FREE PEOPLE
READ FREELY

The 13th Annual Report on
Challenged and Banned Books in Texas Public Schools

2008-2009 School Year

Includes an exclusive interview with
H. G. Bissinger
Author of Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, a Dream

In Celebration of National Banned Books Week
September 26 – October 3, 2009
# Table of Contents

A Few Thoughts from ACLU of Texas Executive Director Terri Burke .................................................. 4  
Foreword .................................................................................................................................................... 5  
Introduction and Summary ........................................................................................................................ 6  
Statistical Summary and Breakdown ......................................................................................................... 7  
Where were the Most Challenges? ............................................................................................................ 8  
Challenges by Grade Level ........................................................................................................................ 9  
Reasons for Challenges .............................................................................................................................. 9  
Process, Policy and Appeals .................................................................................................................... 10  
Most Challenged Authors and Titles ....................................................................................................... 11  
Texas Library Association Resources ..................................................................................................... 12  
Banned Books .......................................................................................................................................... 13  
Restricted Books ...................................................................................................................................... 14  
Retained Books ........................................................................................................................................ 15  
All Challenged Books By District ........................................................................................................... 16  
A Short Summary of Each Challenged Book: ......................................................................................... 22  
The ACLU of Texas Interviews H. G. Bissinger .................................................................................... 27
A Few Thoughts
From ACLU of Texas Executive Director Terri Burke

Celebrating the Freedom to Read

Earlier this year, America lost one of its champions of the First Amendment who fought hard against censorship and struggled to protect our freedom of speech, and freedom to read. Judith Krug was 69 when she died of cancer in April in Evanston, Illinois. Throughout her career, which spanned more than four decades, she led tenacious efforts to educate policy-makers, librarians, educators, parents and students about their constitutional right to express ideas and to read the ideas of others without governmental interference.

For those of you who don’t know, Ms. Krug was the director of the American Library Association’s (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom and the executive director of the Freedom to Read Foundation for more than 40 years. She advised librarians on how to deal with challenges to reading material. She was involved in multiple legal battles challenging both book and Internet censorship in libraries that went all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1997, she and the ACLU led a successful charge against certain provisions of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which was one of Congress’ first attempts to regulate Internet content. She also fought against a part of the USA PATRIOT Act that allowed government officials access to confidential library records and to secretly monitor what people read.

But most notably, in 1982, she founded ALA’s Banned Books Week—an annual week-long event that celebrates authors, their literature, the freedom to choose and the freedom to express one’s opinions—for which this report is written. Banned Books Week is an incredible legacy she has bestowed upon every person in this country. And her message reads loud and clear: don’t take this precious constitutional freedom for granted!

Through Banned Books Week, she created a means for librarians and teachers to teach the importance of the freedoms of speech and expression to our children. She alerted ordinary folk about school districts that ban books from their schools’ libraries and the dangers of imposing restrictions on a free society. And she reminded people of the joys of reading, the wonderful ways books teach us about life, and how books open doors to different worlds and ideas.

It is the responsibility of all of us to protect our freedoms, to continue the legacy Judith Krug left for our children and for generations to follow, so we may read freely without the government meddling into our lives.

Judith Krug was a great inspiration to us at the ACLU Foundation of Texas. For 13 years, we have presented an annual report of books challenged or banned in Texas schools. And so it is my great honor to dedicate the ACLU of Texas’ 2008-2009 annual banned books report, Free People Read Freely, to Judith Krug, a heroine to us all. And a true freedom fighter in my book.

Yours in liberty,

Terri Burke
Executive Director
FOREWORD

By Dotty Griffith, Public Education Director

As a mom, I used to love carpooling. There’s no better way to find out what your kids and their friends are up to than driving them around for a while. All you have to do is keep your mouth shut and listen. Of course, once teens start driving, parents are left out of the loop pretty fast. Then, to know what’s going on, you rely on other parents, teachers…maybe even talking to your kids and their friends. What an extraordinary concept!

Reminiscing about the joys of carpooling brings me, in a round-about way, to the 13th annual ACLU of Texas banned books report, *Free People Read Freely*. Censorship always dismays me. But adults trying to keep young people from reading books about what young people are thinking and doing seems especially futile. Sounds like banning soap operas to wipe out infidelity.

This year’s banned books report got a very high response rate of 70 percent from the more than 1,200 school districts in Texas we queried about challenges to school library books.

Here are some of the highlights of our report:

- Stephenville, Houston and Irving independent school districts reported the most challenges for the 2008-2009 school year. (See p. 7)
- Relatively small Stephenville ISD not only had the most challenges this year but imposed preemptive bans on books not yet written. From our report: “The district banned the two teen vampire series from the library, even though neither series has been completed…Stephenville ISD actually banned books that have not yet been published and perhaps even books that have yet to be written.” (See p. 11)
- The most challenged author was P.C. Cast. In Stephenville ISD, all six books in her *House of Night* series were banned at Henderson Jr. High. The second most challenged (and banned) author this year was Richelle Mead; all five books in her *Vampire Academy* series were banned at the same school. This situation indicates that a squeaky wheel or two can deny a whole school access to a particular book or series. “It seems that an individual or group of people went on a crusade…” (See p. 11), thereby imposing the tyranny of a vocal minority.
- Although districts have so-called “reconsideration procedures,” once a book is banned from a school library, that ban is often permanent. Fifty-five percent of the school districts “reported that all decisions are final. This means once a book is banned…there is no formal appeals process by which a community member or student might hope to have a book reinstated.” (See p. 10)

All this brings me back to carpooling. Once kids outgrow carpooling, perhaps parents should grow up, too. Instead of trying to prevent pre-teens and teens from reading about what they already know, parents should consider reading to find out what’s going on in the lives of kids the same age as theirs. Carpooling by reading, so to speak. Then parents can use the books as starting points with their kids for heart-to-heart conversations about values and behavior. That way everyone might learn something.

Instead of banning juvenile literature, let’s all read some and talk about it.
“Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech.”
—Benjamin Franklin

“God forbid that any book should be banned. The practice is as indefensible as infanticide.”
—Dame Rebecca West

“If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.”

Introduction and Summary

Beginning in 1996, the ACLU of Texas has celebrated Banned Books Week by releasing an annual report, cataloging the occurrence of censorship in Texas public schools. This is the 13th of these reports.

In order to compile the information necessary to present this report, more than 1,200 open records requests were sent to every school district and charter school in the state. Each school district received a request asking specific questions about challenges to remove or restrict library books or curriculum based reading materials during the 2008-2009 academic year.

This year’s report is based on the information contained in the 889 responses to these open records requests. Once received, the data was organized in the following fields: challenging district, book challenged, author of challenged book, campus receiving the challenge, reason for challenge, result of challenge, whether the challenge was to a curricular usage or library usage. This year we also added questions for each district about their policies governing challenges to literature. In particular, we asked each district to name the individual(s) responsible for reviewing and deciding challenges, and whether the decision of the reviewer(s) is final or can be appealed.

