library shelves but took it off a required reading list. Another restricted the books to 11th and 12th graders.

Among the notable literature that made our “challenged” list this year is *Flowers for Algernon*,

Catcher in the Rye, and *The Kite Runner*.

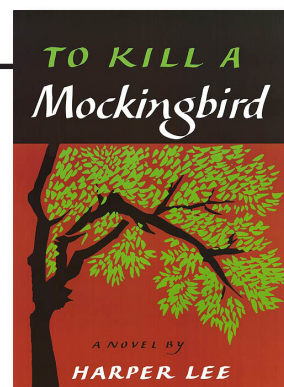
This year, we feature *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, which has long been on the bulls-eye for those who police reading lists. This story of a six-year-old girl who confronts the

complex racial overtones of her Southern town became an instant classic when it was released. We talk with Mary McDonagh Murphy, whose new book *Scout, Atticus & Boo*, reflects on the significance of the book 50 years later. Its power to move people – and its perhaps unintended themes of feminism, the bitter remnants of slavery, and the importance of one person (no matter how small) standing up to injustice – continues to draw lots of attention.

In Eden Valley, Minnesota, in the 1970’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* was temporarily banned for the words “damn” and “whore lady.” More recently, it’s come under fire for use of the N word. Black parents and even the NAACP have protested on several occasions when the book is included in elementary and middle school reading lists.

In 1995, the book was removed from a high school library in Louisiana, and then banned from a Lindale, Texas advanced placement reading list, often reserved for juniors and seniors, because the book “conflicted with the values of the community.”

To Kill a Mockingbird is one of the modern classics, alongside *Of Mice and Men* and *Catcher in the Rye*, which routinely draws complaints for profanity, unpleasant racial themes, and sexuality. The book was banned by one Oklahoma district in 2001. In Texas, it has come under fire as recently as 2008. Hardly a year goes by when the book is not challenged somewhere in the US.



DUE PROCESS BEFORE PULLING A BOOK

When a book is challenged by a parent or school district resident, the process by which a district responds often affects whether the book gets banned as much as the content of the book. Two hundred schools reported that when a book is challenged, the decision on whether to ban it is made by the “administration only” or “librarian only.” This means the decision is likely made by a single person. Another 130 rely on the “School Board only” to review challenged books.

Five hundred districts use a review committee, often comprised of the principal or superintendent, school librarian, teachers, parents, and ideally some students. This is clearly a more democratic way to make decisions that affect the student body, possibly for decades to come. Oftentimes, librarians will be encouraged to read and review the book and present their opinions to others. This creates some safeguards that one parent’s whims, religious beliefs or personal objections do not rob a whole community of the opportunity to expand their world through reading.

In Leander ISD, which had the most challenges this year, both the person challenging the book and the review committee must read the books before making a decision. In Round Rock, which had the second highest number of challenges, teachers, parents, administrators, and students sit on the review committee. The Superintendent makes decisions as well, but only those decisions made by the Round Rock School Board are final.

Many districts may choose some intermediary option that falls short of banning a book but does restrict access to it. Often, a district will decide a given book is only acceptable for a student of a certain age or grade level, or it will require parental permission before a student can check it out. And if a parent objects to a book that is assigned by a teacher, usually the teacher will offer an alternative assignment. Last year, 22 percent of challenges led to a restriction. This year, the number was nearly identical, with 20 percent of challenges leading to restricted access based on age. In another four percent of cases, the

students whose parents objected were not allowed to read the book though other students retained access to it.

Equally significant is whether the decision made is “permanent.” Although many districts claim to have reconsideration procedures once a book is removed from library shelves, 455 districts – more than half of those who answered the question – reported that all decisions are final. This means there is no way for a teacher, student, or community member to appeal the decision and reintroduce the question of whether a book belongs in the classroom once controversy around an issue may have died down.

Where would be today if our children were still prohibited from reading *To Kill A Mockingbird*? Key to democracy and open information is the ability to revisit situations. It is crucial that, in due time, when it becomes clear that Harry Potter readers do not take up witchcraft and put spells on their teachers, or that the values put forth by a book like *To Kill a Mockingbird* are ones we should aspire to rather than fear, school administrators are open to putting a book back into library circulation.

In the best of worlds, when a parent challenges a book, this can be a good way of creating a community or school-wide discussion on issues raised by the book. Certainly this was true with *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the 1960’s and with Judy Blume books, even today. Educators are forced to read, perhaps for the first time, literature that is popular with their students. Parents are encouraged to read as well, and see what their children are drawn to and discussing.

Books don’t corrupt us. They guide us through the complexities of life, arm us with information, and help us develop our own moral compasses. From high literature to pulp fiction, if it gets a child to read, can it really be that bad?

We would like to thank the schools that took the time to answer our survey, and above all, the librarians across Texas who continue to foster a curiosity for learning and a love of reading.

TEXAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION RESOURCES

The Texas Library Association believes that the freedom to read is a corollary of the First Amendment's guarantees of a free press. The Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee helps protect this right by responding to librarians facing book challenges, offering model policies and procedures, tracking reports of book challenges by its members, and supporting policies and laws that preserve and protect access to information. The Committee also makes itself available as a resource to librarians facing intel-

lectual freedom challenges.