School library censors were just about as active in the 2008-2009 academic year as they were in the previous year. Ninety-eight challenges were reported this year, while 102 were reported last year. Similarly, 26 books were banned this year while 27 were banned last year. What is more promising, however, are our findings
related to restrictions. Here, we noticed a 25% decrease in the rate of challenges resulting in restrictions. There is bad news also; we noticed a 17% decrease in the rate of challenges resulting in retention. Stephenville ISD reported the most challenges this year with 11. All of these challenges addressed books housed in the Henderson Junior High School library and, unfortunately, every one of them was eventually banned. It is surprising that so many bans—and, therefore, challenges—would come out of district with an enrollment of only 3,500 students. Texas’ largest district, Houston ISD, reported only six challenges this year, down from last year’s 20 challenges.

The most challenged and banned authors of the year were both writers of series about teen vampires. Every installment in P.C. Cast’s *House of Night* series (six books) and Richelle Mead’s *Vampire Academy* series (five books) was banned in Stephenville ISD.

When a controversial feature film, adapted from a book for children or adolescents, is released we often see a spike in the number of challenges of that book. This was the case for the J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, H.G. Bissinger’s *Friday Night Lights*, and Phillip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* series, which features the *Golden Compass*. Surprisingly, none of these books was widely challenged this year. Especially conspicuous is the absence of any pieces from Stephanie Meyer’s popular *Twilight* series, which is also about teenage vampires and is adapted for the silver screen.

**Statistical Summary and Breakdown**

Fifty-five school districts reported 98 challenges in the 2008-2009 academic year, while 43 school districts reported a sum of 102 challenges in the previous year. That is a 28% increase in the number of school districts reporting challenges, but a 4% decrease in the number of total challenges. Put otherwise, 5.33% of the school districts in the state reported challenges this most recent school year, whereas 4.17% of all districts reported challenges last year. Accounting for only responding districts, rather than all districts, the figures become 6.2% (55 out of 889 responding districts) and 5.4% (43 out of 786 responding districts), respectively.

The figures above illustrate an overall rise in the concentration of challenges. That is, the average number of titles challenged by a district reporting at least one challenge has decreased from 2.4 (102 challenges reported by 43 school districts) to 1.8 (98 challenges reported by 55 school districts). This decrease is likely due to the inordinate number of challenges reported last year in Houston ISD (20) and Round Rock ISD (9). All the while, Stephenville ISD revealed the most challenges this year with 11.

In terms of challenges resulting in an outright ban on a library or curricular book, this school year’s results are nearly identical to those of last year. Only 26 of the 98 (27%) challenges resulted in a banning during the most recent school year, whereas 27 of the 102 reported challenges (26%) resulted in the challenged title being
banned during the 2007-2008 academic year. While last year we reported a 42% decrease in the overall number of banned books and a 35% decrease in the “success” rate of challenges from the preceding year (2006-2007), the change in both figures was negligible this year. We regard this as something of a success, considering last year saw such a decline in bans and little has changed this year.

Oftentimes, school boards react to a book challenge with actions that stop short of removing books from a school’s library. These actions are known as restrictions and they fall into two categories: restriction to access/special permission required, and allowance of an alternate book--the latter refers only to curricular books. Access to a library book may be restricted in a number of ways, but most commonly an access-restricted book may only be borrowed (1) by students of a certain age/grade level or (2) by students with parental permission.

When a challenge is made to a curricular book, a school district may respond by assigning alternative readers to complaining students or, perhaps, to those students with parents who object to the content of the challenged text. That said, 22% (22 titles) of this year’s challenges resulted in restrictions, while 32% (34 titles) of last year’s challenged books were ultimately restricted. This represents a promising decrease of 31% in the restriction rate and 29% decrease in the number of restricted books.

Not all book challenges result in restrictive action by school districts. In fact, it is not rare for a school board to take matters of intellectual freedom seriously and elect to reshelve a challenged book, allowing free and unrestricted access. This year 27 challenges (28%) resulted in retention, while last year 36 challenged books (35%) were retained. This reflects a slight but unfortunate move away from retention and toward restricting.

It is important to note that 70.2% (889/1266) of districts responded to the ACLU of Texas’ information requests this year, as opposed to last year’s rate of 62.57%. Due to the larger sample size, this leads us to believe this year’s results paint a more accurate portrait of censorship in public school libraries. It should also be noted that the result of 11 of the 98 challenges are still pending. These books could eventually be banned, restricted, or retained; it is simply too early to tell.

**Where were the Most Challenges?**

Stephenville, Houston and Irving school districts reported the most challenges for the 2008-2009 school year. Stephenville ISD led the charge this year with 11 challenges, all of which resulted in bans. Houston ISD and Irving ISD tied for the second most this year with six challenges each. This marks quite the improvement for HISD, as the district reported 20 challenges last year. Unfortunately, only one of HISD’s six challenges resulted in the book being retained without restriction. While Irving ISD experienced just as many challenges, five of the six books challenged were retained without restriction: a sole book was restricted to the reference library. Tying for third was Seguin ISD and Klein ISD, each with four challenges.
Challenges by Grade Level

For the last two years, we have found most challenges to be occurring at the elementary school level. However, last year the rate of challenges experienced at the middle school level surged from 10% in 2006-2007 to 41% in 2007-2008. This year middle school challenges surpassed elementary school challenges. Also, 40% of challenges were to books housed in middle school libraries, down only 1% from last year. The rate of challenges to books at the elementary school level decreased to 36%, down 11% from last year.

Worth mentioning is the 10% decrease in challenges at the elementary school level; that is a 20% decrease over the last two years. Challenges to high schools were up this year, however. While only 13% of last year’s challenges were to books found in high school libraries, 22% of this year’s challenges were to the same books. Lastly, this year 2% of challenges took place at institutions that cannot be neatly classified as one of the three grade levels mentioned above.

Reasons for Challenges

When we ask school districts about the challenges they have experienced we are especially interested in the reasons why books have been challenged. For each challenge, we ask which qualities of the book the challenging party found objectionable. In past years we have offered five choices, where choosing more than one is acceptable: profanity, violence or horror, sexual content or nudity, mysticism or paganism, and other.

Last year other topped the list as the most cited reason for challenging a book. We viewed this as a problem, as other is not informative. So, in an effort to be clearer we have added two new categories to the list of choices above: politically, racially, or socially offensive, and drug or alcohol use. We also replaced mysticism and paganism with offensive to religious sensitivities.

These changes were made because we found many other complaints were often associated with one of the two new categories. We also found that many others were categorized as “anti-Christian” or atheist in nature, so we
broadened *mysticism and paganism* to *offensive to religious sensitivities* to account for these closely related complaints.

This year 60 books were challenged for containing *sexual content or nudity*, making it the most often cited reason for challenging a book. Of these 60 books, 17 were banned and the use of 14 was restricted. Additionally, 17 of these books were retained. Discounting *other, sexual content and nudity* was also last year's most often cited reason for challenging a book. However, it was then only associated with 43 challenges, 27 of which resulted in a banning or restriction.

*Profanity* was the second most often cited reason for challenging a book this year. Thirty-seven books were challenged for this reason. Ultimately, 10 of these challenges resulted in a ban and another 10 resulted in a restriction of access.

*Politically, racially or socially offensive* (PRS) and *violence or horror* are next on the list, respectively. PRS content was the reason 16 books were challenged. Of these 16, three were banned, the use to two was restricted, and six were retained. With 15 challenges, *violence or horror* is only slightly lower on the list. Three of these 15 resulted in a ban, three in a restriction, and two in retention.

*Drugs or alcohol use* and *offensive to religious sensitivities* were the next lowest pair on the list. Eight books were challenged for references or depictions of *drug or alcohol* use. None of these books was banned; however, the use to five was restricted and two were retained without restriction. Six books were found to be *offensive to religious sensitivities* and were challenged as a result: one was banned, the use of three was restricted, and two were retained without restriction.

*Other* was at the bottom of the list this year, unlike last year when it was the most often cited reason for challenging a book. One must assume this was due mostly in part to the addition and broadening of the other categories. This year only four books were challenges for reasons not falling under the above six categories, but none of these were banned or restricted.

**Process, Policy and Appeals**

Most school districts in Texas have formal reconsideration policies in place for use in the event that a book is challenged. Reconsideration policies are designed to ensure books are neither restricted nor banned behind closed doors or without clear guidelines. Furthermore, formal reconsideration policies exist to provide transparency, accountability, predictability and the opportunity for the fate of each book to receive a fair trial of sorts. Sometimes members of the community may even voice their opinion on the book’s place in the library.

This year we began to ask each school district about their reconsideration policies. Specifically, we asked them two questions. First, we asked each district to list the personnel responsible for reviewing (and deciding) challenges. The choices we gave were: administration only, librarian only, school board only, and review committee. Secondly, we asked each district if the decision to ban each book is final or not.

Of the 889 district that responded to our open records requests, 786 responded—at least in part—to our questions about their reconsideration policies. Four hundred eighty-one (61%) of these reported a review committee is in charge of reviewing challenges. Usually review committees are comprised of a combination of teachers familiar with the material, librarians, and administrative staff. Sometimes even parents and students are asked to join these committees. Usually it is the principal who names the committee.
Schools with a policy giving the school board sole authority to decide the fate of challenged books were the next most common. We found 143 (18%) school districts to have this as their policy. Following closely behind were school districts that give this responsibility to members of the administration (e.g. principal or superintendent). There are 135 (17%) of these districts. Surprising, only 27 (3%) school districts give librarians sole discretion in reviewing challenges.

The second question, *are decisions to ban or restrict final*, returned alarming results. There were 753 districts that responded to this question. Of these districts, 414 (55%) reported that all decisions are final. This means once a book is banned in these districts there is no formal appeals process by which a community member or student might hope to have a book reinstated into the library.

On the question of finality, 339 districts reported having some sort of appeals process in place. Most often these were either two-tiered or three-tiered processes. With the former, the decision is appealed directly to the school board. With the latter, there is a second level before the school board, usually the superintendent.

While researching the various reconsideration policies districts employ, we came across a particularly interesting and discouraging finding in Houston ISD. HISD is the seventh largest school district in the United States and one that frequently experiences a relatively large number of challenges. In this key district we discovered what is safe to call a complete failure in policy, record keeping, and government transparency. When asked to provide records of their review committees meetings and membership rolls, representatives of HISD were forced to admit that no such records are kept.

Though the deliberations of HISD’s review committees affect a large number of students, the public has little hope of finding key information pertaining to their decisions. If a citizen wanted to request the names, votes, and arguments of the individuals who reviewed a challenge, she would be out of luck. We regard this information as essential public information that should be well documented and available to the public. Decisions directly affecting the constitutional rights of students should simply not be made by anonymous actors and behind closed doors.

**Most Challenged Authors and Titles**

There are some authors whose works are challenged in Texas nearly every year. Three books were banned or restricted in the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic years: *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, and *The Black Tattoo* by Sam Enthoven.

Some noteworthy authors were also challenged this year and in previous years, including: Gary Paulsen, John Steinbeck, Maurice Sendak, Judy Blume, Anonymous (Go Ask Alice), Robert Cormier, and Ray Bradbury. As a side note, renowned authors on the list for the first time include Salman Rushdie, Orson Scott Card, Stephen Chbosky, and Cormac McCarthy.
Though these authors’ works have been challenged in years prior, none of them were among this year’s most challenged authors. The most challenged author in this year’s report was P.C. Cast. In Stephenville ISD, all six books in her House of Night series were banned at Henderson Junior High School. What’s more, the second most challenged (and banned) author this year was Richelle Mead; all five books her Vampire Academy series were banned at the same school. This makes Stephenville ISD the most prolific banner of the year with 11 bans.

The deeds of Stephenville ISD do not end there, however. Both series are about teenage vampires. It seems that an individual or group of people went on a crusade against books about teenage vampires. Though the books were all challenged for sexual content or nudity, one can’t help but surmise these books were targeted at least in part because of the type of characters portrayed.

The most shameful aspect of Stephenville ISD’s practices was the district’s preemptive banning of the books. None of the 11 books banned at Henderson Jr High were named in their response to our records request. Rather, the district simply reported that they had banned the two teen vampire series from the library. This is interesting because neither series has been completed. So, Stephenville ISD actually banned books that have not yet been published and perhaps even books that have yet to be written. There is no way the district could know the content of these books, and yet they have been banned.

The fourth most challenged author this year was Lauren Myracle with five challenges. Myracle writes contemporary young adult novels and is most famous for her IM series. Three of these books were challenged in three districts but none were banned. The fourth most challenged author was Gary Paulsen, the author of young adult fiction often set in the wilderness. Three of his books were challenged: one was banned, one lost its place as a classroom reader, and one was age restricted.

**Texas Library Association Resources**

The Texas Library Association (TLA) holds that the freedom to read is a corollary of the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of the press. Freedom of choice in selecting materials is a necessary safeguard to the freedom to read and must be protected against extra-legal attempts by self-appointed censors to control that process. Citizens have the right of free inquiry, and democracy itself rests on an open dialogue and demands that freedom of the press in all forms of public communication be defended and preserved.