Freedom to read means individuals should have the freedom to choose among reading materials, and open access to a diversity of resources. It means that these rights should be protected against attempts – legal or otherwise – to censor reading materials or control the process.

For more information on these resources visit: www.txla.org or contact the Texas Library Association at (512) 328-1518.

LIST OF BANNED BOOKS

Books removed from library shelves or class reading lists

JUDY BLUME

Forever

Then Again, Maybe I Won't

JEAN FERRIS

Eight Seconds

BRIAN INNES

The History and Methods of Torture

MARK KIDWELL

The Creature from the Depths

DENENE MILLNER

Hotlanta

LAUREN MYRACLE

ttn

PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR

Achingly Alice

PETER PARNELL AND JUSTIN RICHARDSON

And Tango Makes Three

JULIE ANNE PETERS

Far from Xanadu

PATRICIA POLACCO

In Our Mothers' House

ANNE ROONEY

Zombies on the Loose

R.L. STINE

Eye Candy

TIME-LIFE MAGAZINE

MEDIA: TOM BROWN'S SCHOOLDAYS

ALLISON VAN DIEPEN

Snitch

JAKE WIZNER

Spanking Shakespeare

CECILY CON ZIEGESAR

Would I Lie to You: A Gossip Girl Novel



LIST OF RESTRICTED BOOKS

Restricted to Readers Based on Age, Reading Level, Parental Permission, etc.

JUDY BLUME

It's Not the End of the World

JOHN FARNDON

Dorling Kindersly Visual Encyclopedia

ELLEN HOPKINS

Burned

Crank

Glass

Identical

Impulse

ANTHONY HOROWITZ

More Horowitz Horror

MARK KIDWELL

The Creature from the Depths

STEPHEN KING

It

GORDON KORMAN

Born to Rock

GARY PAULSEN

The Schernoff Discoveries

DAV PILKEY

Las Aventuras del Super-Bebe Panal

PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR

Alice on Her Way

PETER PARNELL AND

JUSTIN RICHARDSON

And Tango Makes Three

SONYA SONES

What My Mother Doesn't Know



Illustration by:
Adrian C. Sinnott

ALL CHALLENGED BOOKS: BY DISTRICT

ALVIN ISD

School: Alvin Elementary

Book: *More Horowitz Horror*,

Anthony Horowitz

Reason Cited: Profanity;

Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Use restricted

Note: Copies of books were sent to the Junior High

School: Stevenson Primary

Book: *The Creature from the Depths*, Mark Kidwell

Reason Cited: Violence or horror

Action Taken: Banned

Note: Book was initially restricted from the child of the parent who brought the challenge forward. Upon review, the book was restricted to all PK-2 students

BUSHLAND ISD

School: Bushland Middle School

Book: *Eye Candy*, R.L. Stine

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Banned

CALHOUN COUNTY ISD

School: HJM Elementary School

Book: *Zombies on the Loose*,

Anne Rooney

Reason Cited: Violence or horror

Action Taken: Banned

CANUTILLO ISD

School: Alderete Middle School

Book: *Eight Seconds*, Jean Ferris

Reason Cited: Politically, racially, or socially offensive

Action Taken: Banned

School: Jose Damian Elementary

Book: *Las aventuras del Super Bebe Panal*, Dav Pilkey

Reason Cited: Offensive language

Action Taken: Restricted from the child of parent who brought the challenge forward

CELINA ISD

School: Middle School

Book: *Twilight*, Stephanie Meyer

Reason Cited: Violence or horror; Offensive to religious beliefs

Action Taken: Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)

CORPUS CHRISTI ISD

School: Cullen Middle School

Book: *Blood and Chocolate*, Annette Curtis Klause

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Offensive language

Action Taken: Retained

School: Cullen Middle School

Book: *Go Ask Alice*, Anonymous

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Offensive language

Action Taken: Retained

School: King High School

Book: *The Idiot's Guide to Wicca & Witchcraft*, Denise Zimmerman & Katherine A. Gleason

Reason Cited: Other: "This book teaches kids how to make potions and spells."

Action Taken: Book reclassified and shelved with the religious materials

CUERO ISD

School: Hunt Elementary

Book: *Time-Life Magazine*

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Politically, racially, or socially offensive

Action Taken: Banned

CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS ISD

School: Aragon Middle School

Book: *Crystal Meth and other Amphetamines*, Karla Fitzhugh

Reason Cited: Drugs or alcohol

Action Taken: Retained

School: Hopper Middle School

Book: *Hip-Hop: Jay-Z*, Geoff Barnes

Reason Cited: Other: Cigars and risqué-dressed ladies in photos

Action Taken: Retained

School: Kahla Middle School

Book: *Hotlanta*, Denene Miller

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Banned

School: Lamkin Elementary

Book: *Chains*, Laurie Halse Anderson

Reason Cited: Politically, racially, or socially offensive

Action Taken: Retained

EDNA ISD

School: High School, AP Class

Book: *In the Lake of the Woods*, Tim O'Brien

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Offensive to religious beliefs

Action Taken: Retained

School: Not given

Book: *Burned*, Hopkins

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Violence or horror;