The Association, through its Intellectual Freedom Committee, supports access to information by responding to librarians facing book challenges, offering model policies and procedures, tracking reports of book challenges by its members, and supporting policies and legislative action that respect access to information. Members of TLA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee are also available to consult with librarians facing intellectual freedom challenges. For more information on these resources visit:  [www.txla.org/groups/committees/IF](http://www.txla.org/groups/committees/IF)
Banned Books:

Books Removed from Library Shelves or Class Reading Lists

Laurie Anderson
*Speak*

Crosby Bonsall
*Mine’s the Best*

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
*Intimate Universe - The Human Body*

Kevin Brooks
*Being*

P.C. Cast
*Marked*

P.C. Cast
*Betrayed*

P.C. Cast
*Chosen*

P.C. Cast
*Untamed*

P.C. Cast
*Hunted*

P.C. Cast
*Tempted*

Gennifer Choldenko
*Al Capone Does My Shirts*

Robert Cormier
*The Chocolate War*

E.R. Frank
*Life is Funny: a novel*

Honor Head
*My Pet Puppy*

Annette Curtis Lance
*Blood and Chocolate*

Richelle Mead
*Vampire Academy*

Richelle Mead
*Frostbite*

Richelle Mead
*Shadow Kiss*

Richelle Mead
*Blood Promise*

Richelle Mead
*Spirit Bound*

Gary Paulsen
*Lawn Boy*

Mal Peet
*Tamar*

Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell
*and Tango Makes Three*

Maurice Sendak
*In the Night Kitchen*

Sara Shepard
*Pretty Little Liars*

James St James
*Freak Show*
### Restricted Books:

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rudolfo Anaya</td>
<td>Bless Me, Ultima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Blume</td>
<td>Forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Chbosky</td>
<td>Perks of Being a Wallflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meg Cot</td>
<td>Princess on the Brink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Enthoven</td>
<td>The Black Tattoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Hughes</td>
<td>Drug Related Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Kingsolver</td>
<td>The Bean Trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masashi Kishimoto</td>
<td>Naruto vol. 1: The Tests of the Ninja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Klages</td>
<td>Green Glass Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Koertge</td>
<td>Shakespeare Bats Cleanup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Krensky</td>
<td>The Bogeyman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chiggers</td>
<td>Hope Larson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheila P. Moss</td>
<td>The Legend of Buddy Bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cormac McCarthy</td>
<td>The Road</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren Myracle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Paulsen</td>
<td>The Fox Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johnny Rico</td>
<td>Blood Makes the Grass Grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salman Rushdie</td>
<td>The Satanic Verses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellen Ruskin</td>
<td>The Westing Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Lee Smith</td>
<td>Marijuana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retained Books:

Challenges That Did Not Affect Students’ Accessibility to Books

Barbers Hill ISD
Barbers Hill Primary
Mary Hoffman
*Boundless Grace*

Brazosport ISD
Clute Intermediate
Melody Carlson
*Pitch Black: Color Me Lost*

Corpus Christi ISD
Cullen Middle School
Anonymous
*Go Ask Alice*

King High School
Denise Zimmerman
*The Idiot’s Guide to Wicca and Witchcraft*

Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Andre Elementary
Nicole Rubel
*It’s Hot and Cold in Miami*

Denton ISD
Strickland Middle School
J. Michael Straczynski
*Spider-Man*

Eanes ISD
West Ridge Middle School
Lauren Myracle
*ttyl*

Houston ISD
Johnston Middle School
Alex Sanchez
*Getting It*

Irion County ISD
Irion County Elementary
Maurice Sendak
*In the Night Kitchen*

Irving ISD
Crockett Middle School
Allison Van Diepen
*The Street Pharm*

Farine Elementary
Christian Burch
*The Manny Files*

MacArthur High School
Jake Coburn
*Prep*

MacArthur High School
Alan Watt
*Diamond Dogs*

Klein ISD
Klein Oak High school
Chris Crutcher
*Whale Talk*

Leander ISD
Charlotte Cox Elementary
Jack DeMolay
*Ghosts in Amityville: The Haunted House*

Lytle ISD
Lytle Junior High
Daniel Ehrenhaft
*10 Things to Do Before I Die*

McKinney ISD
Evans Middle School
Libba Bray
*A Great and Terrible Beauty*

Midlothian ISD
Mt. Peak Elementary
Darren Shan
*Cirque du Freak: Tunnels of Blood*

Northside ISD
Elementary Schools
Dav Pilkey
*Captain Underpants*

Pottsboro ISD
High School
Kaye Gibbons
*Ellen Foster*

Richardson ISD
Pearce High School, Berkner High School
Michael Connelly
*The Poet*

Round Rock ISD
All 9 middle schools
Lauren Myracle
*ttyl*

Caraway Elementary
Todd Parr
*The Family Book*

Round Rock Opportunity Center
Ellen Hopkins
*Impulse*

Sanger ISD
Clear Creek Intermediate
Jack Gantos
*Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*

The School of Liberal Arts and Science
Sandra Cisneros
*Woman Hollering Creek*
All Challenged Books: by District

Alief ISD
School: All Middle Schools
Book: *Forever*, Judy Blume
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity
Action Taken: Use restricted
Notes: If used in classroom, letter must be sent home notifying parents of sexual content.

Alvin ISD
School: All Junior High Schools
Book: *Ender’s Game*, Orson Scott Card
Reason Cited: Profanity; Violence or horror
Action Taken: Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)

Barbers Hill ISD
School: Barbers Hill Primary
Book: *Boundless Grace*, Mary Hoffman
Reason Cited: Other: treats the subject of divorce
Action Taken: Retained

Birdville ISD
School: All high schools
Book: *The Bean Trees*, Barbara Kingsolver
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity; Offensive to religious sensitivities
Action Taken: Use restricted
Notes: Moved from 9th to 11th grade

Brazosport ISD
School: Clute Intermediate School
Book: *Pitch Black: Color Me Lost*, Melody Carlson
Reason Cited: Other: treats the subject suicide
Action Taken: Retained

Burleson ISD
School: Bransom Elementary
Book: *The Chocolate War*, Robert Cormier
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity
Action Taken: Banned

Celina ISD
School: Celina Intermediate
Book: *Harris and Me*, Gary Paulsen
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Politically, racially, or socially offensive
Action Taken: Use restricted; Alternate book allowed (curriculum only).

Childress ISD
School: Childress Elementary
Book: *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, Gennifer Choldenko
Reason Cited: Profanity
Action Taken: Banned

Cleburne ISD
School: Cleburne High School
Book: *Pillars of Earth*, Ken Follett
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity
Action Taken: Decision pending
Notes: Challenge is to curricular reader.

Copperas Cove ISD
School: Clements Parsons Elementary
Book: *Creepy Castles*, Sarah Parvis
Reason Cited: Violence or horror
Action Taken: Decision pending
Notes: Book was challenged for “being too scary for children.”

Corpus Christi ISD
School: Cullen Middle School
Book: *Go Ask Alice*, Anonymous
Reason: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Politically, racially, or socially offensive; Drugs or alcohol
Action Taken: Retained
School: King High School  
Book: *The Idiot’s Guide to Wicca and Witchcraft*, Denise Zimmerman  
**Reason:** Offensive to religious sensitivities; Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
**Action Taken:** Retained  
**Notes:** The book was re-catalogued and placed in the Religion section of the high school library.

School: Cullen Middle School  
Book: *Blood and Chocolate*, Annette Curtis Lance  
**Reason:** Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Violence or horror  
**Action Taken:** Banned

**Cypress-Fairbanks ISD**

School: All high schools  
Book: *Fallen Angels*, Walter Dean Myers  
**Reason:** Profanity; Violence or horror; Drugs or alcohol  
**Action Taken:** Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)

School: Andre Elementary  
Book: *It’s Hot and Cold in Miami*, Nicole Rubel.  
**Reason Cited:** Sexual content or nudity  
**Action Taken:** Retained

School: Andre Elementary  
Book: *The Legend of Buddy Bush*, Sheila P. Moss  
**Reason Cited:** Profanity; Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
**Action Taken:** Use restricted

**Denton ISD**

School: Strickland Middle School  
Book: *Spider-Man*, J. Michael Straczynski  
**Reason Cited:** Sexual content or nudity  
**Action Taken:** Retained

**Dripping Springs ISD.**

School: Walnut Springs Elementary  
Book: *Flossy and the Fox*, Patricia McKassack  
**Reason Cited:** Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
**Action Taken:** Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)

School: Rooster Springs Elementary  
Book: *Princess on the Brink*, Meg Cabot  
**Reason Cited:** Sexual content or nudity  
**Action Taken:** Use restricted

**East Central ISD**

School: East Central Development Center  
Book: *Tom*, Tomie dePaola  
**Reason Cited:** Violence or horror  
**Action Taken:** Decision pending

**Ector County ISD**

School: Jordan Elementary  
Book: *Chiggers*, Hope Larson  
**Reason Cited:** Profanity  
**Action Taken:** Use restricted

**Fort Stockton ISD**

School: Fort Stockton High School  
Book: *Like Water for Chocolate*, Laura Esquivel  
**Reason Cited:** Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
**Action Taken:** Decision pending

**Frisco ISD**

School: Roach Middle School  
Book: *The Contender*, Robert Lipstye  
**Reason Cited:** Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
**Action Taken:** Decision pending

School: Hooks High School  
Book: *The Chocolate War*, Robert Cormier  
**Reason Cited:** Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
**Action Taken:** Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)
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<th><strong>Joaquin ISD</strong></th>
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<td>Book: <em>Freak Show</em>, James St. James</td>
<td>Book: <em>In the Night Kitchen</em>, Maurice Sendak</td>
<td>Book: <em>Naruto vol 1; The Tests of the Ninja</em>, Masashi Kishimoto</td>
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<td><strong>Book:</strong> <em>Drug Related Diseases</em>, Barbara Hughes</td>
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*Book:* *Whale Talk*, Chris Crutcher  
*Reason Cited:* Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
*Action Taken:* Retained

School: All high schools  
*Book:* *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy  
*Reason Cited:* Violence or horror  
*Action Taken:* Use restricted

**Lockhart ISD**

School: Lockhart High School  
*Book:* *Blood Makes the Grass Grow Green*, Johnny Rico  
*Reason Cited:* Sexual content or nudity; Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
*Action Taken:* Use restricted

**Nederland ISD**

School: Langham Elementary  
*Book:* *My Pet Puppy*, Honor Head  
*Reason Cited:* Profanity  
*Action Taken:* Banned

**New Caney ISD**

School: New Caney High School  
*Book:* *The Secret Life of Bees*, Sue Monk Kidd  
*Reason:* Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
*Action Taken:* Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)

**Northside ISD**

School: Elementary Schools  
*Book:* *and Tango Makes Three*, Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell  
*Reason Cited:* Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
*Action Taken:* Use restricted

**Northside ISD**

School: Elementary Schools  
*Book:* *Captain Underpants*, Dav Pilkey  
*Reason Cited:* Sexual content or nudity  
*Action Taken:* Retained

**Pearsall ISD**

School: Pearsall Intermediate  
*Book:* *Marijuana*, Sandra Lee Smith  
*Reason Cited:* Drugs or alcohol  
*Action Taken:* Use restricted

**Laredo ISD**

School: JC Martin Elementary  
*Book:* *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, Jeff Kinney  
*Reason Cited:* Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
*Action Taken:* User provided no response

**Leander ISD**

School: Canyon Ridge Elementary  
*Book:* *Tempting Faith*, DiNapoli, Lisa Gabriele  
*Reason Cited:* Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
*Action Taken:* Decision pending

School: Charlotte Cox Elementary  
*Book:* *Ghosts in Amityville: The Haunted House*, Jack DeMolay  
*Reason Cited:* Violence or horror  
*Action Taken:* Retained

School: Westside Elementary  
*Book:* *The Bogeyman*, Stephen Krensky  
*Reason Cited:* Violence or horror; Drugs or alcohol  
*Action Taken:* Use restricted

**Lytle ISD**

School: Lytle Junior High School  
*Book:* *10 Things to Do Before I Die*, Daniel Ehrenhaft  
*Reason Cited:* Sexual content or nudity; Violence or horror  
*Action Taken:* Retained

**McKinney ISD**

School: Evans Middle School  
*Book:* *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, Libba Bray  
*Reason Cited:* Sexual content or nudity  
*Action Taken:* Retained

**Midlothian ISD**

School: Mt. Peak Elementary  
*Book:* *Cirque du Freak: Tunnels of Blood*, Darren Shan  
*Reason Cited:* Profanity  
*Action Taken:* Violence or horror  
*Action Taken:* Retained

**Navarro ISD**

School: Navarro Junior High School  
*Book:* *Pretty Little Liars*, Sara Shepard  
*Reason Cited:* Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
*Action Taken:* Banned
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<td>Notes: Book was removed because of missing text before challenged. It was replaced by a book on the same subject.</td>
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**Sheldon ISD**

School: CE King High School  
Book: *Intimate Universe-The Human Body* (video), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned

**Spring ISD**

School: Spring High School  
Book: *Crescent*, Diana Abu-Jaber  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Alternate book allowed

**Stephenville ISD**

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Betrayed*, P.C. Cast  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned  

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Hunted*, P.C. Cast  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned  

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Marked*, P.C. Cast  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned  

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Tempted*, P.C. Cast  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned  

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Untamed*, P.C. Cast  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned

**Spring ISD**

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Blood Promise*, Richelle Mead  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned  

School: Henderson Junior High  
Book: *Frostbite*, Richelle Mead  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Banned

**Tomball ISD**

School: Tomball High School  
Book: *My Sister's Keeper*, Jodi Picoult  
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Alternate book allowed (curriculum only)

**Whitehouse ISD**

School: Whitehouse High School  
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Use restricted

**Woodville ISD**

School: Woodville Elementary  
Book: *Mine’s the Best*, Crosby Bonsall  
Reason Cited: Politically, racially, or socially offensive  
Action Taken: Banned  

School: Woodville Intermediate  
Book: *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup*, Ron Koertge  
Reason Cited: Sexual content or nudity  
Action Taken: Use restricted

**Charter School**

School: The School of Liberal Arts and Science (Dallas)  
Book: *Woman Hollering Creek*, Sandra Cisneros  
Reason Cited: Profanity; Sexual content or nudity; Offensive to religious sensitivities  
Action Taken: Retained
A Short Summary of Each Challenged Book:

10 Things To Do Before I Die, Daniel Ehrenhaft. Realizing he only has 24 hours left to live, normally cautious 16-year-old Ted Burger sets out to complete a “to-do” list compiled by his friends.

A Great and Terrible Beauty, Libba Bray. After witnessing her mother’s death, Gemma is haunted by visions while she attends a prep boarding school in London. Learning to control her visions, Gemma is able to use her magical powers for good and work to avenge some past magical wrongdoings.