Offensive to religious beliefs

Action Taken: Use restricted

GILMER ISD

School: Gilmer Intermediate

Book: *Tom Brown's School Days (Media)*

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Violence or horror

Action Taken: Banned

GLEN ROSE ISD

School: Glen Rose

Intermediate

Book: *In Our Mothers' House*, Patricia Polacco

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Banned

School: Not given

Book: *The Schernoff Discoveries*, Gary Paulsen

Reason Cited: Socially offensive

Action Taken: Use restricted

GRAFORD ISD

School: Graford High School

Book: *A Child Called It*, David J. Pelzor

Reason Cited: Violence or horror

Action Taken: Retained

Note: Alternate book allowed

HAYS ISD

School: Chapa Middle School

Book: *Give a Boy a Gun*, Todd Strasser

Reason Cited: Profanity; Violence or horror; Politically, racially or socially offensive

Action Taken: Retained

IRVING ISD

School: J. O. Davis

Book: *About Sardine in Outer Space 4*, Emmanuel Guibert

Reason Cited: None given

Action Taken: Retained

School: John Haley Elementary

Book: *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies...*, Robie Harris

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Retained; Note: moved copies of book to middle schools

School: Lamar Middle School

Book: *Parrot in the Oven*, Victor Martinez

Reason Cited: Violence or horror

Action Taken: Retained

KELLER ISD

School: Friendship Elementary

Book: *Draw Me a Star*, Eric Carle

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Retained

School: Hargrave High School

Book: *The Catcher in the Rye*, J.D. Salinger

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Drugs or alcohol

Action Taken: Retained

KLEIN ISD

School: Benignus Elementary

Book:

The Diary of Wimpy Kid, Jeff Kinney

Reason Cited: Politically, racially or socially offensive

Action Taken: Retained

LEANDER ISD

School: Bagdad Elementary

Book: *Story of Colors (La historia de los colores)*, Subcomandante Marcos

Reason Cited: Other: Tobacco use

Action Taken: Retained

Note: parent of child requested that their child not be allowed to check out books in the same section of the library

School: Canyon Ridge Middle School

Book: *The True Meaning of Cleavage*, Mariah Fredericks

Reason Cited: Other: Cover art

Action Taken: Retained

School: Cypress Elementary

Book: *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*, Judy Blume

Reason Cited: Other: Mature content

Action Taken: Retained

School: Grandview Hills Elementary

Book: *Dorling Kindersly Visual Encyclopedia*, John Farndon

Reason Cited: Other: Depth of content regarding the human body and reproduction

Action Taken: Restricted; Book moved to different section for teacher use

School: Jim Plain Elementary

Book: *Halloween*, Jerry Seinfeld

Reason Cited: Other: Offensive language

Action Taken: Retained

School: Jim Plain Elementary

Book: *No, David!*, David Shannon

Reason Cited: Other: Portrayal of negative behavior rewarded by parent

Action Taken: Retained

School: Vandergrift High School
Book: *The Gossip Girl Series*, Cecily von Ziegesar

Reason Cited: Sexual content;
Drugs and alcohol; language
Action Taken: Retained (copies
of series written by von Ziegesar
only)

School: Westside Elementary
Book: *Encyclopedia Horrifica*,
Joshua Gee
Reason Cited: Other: Frightening
cover art
Action Taken: Retained

School: Westside Elementary
Book: *Beyond the Grave*, Judith
Herbst
Reason Cited: Other: Frightening
Material
Action Taken: Retained

School: Wiley Middle School
Film: *"Under the Influence"*
Reason Cited: Other: Inappropriate
content
Action Taken: Retained;
Note: Teachers are now told to
preview the film before screening
it to students

LEWISVILLE ISD

School: Forestwood Middle
School
Book: *Paranoid Park*, Blake
Nelson
Reason Cited: Sexual content
or nudity; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Retained

LUMBERTON ISD

School: Middle School
Book: *Achingly Alice*, Phyllis
Reynolds Naylor
Reason Cited: Other: Sexually explicit

conversation
Action Taken: Banned

MCKINNEY ISD

School: Walker Elementary
Book: *She's Got the Beat*, Nancy
Krulik
Reason Cited: Sexual content or
nudity; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Decision pending
Note: A committee will meet to review
the book; afterward, a report will be sent

MIDWAY ISD

School: All elementary schools
Book: *And Tango Makes Three*,
Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson
Reason Cited: Other: Not age appropriate
Action Taken: Use Restricted

School: Midway Middle School
Book: *ttfn*, Lauren Myracle
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual
content or nudity; Offensive to
religious views
Action Taken: Banned

NEWCASTLE ISD

School: Newcastle school
Book: *It's Not the End of the World*,
Judy Blume
Reason Cited: Profanity; Offensive
to religious beliefs
Action Taken: Use restricted

NORTHEAST ISD

School: Tejada Middle School
Book: *Would I Lie to You--A Gossip
Girl Novel*, Cecily von Ziegesar
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual
content or nudity
Action Taken: Banned

NORTHSIDE ISD

School: All middle schools
Book: *The History and Methods of
Torture*, Brian Innes

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Banned

ORANGEFIELD ISD

School: Orangefield High School

Book: *My Sister's Keeper*, Jodi Picoult

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Drugs or alcohol;