Al Capone Does My Shirts, Gennifer Choldenko. In 1935, 12-year-old Moose moves to Alcatraz with his mother, prison-guard father, and autistic sister Natalie. Moose befriends a girl named Piper who has a knack for getting him into trouble, but also helps him come to terms with his new life on the island.

and Tango Makes Three, Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. 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.

Being, Kevin Brooks. A routine trip to the doctor turns into a nightmare for Robert Smith, who discovers that he does not have human organs. Embarking as a fugitive, Robert travels across England and beyond, wanting to avoid the facts of his situation while also questioning everything he thought was real.

Betrayed, P.C. Cast. Young vampire Zoey must confront danger and reconcile her past with her present as her home, the House of Night, is threatened.

Bless Me, Ultima, Rudolfo Anaya. Set in World War II era New Mexico, a young boy must face questions of morality and religion when he meets Ultima, a healer who uses herbs and magic.

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.

Blood Makes The Grass Grow Green, Johnny Rico. Rico’s autobiographical account details his time fighting against the Taliban as an American soldier.

Blood Promise, Richelle Mead. A story of three vampires who must make sacrifices and compromises after they are captured by an enemy group.

Body Language, Alan and Barbara Pease. The Peases’ work offers a look into how humans communicate nonverbally; focusing on body language, the book provides advice and information on the topic for those wishing to read deeper into others’ communication.

Boundless Grace, Mary Hoffman. Young Grace travels to Africa to meet her father’s new wife and family.

Captain Underpants, Dav Pilkey. A collection of children’s humor stories featuring characters such as Professor Poopypants and the Wedgie Woman.

Chiggers, Hope Larson. As Abby returns for another summer at camp, she finds that her old friends aren’t just as she left them and is forced to forge new bonds with the girls at her camp.

Chosen, P.C. Cast. Vampire Zoey must navigate her way through chaotic events at her vampire finishing school and is forced to confront secrets, murder, and love.
**Cirque du Freak: Tunnels of Blood**, Darren Shan. Darren and Evra discover blood-drained corpses and embark on a mission to find the creatures responsible.

**Creepy Castles**, Sarah Parvis. A compilation of some of the world’s scariest locations.

**Crescent: A Novel**, Diana Abu-Jaber. Set in Los Angeles, this story follows Sirine who falls in love with an Iraqi-born academic, only to have their relationship complicated by disturbances in the Middle East.

**Diamond Dogs**, Alan Watt. Neil, a high-school football player, kills a boy while driving drunk. Neil’s father, the sheriff of the town, hides the body but is subsequently called to work on the case. As the events unfold, Neil’s life becomes filled with self-loathing, lies, and betrayal.

**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.

**Drawing Portraits**, Barrington Barber. An instructional book on how to draw portraits and improve one’s skills.

**Drug Related Diseases**, Barbara Hughes. Discusses a number of drugs, including alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines, and the health problems that may result from their use or abuse.

**Ellen Foster**, Kaye Gibbons. Eleven-year-old orphan Ellen faces difficult situations and unloving homes until she finds a place to belong.

**Ender’s Game**, Scott Orson Card. The story of child genius Ender Wiggin, who must save the world from malevolent alien “buggers.”


**Fallen Angels**, Walter Dean Myers. Set during the Vietnam War, this story follows Perry, a teenager from Harlem, as he lives life on the front lines of the war.

**Falling Angels**, Tracy Chevalier. Living in Edwardian London, Lavinia and Maude forge a friendship that overcomes social boundaries amidst much social upheaval.

**Flossy and the Fox**, Patricia McKassack. In the rural South, young Flossy outsmarts a fox on her way to deliver eggs.

**Forever**, Judy Blume. A story of first love between high school seniors Katherine and Michael.

**Freak Show**, James St. James. Teenage drag queen Billy Bloom pushes boundaries and challenges social norms at the conservative Eisenhower Academy.

**Frostbite**, Richelle Mead. Three vampire friends must join forces against an enemy army.

**Getting It**, Alex Sanchez. Fifteen-year-old Carlos asks his gay friend Sal to give him a makeover; Sal agrees, but only in exchange for Carlos’ help in forming a Gay-Straight Alliance.

**Ghosts in Amityville: The Haunted House**, Jack DeMolay. An account of one of the most famous ghost stories in America, as told from the perspective of the inhabitants of the haunted house.

**Go Ask Alice**, Anonymous. An anonymous diary of a girl whose loneliness drives her to try drugs and eventually let her life spin out of control.

**Green Glass Sea**, Ellen Klages. Two girls spend a year in Los Alamos as their parents work on the atomic bomb that will end World War II.

**Harris and Me**, Gary Paulsen. An 11-year-old spends his summer on a family farm and befriends his prankster cousin Harris.

**Hunted**, P.C. Cast. Vampire Zoey and her friends must discover a way to deal with something that might bring down their House of Night.
La Cocina de Noche, Maurice Sendak. Spanish language edition of In the Night Kitchen. See synopsis for In the Night Kitchen below.

Impulse, Ellen Hopkins. Three teens in a psychiatric hospital tell their stories of failed suicides.

In the Night Kitchen, Maurice Sendak. A nighttime adventure in a baker’s kitchen narrated by a child.

Intimate Universe: The Human Body, BBC (video). An in-depth look at the physiological and emotional workings of the human body throughout the lifespan.

It’s Hot and Cold in Miami, Nicole Rubel. Chronicling the fifth grade year of twins Rachel and Rebecca, the story highlights their adventures and the competitive spirit that exists between the girls.

Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key, Jack Gantos. Written from Joey’s perspective, this story chronicles the life of a boy with Attention-Deficit Disorder.

l8r g8r, Lauren Myracle. Three best friends detail the ups and downs of high school life through instant-message conversations.

Lawn Boy, Gary Paulsen. On his twelfth birthday, the narrator receives a lawn mower and embarks on a business venture that leads him to climb the financial ladder with great success.

Life is Funny, E.R. Frank. Author Frank describes the lives of eleven Brooklyn teenagers as they navigate through school, relationships, and family problems.

Like Water for Chocolate, Laura Esquivel. Main character Tita’s sister marries Tita’s love while the unmarried sister is left to prepare the wedding feast. Esquivel’s story is one about the intertwining of food and love, and of breaking traditional norms.

Marijuana, Sandra Lee Smith. A scientific book that examines the ways marijuana has been produced and used, and discusses the harmful effects of the drug on the mind and body.

Marked, P.C. Cast. An introduction to vampire Zoey and the House of Night, in which she finds friendship, love, and adventure.

Mine’s The Best, Crosby Consall. Two boys, each with a balloon, debate over whose is better.

My Brother Sam Is Dead, Christopher Collier. The classic story of one family torn apart by the Revolutionary War.

My Pet Puppy, Honor Head. A book designed to help children learn how to care for their pet.

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 vol 1: The Tests of the Ninja, Masashi Kishimoto. Naruto attempts to gain entrance to the Ninja Academy, make friends with his classmates, and pass an upper-level ninja test.

Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck. A story of two migrant farm hands, father-like George and simple-minded Lennie, who weather tough times together.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Stephen Chbosky. A coming-of-age story told in the form of letters written by protagonist Charlie, who must deal with sex, drugs, friends, and family problems in his 10th grade year.

Pillars of the Earth, Ken Follett. A story that chronicles one man’s journey to build a cathedral in 12th century England while navigating the chaotic political landscape of the era.

Prep, Jake Coburn. A story focusing on male Manhattan prep-school students who fight, do drugs, drink heavily, and join gangs despite their privileged and wealthy upbringings.

Pretty Little Liars, Sara Shepard. Four high school girls grapple with secrets and a missing childhood friend.

Princess on the Brink, Meg Cabot. Princess Mia wonders whether or not to use sex to keep her boyfriend Michael from moving to Japan.

Shadow Kiss, Richelle Mead. Vampire Rose fights a personal battle over whether to save her best friend or hold on to the boy she loves.

Shakespeare Bats Cleanup, Ron Koertge. Fourteen-year-old, baseball-obsessed Kevin takes to writing poetry when he is diagnosed with mono. His poetry provides insight into his adolescent dreams, romance, and grief.

Speak, Laurie Anderson. Teenage outcast Melinda begins to find it hard to speak – physically. As she observes the world around her, she searches for her true voice.

Spider-Man, J. Michael Straczynski. One of the man Spider-Man comics the author has written.

Spirit Bound, Richelle Mead. The fifth installment of Mead’s Vampire Academy series. Due for release in 2010.

Tamar, Mal Peet. A drama about resistance fighters in the Netherlands during World War II, partially narrated by a resistance fighter’s granddaughter whose curiosity compels her to research her grandfather’s past.

Tempted, P.C. Cast. Vampire Zoey discovers she has the power to stop the evil immortal, but only with the chance of losing her own life.

Tempting Faith DiNapoli, Lisa Gabriele. Faith, the eldest daughter of an Italian family, takes it upon herself to compensate for her entire family’s shortcomings by being as much of a “saint” as possible.

The Bogeyman, Stephen Brensky. A guide to the various bogeymen that have appeared in film, literature, and folklore throughout the ages.

The Chocolate War, Robert Cormier. Jerry’s refusal to sell chocolate for a class fundraiser launches the entire school into a battle of control and honor.

The Contender, Robert Lipstye. High school dropout Alfred joins a gym in his quest to become a champion boxer.

The Dirty Cowboy, Amy Timberlake. A cowboy decides to take his yearly bath, only to emerge unrecognizable to his canine companions, who refuse to relinquish the cowboy’s clothing.

The Family Book, Todd Parr. A children’s book that illustrates the many and varied types of families, from the traditional nuclear family to those with same-sex parents.

The Foxman, Gary Paulsen. A story of friendship and healing in Minnesota’s wilderness that focuses on a 15-year-old orphan who is forced to move away from his alcoholic parents.

**The Legend of Buddy Bush**, Sheila P. Moses. Accused of raping a white woman, Buddy Bush must endure arrest, trial, and visits from the Ku Klux Klan.

**The Manny Files**, Christian Burch. Matthew, a male nanny, is hired to care for four children, one of whom takes it upon herself to get him fired.

**The Poet**, Michael Connelly. Jack, a Denver crime reporter, is given the assignment of writing a story about his brother Sean’s suicide. However, Jack isn’t convinced that Sean’s death was a suicide and he proceeds to launch his own investigation into his brother’s death.

**The Road**, Cormac McCarthy. A story of a father and son struggling to survive in a post-nuclear-holocaust world, full of gray skies and starvation.

**The Satanic Verses**, Salman Rushdie. Two actors from India are the main characters in a series of allegorical tales about metamorphoses, dreams, and revelations.

**The Secret Life of Bees**, Sue Monk Kidd. In the 1960’s South, 14-year-old Lily embarks on a journey with her nanny to find answers about her mother and her past.

**The Street Pharm**, Allison Van Diepen. In Brooklyn, Ty is a 17-year-old drug dealer who must navigate through relationships and a family business while trying to stay alive on the streets.

**The Westing Game**, Ellen Raskin. A mystery that explores the Halloween murder of Sam Westing.


**Tom**, Tomie dePaola. An autobiographical account of the author’s relationship with his grandfather, Tom.

**ttfn**, Lauren Myracle. Through a series of instant messages, three high school friends keep in touch and offer each other advice in dealing with high school happenings.

**Untamed**, P.C. Cast. High school vampire Zoey deals with being a social outcast.

**Vampire Academy**, Richelle Mead. Two vampire best friends begin school at a vampire academy and are faced with “typical” high school challenges.

**Vampires**, Stephen Krensky. Krensky offers information on vampire history, folklore, and reported attacks, among other topics.

**Whale Talk**, Chris Crutcher. Orphan T.J. assembles an army of outcasts to teach the school’s jocks a lesson.

**Woman Hollering Creek**, Sandra Cisneros. Mexican-American women of San Antonio muse on their loyalty to Mexico, their lovers, and their sense of self-worth.
The ACLU of Texas Interviews H. G. Bissinger

H. G. Bissinger’s 
Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, a Dream tells the story of the 1988 Permian High School football team of Odessa. Bissinger, a journalist by trade, spent an entire year in Odessa in order to acquaint himself with the team, the fans and the culture. In doing his research, he found rampant racism and sexism in Odessa. He also found that Permian High valued football over academics.

Bissinger’s reporting on Odessa’s football culture was, at times, unflattering for the town. In order to expose the racism he found, he often quoted the townsfolk employing racial epithets. A substantial amount of vulgarities also made it to the page.

Last year, Friday Night Lights was challenged in Beaumont ISD for racism, sexual content, and profanity. The district responded to the challenge by not just banning the book in a single school, as is most often the case, but by banning the book in every one of the districts’ 30 school libraries.

A ban of such magnitude is rare, and the ACLU of Texas believes it was the most egregious instance of censorship reported last year. In an effort to follow up on this story we interviewed H. G. Bissinger to get his thoughts on the banning, and censorship of public school library books in general.

Please tell our readers a bit about yourself.

Well, I would encourage people to check out my website1, but I can give a few highlights.

I was raised in New York City. I went to Phillips Academy in Andover and then to the University of Pennsylvania. I was a newspaper reporter for about 15 years before I went down to Odessa in the summer of 1988 to begin researching Friday Night Lights. I lived there for a year with my family.

I’ve written several books since Friday Night Lights. The second book was a book about urban America called A Prayer for the City (1998). My third book was about Major League Baseball called Three Nights in August (2005). And then there’s a fourth book coming out in September that I’ve written with the basketball player Lebron James that's called Shooting Stars (2009). I am also a contributing writer and editor at Vanity Fair magazine. I’ve done that for over a decade. And—not to brag—but I won the Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting in 1987. I now live in Philadelphia with my wife and three sons.

Would you describe the responses you have received from individuals who have read Friday Night Lights.