Other: bomb-making descriptions

Action Taken: Retained

PAWNEE ISD

School: Pawnee Junior High

Book: *It*, Stephen King

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Profanity

Action Taken: Use restricted

PORT NECHES-GROVES ISD

School: Port Neches Elementary

Book: *Then Again, Maybe I Won't*, Judy Blume

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Banned

RED LICK ISD

School: Red Lick Middle School

Book: *Born to Rock*, Gordon Korman

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Violence or horror; Drugs or alcohol

Action Taken: Use restricted

ROCKWALL ISD

School: All middle schools

Book: *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins

Reason Cited: Violence or horror

Action Taken: Retained

ROSEBUD-LOTT ISD

School: Rosebud Primary School

Book: *And Tango Makes Three*,

Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson

Reason Cited: Politically, racially or socially offensive

Action Taken: Banned

ROUND ROCK ISD

School: Callison Elementary

Book: *The Guinness Book of World Records*

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity

Action Taken: Retained

School: Canyon Vista Middle School

Book: *Bloodline*, Kate Cary

Reason Cited: Violence or horror; Offensive to religious beliefs

Action Taken: Retained

School: Canyon Vista Middle School

Book: *Suck it Up*, Brian Meehl

Reason Cited: Violence or horror; Offensive to religious beliefs

Action Taken: Retained

School: Cedar Valley Middle School

Book: *Ghosts of War*, Ryan Smithson

Reason Cited: Profanity

Action Taken: Retained

School: Chisholm Trail Middle School

Book: *Feed*, M.T. Anderson

Reason Cited: Profanity

Action Taken: Retained

SANGER ISD

School: Sanger Middle School

Book: *Spanking Shakespeare*, Jake Wiz-ner

Reason Cited: Inappropriate for age level
Action Taken: Banned

SEALY ISD

School: Sealy Junior High
Book: *Alice on Her Way*,
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
Reason Cited: Sexual content
or nudity
Action Taken: Use restricted

SINTON ISD

School: Sinton Elementary
Book: *Bone Dance*, Martha Brooks
Reason Cited: Profanity;
Offensive to religious sensitivities
Action Taken: Retained

School: Sinton Elementary
Book: *The Cookcamp*, Gary
Paulsen
Reason Cited: Sexual content or
nudity
Action Taken: Retained

SPLENDORA ISD

School: Splendora Junior High
Book: *Wake*, Lisa McMann
Action Taken: Retained
Note: The book is currently under review,
though no formal challenge has been
filed

TAYLOR ISD

School: Taylor Middle School
Book: *What My Mother Doesn't
Know*, Sonya Sones
Reason Cited: Other: Mature content
Action Taken: Use restricted

THORNDALE ISD

School: Middle school and high
school
Book: *Far From Xanadu*, Julie
Ann Peters
Reason Cited: Profanity

Action Taken: Banned

THRALL ISD

School: Elementary and
secondary schools
Book: *Forever*, Judy Blume
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual
content or nudity
Action Taken: Banned

TRENT COUNTY ISD

School: All schools
Book: *Snitch*, Allison van Diepen
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual
content or nudity; Offensive to
religious beliefs; Socially, racially,
or politically offensive
Action Taken: Banned

UNION HILL ISD

School: Not given
Book: *Burned*, Ellen Hopkins
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content
or nudity; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Use restricted (to 11th
and 12th grade students only)

School: Not given
Book: *Crank*, Ellen Hopkins
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content
or nudity; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Use restricted (to 11th
and 12th grade students only)

School: Not given
Book: *Glass*, Ellen Hopkins
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content
or nudity; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Use restricted (to 11th and
12th grade students only)

School: Not given
Book: *Identical*, Ellen Hopkins
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content
or nudity; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Use restricted (to 11th

and 12th grade students only)

School: Not given

Book: *Impulse*, Ellen Hopkins

Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Drugs or alcohol

Action Taken: Use restricted (to 11th and 12th grade students only)

WEATHERFORD ISD

School: Weatherford High School
Ninth Grade Center

Book: *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini

Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Violence or horror

Action Taken: Retained

A SHORT SUMMARY OF EACH CHALLENGED BOOK

A Child Called It

DAVID J. PELZER

An autobiography of Pelzer's childhood with his abusive, alcoholic mother.

About Sardine In Outer Space 4

EMMANUEL GUIBERT

A whimsically illustrated account of a space-pirate's adventures with his friends.

Achingly Alice

PHYLLIS

REYNOLDS NAYLOR

Alice, an eighth grader, attempts to navigate adolescence and confronts her relationships and sexuality head-on.

Alice On Her Way

**PHYLLIS REYNOLDS
NAYLOR**

Alice, along with several of her friends, further explores her sexuality with the help of an uncharacteristically liberal church-sponsored program.

And Tango Makes Three

**PETER PARNELL AND
JUSTIN RICHARDSON**

At New York City's Central Park Zoo, two male penguins fall in love and start a family by taking turns sitting on an abandoned egg until it hatches.

Are You There God?

It's Me Margaret

JUDY BLUME

An 11-year-old Margaret's exploration of puberty and adolescent spiritual relationships.

Beyond The Grave

JUDITH HERBST

A parapsychological book discussing topics such as ghosts, spontaneous human combustion, and near-death experiences.

Bleach

TITE KUBO

A series of graphic novels depicting the adventures of a Soul Reaper, who guides deceased spirits to the afterlife.

Blood And Chocolate

**ANNETTE CURTIS
KLAUSE**

A teenage werewolf finds herself stuck between the human and paranormal worlds when she falls in love with a high school boy.

Bloodline

KATE CARY

A dramatic war story in which a woman must decide whether or not to follow the man she loves and become a vampire.

Bone Dance

MARTHA BROOKS

As a teenager, Alexandra becomes the owner of a prairie home near an ancient Native American burial ground. When she takes up residence at this home, she begins encounter ghosts and other mythological Native American spirits.

Born To Rock

GORDAN KORMAN

After a debate involving homophobia and accusations of cheating, high school student Leo sets out to find his biological

father, a punk-rock band member. The former president of his high school's Young Republican club, Leo is forced to reexamine his life and his principles along his journey.

Burned

ELLEN HOPKINS

Escaping an abusive home life and beginning to live with her aunt, teenage Pattyn begins to question her Mormon religion and relationships.

Chains

**LAURIE HALSE
ANDERSON**

The story of a teenage slave who, during the American Revolution, works as a spy for the rebels.

Crank

ELLEN HOPKINS

Written in verse, 15-year-old narrator Kristina reveals how she became addicted to crank, and how the stimulant turned her from straight-A student to drug addict.

Crystal Meth and Other Amphetamines

KARLA FITZHUGH

An informative description of various amphetamines. Also examines the behavior of young persons in regards to amphetamines.

Dorling Kindersly

Visual Encyclopedia

JOHN FARNDON

An encyclopedia with categories such as the Earth, the human body, and society and history.

Draw Me A Star

ERIC CARLE

A young boy creates an entire world around a simple drawing of a star.

Eight Seconds

JEAN FERRIS

An upcoming senior in high school, John attends a rodeo camp, where he discovers his own homosexuality and must confront what this realization means for his future.

Encyclopedia Horrifica

JOSHUA GEE

An encyclopedia of mythical creatures, such as aliens, vampires, mermaids, and zombies.

Eye Candy

R.L. STINE

Experimenting with online dating, Lindsey finds herself dating four men at once. However, after an anonymous, threatening message from one of the men, Lindsey feels forced to say yes to everything each man demands.

Far From Xanadu

JULIE ANNE PETERS

Protagonist Mike (born Mary-Elizabeth) must come to terms with her homosexuality as she ponders her escape from her small-town home.

Feed

M.T. ANDERSON

A tale of a society in which infants are “plugged in” to computers that dictate their desires and behaviors.

Flowers For Algernon

DANIEL KEYES

Mentally-challenged Charlie becomes the first human subject for an IQ-increasing brain operation. Once his IQ begins to climb, however, Charlie must confront the cruelty of his “friends” and the other stresses that come with extreme intellect.

Forever

JUDY BLUME

A story of first love that explores the sexuality and passionate relationship between two high school students.

Ghosts of War

RYAN SMITHSON

A true account of Smithson’s enlistment into the Army following 9/11. Following his return home from Iraq, he must deal with PTSD.

Give A Boy A Gun

TODD STRASSER

Two bullied high school students hold their fellow classmates hostage with stolen guns and homemade bombs.

Glass

ELLEN HOPKINS

The sequel to *Crank*, this is the continuing story of Kristina and drug addiction. Told in verse, it’s a harrowing and disturbing look at addiction and the damage that it inflicts.

Go Ask Alice

ANONYMOUS

This anonymous account of an adolescent rapidly losing control

explores topics such as drug addiction and mental illness.

Gossip Girl series

CECILY VON ZIEGESAR

A series of novels that explores the lives of elite, privileged young women in New York City.

Guinness Book of World Records

A book of world records, ranging from articles about the oldest Titanic survivor to some of the world’s most intriguing cultural rituals. Also includes sections on the human body, sports, and engineering and technology.

Halloween

JERRY SEINFELD

A children’s humor book that recounts a young Jerry Seinfeld’s trick-or-treating adventures.

Hip Hop: Jay Z

GEOFF BARNES

A biography of musical artist Jay-Z that details his journey from adolescent drug dealer to multi-million dollar businessman and performer.

Hotlanta

DENENE MILLNER

The story of twins who, despite living privileged lives, deal with an incarcerated father, a murder, and insincere relationships.

Identical

ELLEN HOPKINS

A story of a severely dysfunctional family whose teenage twin daughters are in physical danger and emotional crisis.

*If Pigs Could Fly... And
Other Deep Thoughts*
BRUCE LANSKY

A collection of poems on topics such as dirty socks and toothless relatives.

Impulse
ELLEN HOPKINS

Three troubled teens cross paths at Aspen Springs, a psychiatric hospital, after attempting suicide.

In Our Mothers' House
PATRICIA POLACCO

This book describes the happy and well-adjusted life of a family with two mothers who raise several racially different children.

In the Lake of the Woods
TIM O'BRIEN

After John's bid for Senate is derailed due to his behavior during the Vietnam War, his wife Kathy disappears, which raises new questions about John's past.

In The Night Kitchen
MAURICE SENDAK

A nighttime adventure in a baker's kitchen narrated by a child.

It
STEPHEN KING

Having already once thwarted an evil responsible for several gruesome murders, a group of seven individuals is called upon again to battle evil.

*It's Not the
End of the World*
JUDY BLUME

Young Karen plots to resolve her

family's problems and prevent her parents from getting a divorce.

*It's Perfectly Normal:
Changing Bodies...*
ROBIE HARRIS

An informative reference book that covers topics such as puberty, birth control, and conception.

*Las Aventuras
Del Super-Bebe Panal*
DAV PILKEY

A Spanish-language graphic novel of Captain Underpants and his companions, who favor potty-humored adventures.

Tom Brown's Schooldays
THOMAS HUGHES

A semi-autobiographical account of a young boy's experiences with bullying and friendships.

More Horowitz Horror
ANTHONY HOROWITZ

Nine horror stories, involving things such as a cell phone that receives calls from the dead and other paranormal activity.

My Sister's Keeper
JODI PICOULT

A story of one girl's fight to keep her organs her own, despite having been genetically engineered to be a perfect match for her cancer-stricken sister.

Naruto
KISHIMOTO

A series of graphic novels that details the adventures of a young ninja.

No, David!
DAVID SHANNON

An illustrated children's book that portrays the title character doing a variety of mischievous things.

Olive's Ocean
KEVIN HENKES

After receiving a note from a deceased classmate, a young girl realizes her own mortality while also experiencing many of her life's "firsts."

Paranoid Park
BLAKE NELSON

A teenage boy must face the guilt he experiences after inadvertently causing a man's death.

Parrot In The Oven
VICTOR MARTINEZ

As he matures, a Hispanic teenager is confronted with poverty, neighborhood gangs, and familial strife.

*Reality Matters: Under The
Influence (video)*

Video that explores the potential harms of alcohol on teenagers.

She's Got The Beat
NANCY KRULIK

Upon arriving at college, Miranda begins taking drum lessons, which lead her to romance and new friendships.

Snitch
ALLISON VAN DIEPEN
High school student Julia joins a gang, only to be confronted with drugs, sex, violence, and unstable relationships.

Spanking Shakespeare
JAKE WIZNER

As part of a school project, teenager Shakespeare Shapiro meticulously documents his senior year.

Story of Colors/La Historia De Los Colores

SUBCOMANDANTE MARCOS

A Mexican folk tale that describes how the gods created the colors of the world.

Suck It Up

BRIAN MEEHL

The story of a special-needs misfit vampire.

The Catcher In The Rye

J.D. SALINGER

Having been expelled from prep school, narrator Holden Caulfield describes his disillusion with the world.

The Cookcamp

GARY PAULSEN

Sent to live with his grandmother in a remote part of Minnesota, a young boy longs for his parents while also admiring the workmen near his grandmother's house.

The Creature from the Depths

MARK KIDWELL

A graphic novel that tells the story of a deep sea treasure guarded by a mythical monster.

The Diary of a Wimpy Kid

JEFF KINNEY

Middle-school student Greg is

forced, by his mother, to keep a diary of the school year's events.

The History and Methods of Torture

BRIAN INNES

A historical account of 3,000 years of torture in various locations around the world.

The Hunger Games

SUZANNE COLLINS

In a dystopic future world, a teenage girl is forced to participate in a worldwide competition that is part entertainment, part violence.

The Idiots Guide to Wicca & Witchcraft

DENISE ZIMMERMAN AND KATHERINE A. GLEASON

A "how-to" book giving a history of witchcraft and earth-based religion. Also provides advice for casting spells.

The Kite Runner

KHALED HOSSEINI

Haunted by an act of childhood disloyalty, protagonist Amir returns to Afghanistan and witnesses many of the injustices perpetrated by the Taliban.

The Schernoff Discoveries

GARY PAULSEN

A story of two awkward adolescents who experience first dates, joyrides, and other adventures.

The True Meaning of Cleavage

MARIAH FREDERICKS

Two high school friends are torn

apart when one decides to have a secret affair with a fellow classmate.

The World's Most Evil People

RODNEY CASTLEDEN

An account of some of the world's most evil individuals, including Vlad the Impaler and Stalin that also details the individuals' preferred methods of torture, killing, maiming, etc.

Then Again, Maybe I Won't
JUDY BLUME

Already having to deal with the awkwardness of adolescence, protagonist Tony must also face the changes that arise when his father becomes rich and moves his family to a wealthy city.

Thirteen Reasons Why
JAY ASHER

A teenage boy receives tapes of a dead classmate's voice and begins to investigate the circumstances that led up to the classmate's suicide.

Time-Life Magazine

A worldwide news magazine.

ttfn

LAUREN MYRACLE

Through instant message language, three high school friends weather the trials of moving, drug experimentation, and relationships.

Twilight

STEPHANIE MEYER

High school student Bella falls in love with her fellow classmate

Edward, who is a vampire.

Wake

LISA MCMANN

Teenage Janie is capable of seeing into other people's dreams, and she begins to wonder how this ability will affect her own future.

What My Mother Doesn't Know

SONYA SONES

Protagonist Sophie experiences a series of teenage crushes and deals with the embarrassment of her mother's soap-opera devotion.

Would I Lie to You

CECILY VON ZIEGESAR

Another Gossip Girl novel detailing the lives and experiences of privileged New York City teenagers; this particular story takes place in the Hamptons, the summer before the main characters begin college.

Zombies On The Loose

ANNE ROONEY

Contains sections such as "a zombie legend," "zombie slaves," and "are zombies real?"



FREE PEOPLE READ FREELY

Celebrating the
50th Anniversary of
'To Kill a Mockingbird'

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, 50 YEARS LATER

Speaking with Mary McDonagh Murphy

Mary McDonagh Murphy is a journalist who fell in love with *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a teenager. When she revisited the book as an adult, she was moved to travel down to Monroeville, Alabama, where Harper Lee grew up to research the roots of the book.

She recently finished a documentary entitled *Hey Boo* and published a book about the lasting impact of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As she interviewed acclaimed novelists and thinkers of our time, she realized the book continues to inspire young writers and exert a pull on readers' imaginations like few others.

For the last 40 years, Harper Lee has famously refused to give interviews. She never published another book. As such, Mary Murphy is one of the leading experts on *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the small town Southern landscape that inspired it.



Q: You were a journalist at CBS? What made you fall in love with these characters and inspired you to write a book and produce a documentary?

A: *To Kill a Mockingbird* had a huge effect on me when I read it as a younger girl. At the time, I was largely completely besotted by Scout Finch. I just thought she was fantastic and hilarious and would probably grow up to be a writer some day.

But it was really my adult re-reading of the book that made the greatest impression on me. I decided to go exploring and see what I could find out about the novel and where it came from. I began to look into the kind of impact that it's had. I worked as a journalist for 20 years at CBS News, and along the way I pitched this as a story different times in different forms. Whoever I was working with came back and said, "Well if Harper Lee's not going to do an interview, then there's no real news value."

But once I left CBS News and I was doing my own documentaries and casting about, I read the novel again. And I saw very clearly this time that the story was the novel. The story is the phenomenon that the novel became and the effect that it had on so many people. It still endures. We're still talking

about it 50 years later. And I would wager that it may not be you and me, but that people will still be talking about it in 100 years.

Q: How old were you when you first read it?

A: I think I was about 18. I almost escaped high school without actually reading the novel. When my mother and my sister figured this out, they sort of crawled across the kitchen table one morning... I read the book and saw the movie.

It's one of the only books that I had to read in high school that I remember really enjoying.

It's often the first adult book we read when we're still pretty much kids. For many people that I've talked to, it's the first time a young reader gets completely kidnapped by a novel, captivated from beginning to end.

Wally Lamb [famous novelist] describes this. Whenever he did a book report, he picked the shortest books he could find. His sister had been raving about this novel, he went and picked it up, and then he – the pokiest reader in the world – just sat there until it was done. I think we all know what that feels like. And for many people, this was the book that did that to them.

Q: Do you understand the flip side? What about this book makes people so angry?

A: Not everybody likes the novel. Many of those people are parents who find that some of the things dealt with – whether it's race relations being portrayed in a way they don't like, or the fact that there's a rape in it – people have trouble with some of that. I can see it, but I've also always thought that literature is not history or sociology, it's literature. And you can't necessarily treat it any other way.

Q: I think other books which are also part of the curriculum have had rape scenes, so it's always made me feel that perhaps it really is about the social implications of race or the free-spirited feminist character that Scout represents. Do you agree?

A: I've never read that anyone's objected to Scout as a reason to challenge the book. Though you're absolutely right. Scout had more freedom as a six-year-old girl growing up in the Depression than most American women had in the 1960's when the book was published. She wore pants, she played with boys, and she spoke her mind. In 1960, in this country, that was not necessarily the way it was going.

Q: I feel like everyone fixates on Scout and Atticus. My favorite character is Boo Radley. What was his function in the book? What do you think he represents?

A: Harper Lee beautifully wrote and articulated something that's in every town and every neighborhood. There's a Boo Radley practically everywhere. I think we can all talk about some house that was a little bit scary or a person you only saw behind the blinds, peeking out. As children, the kind of suspense and imagination and creepiness that you can build up around a person like that is a very familiar thing.

Scout says, "Hey Boo." That is one of the greatest reveals in a novel ever. What you've been expecting about Boo all this time tells you something about yourself. The fact that Boo turns out to be not a monster, but capable of incredible kindness... Boo

Radley represents how you judge. It tells you something about judgment in general.

Q: Did you know immediately *Hey Boo* was what you wanted to name your documentary?

A: The more I delved into it... Oprah Winfrey tells me that she had lunch with Harper Lee in New York. It was an effort for Oprah to try to get her to come on her show. And Harper Lee basically said to her, "Do you know Boo Radley? If you know Boo Radley, then you know me and you know why I won't be going on TV."

Q: Why do you think that Harper Lee retreated so completely from the press and public attention? Is she a shy person?

A: I can't speak for her. I can tell you what other people told me. Her editor wrote that she was a shy person. I think surely that kind of fame must have been overwhelming to a 34-year-old person from a small town who, first time out, basically wrote a best-selling masterpiece. And it wasn't just a best-selling novel, it got turned into a masterpiece of a movie. It won the Pulitzer Prize. These were huge things in succession very quickly. I think you could see how that could have overwhelmed a person like that.

Her sister Alice still practices law every day at the firm that her father helped found in Monroeville, Alabama. I spent a lot of time with Miss Alice. She said that Harper Lee got misquoted in the press and didn't like it and just decided that it wasn't really the place of a writer to be this familiar or this quoted or recognized. So she stopped giving interviews. It doesn't mean that she's a recluse. You can't equate not giving interviews with being Boo Radley.

Q: Did she have to bear the brunt of the criticism or the attacks on the book at the time?

A: No, I don't think so. I know that she was asked about it in a Newsweek article. A county in Virginia had famously banned it, and she did write a very good – if not tongue 'n cheek – letter to the editor. So there was that. But I don't think she personally had to answer for the book.

Q: Do you think she was trying to write a political book or was even aware of how political a lot of the implications were?

A: She herself said, “This is a love story, plain & simple.” I don’t think she set out to write a novel about race or to make a political statement. Everything I’ve heard and read about her would suggest that’s not the way she operated. I think she wrote a novel. And it’s a novel about many, many things. It’s about childhood. It’s about growing up. It’s about parenthood. It’s about love. It’s about loneliness. It’s about tolerance. It’s also about race and justice, and I think all of those things are beautifully intertwined to make the novel.

The other thing that’s important to say is, it’s a great read. The characters are indelible, incredible. And it’s a novel of suspense as well.

Q: What does that mean, It’s a love story, pure and simple?

A: I interpret that on many levels. It’s about a love for the South, a love for your family, a love of mankind, of humankind honestly. And a kind of reminder to people that that’s what life is about.

Q: It’s a beautiful way to describe a story which has no big romantic plotline, no leading man and no leading lady.

A: Exactly. And it’s not a love story in a romantic sense at all, though sometimes you do wonder what Miss Maudie’s doing over there at Atticus’ house.

Q: What was it like going down to Monroeville?

A: I was fortunate to spend a lot of time with Harper Lee’s sister and to learn a lot about how they grew up. Miss Alice tutored me in Alabama soil, politics and history, literature, government.

I’m a Northerner. It’s a very different world there in Alabama – I found it fascinating. I love the way people told stories and the language, and the rolling hills of Alabama, that in their own way were like Tuscany.

Q: How do people there feel about the book? It’s obviously a lot harder to have the lens of a writer

or a camera focused on yourself and reveal your shortcomings along with your beauty? Do people there tend to be proud of the book?

A: I think they are. I think it’s a book that changed people’s minds, and you know, that rarely happens. The novel was beautifully done – a story well told, great characters, had an important message, a social message. Because it had all these other ingredients, it really gave Southerners a way to think about the system in which they’d been raised – and to find another way. A lot of that had to do with the story being told through the eyes of a child, as an adult looking back.

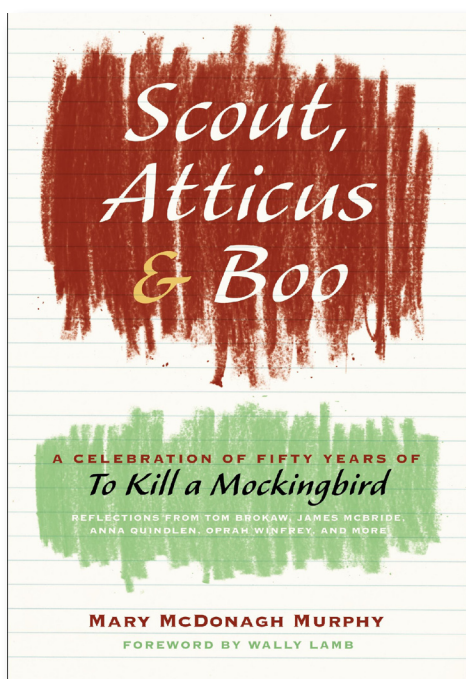
I think it made a great difference to white Southerners... and black Southerners too. It allowed people to question the system, to begin to understand that there was something morally bizarre about the situation.

Q: Does it surprise you that still, every year there’s some school somewhere, where a parent objects to having the book read?

A: I don’t how often that happens. But I think some of that is about treating literature like it’s sociology, which I don’t think you should do. There’s also something else going on which is this: there’s another group that’s saying, “We don’t need to teach this anymore – because Obama’s in the White House. There’ve been incredible strides and progress. This is not a world that we recognize anymore, nor should we.”

I think we’re still gonna be reading it. As long as people are arrested in situations where there’s racial profiling. As long as there’s injustice. It tells a story we all know is true.

I think that argument overlooks some fundamental aspects of the movie. It’s set in the ‘30’s, and Atticus Finch is not a crusading civil rights attorney. He was a man in town who was assigned the case. It’s not like he took this on. But what he did, to the surprise of his neighbors and townspeople, was rigorously defend Tom Robinson.



Post-script

Mary McDonagh Murphy's documentary *Hey Boo* is now being shown in film festivals and independent theatres. Consult www.marymurphy.net for screenings. Her book – *Atticus, Scout & Boo* – is on the New York Times extended bestseller list. She hopes it will become used as a study guide, with teachers taking quotes about what those she's interviewed have said about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and using it a springboard for discussion.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

Amy Lanteigne
Jen Moreno
Madisen Obiedo
Mary McDonagh Murphy
Adrian C. Sinott
Adam Supgul
Texas Library Association
Teachers, librarians and school administrators in the state of Texas