Overall, the responses have been fantastic. I’ve gotten thousands of very positive reactions: “the book was seminal…” “very important…” “it really described the culture of sports and the impact it has on small town lives in way no book had before…” It’s also used in hundreds of high schools and colleges around the country. I’ve had dozens of teachers say “this is the best book we’ve assigned, particularly for high school boys because they really

1 www.buzzbissinger.com
don’t like to read anything but they read *Friday Night Lights.*”

**What did those in Odessa think of the book when it was first released?**

The initial response in Odessa was not fantastic. They were upset with the book. I felt the book was empathetic, but it certainly told the truth when it had too. Whether it was about race, academic standards or gender inequality and the way women were treated in Odessa, it did not sugar coat. The basic message was that high school football had been over emphasized beyond all rational proportion in Odessa. But it was certainly not unique to Odessa. It was a common phenomenon in Texas and in virtually every state in the country.

I also received threats of physical violence from some in Odessa. I was supposed to go down to Odessa to do a series of book signings when the book came out. Various bookstores called the publishers and said, “We cannot guarantee your safety.” So, the publisher elected to cancel those book signings. I know Odessa, and there are great people there, but they take their football very seriously. Though it wasn’t related to the book, Permian had just been declared ineligible for the playoffs. They had been turned in by their rival.² So everyone was going crazy and, as the book came out, they blamed the book and they blamed me for the team’s troubles. It was a very chaotic situation.

**Are they still upset with you in Odessa?**

I’ve been to Odessa five or six times since then. I did go back in 2004 to write an article for *Sports Illustrated* about going back to Odessa on the eve of the film coming out. And within Odessa, many people admitted they hated me when the book came out: “We thought the book was unfair, but as we thought about it and read it, we realized it was a horrible look in the mirror. But it was in many ways an accurate one. So we had to change.” From what I can tell, there have been positive changes in Odessa. As a result of the book, football is not as important.

² The football team had been turned in for holding illegal off-season practices.

Other sports are being emphasized, education is being emphasized, and there is more racial equality. This is music to my ears. The book had a positive impact on Odessa, but I also give Odessa a lot of credit for that.

**What was your reaction to hearing that Beaumont ISD had banned *Friday Night Lights* in all of their school libraries?**

I was saddened, a little surprised, and angered. Sure, the book has a few obscenities. Whether we like to admit it or not, kids down to the age of five have heard obscenities—just turn on a television! But, I think this is an important book for everyone to read, in particular kids from the age of 14 and up. It is very accessible and easy to read, but it talks about themes that are very important. As I said, it talks honestly about race and the ways in which African-American athletes are treated poorly.
It talks about educational standards becoming ridiculous because of the over importance of high school football. It talks about gender inequality. It talks about what happens when a town puts all its hopes and dreams into a high school football team, as Odessa did and so many towns in Texas still do. The situation is not getting any better in Texas. They’re building these outlandish stadiums that cost millions of dollars, have replay scoreboards, VIP seating and licensing opportunities.

I thought Beaumont’s decision was a horrible form of censorship and extremely shortsighted. I understand it was banned in part for sexual content, but I’m not sure what they were referring to in terms of sexual content. I barely remember anything like that in the book. Profanity was used because you have to quote people accurately, that’s what a reporter does. This is the language kids sometimes use. I’m sorry if that offends people, but let’s wake up. It wasn’t used gratuitously; it was used to accurately reflect the feelings of the people I wrote about at the time.

I’m also sorry if the people of Beaumont or anyone else got offended by the use of the n-word in the book. Trust me, I was incredibly offended by the use of that word while in Odessa. The idea that that word would be used routinely by whites in the late 1980s was appalling to me as well, but I had to use that word. If I don’t use that word in the book, then the whole impact of writing about racism would have been completely lost.

It seems like Beaumont ISD is trying to shield students from the fact that racism exists. How do you feel about this tactic?

I don’t know what they think they are shielding kids from. It’s like they’re acting as if racism doesn’t occur in Beaumont. And that’s not to single out Beaumont; racism occurs everywhere. Just like racism wasn’t unique to Odessa, Texas. It also occurs in Philadelphia where I live and in New York City where I grew up. It occurs everywhere.

Kids and adults should know about racism, and they should be sensitive to it. Friday Night Lights hammers home the message of how we often think of African-Americans who play sports: we love them on the football field, but off the football field we often think they are inferior. This extends to African-American athletes being treated as sub-human in the classroom and not being worth anything except that they play football. And this still goes on today.

For Beaumont to think they are doing anyone a favor by sheltering and shielding kids from depictions of racism, they’re doing exactly the opposite. They are depriving kids of knowledge they should have so that they’re more sensitive to saying things that are inflammatory and aware of the repercussions of what can happen.

How different do you think the high schools in Beaumont ISD are from Permian High School in the late 1980s?

My sense from past history is that Beaumont takes its football pretty seriously. I have to imagine the book hit pretty close to home for many in Beaumont. I’ve been in Texas long enough to know football is important in virtually every community and town in Texas. It’s part of the culture and myth of Texas. And nowhere is the culture of football stronger than it is in Texas. So, I’m sure it did. As it turns out, it hit close to home not just in Texas, but in every state in the country. Otherwise, it would not have sold two million copies. It would not have been made into a movie or a television series. So obviously it hits close to the bone in many places. Beaumont ISD is probably sticking its head in the sand and acting like these problems don’t exist there. But I can pretty much guarantee you, if I spent a year in Beaumont and had the type of access I had in Beaumont that I had in Odessa, I would pretty much find the same things there that I found in Odessa.

How are schools and students affected when books like Friday Night Lights are banned?

Whether it is my book or any book, they’re being deprived of knowledge they should have. Kids are sophisticated enough today to read something and agree with it or call it silly and not agree with it. Or
they can be offended by it. But no one, whether they’re adults or kids or senior citizens, should be deprived of knowledge. It’s ridiculous.

*Friday Night Lights* is probably considered the most classic book written on sports in the last 25 years. It was named the best book ever written on football by *Sports Illustrated* and the fourth best sports book of all time. Not only is that an honor, it is an indication that this book is really saying something important. Now, as I said, people don’t have to agree with it and people don’t have to like it, but they should have access to it. And that’s true of any book.

**Are there any messages in your book that you think were lost on the censors in Beaumont?**

Look, football is exciting and I love football and in particular I love high school football. I loved going to those Permian games in Odessa. I’m not against football by any stretch of the imagination. But, this book shows what can happen when high school football becomes *the* major thing in town, or the only important thing in town. It kind of swallows everything: academic standards go down, football players don’t get the education they should get and minorities are treated as animals. There is also a very serious gender gap between young men and women who go to high school. The women are treated as inferior and encouraged to not be as smart as the male students because it’s simply *not cool*.

High school football is fun and exciting, it’s great for the fans, but the game ends. And for a lot of these kids, they’re playing in front of thousands of people at the age of 17 or 18, and then they’re has-beens at 19. And no one should have to live that way. I remember hearing an assistant coach saying, “We’re not here to have fun. This is a business trip.” And if anyone in Beaumont says, “We just treat it as a game and it’s just for fun,” he is lying. It is of supreme importance and it’s becoming more and more important all over the country. Calling attention to these problems is all part of the message of *Friday Night Lights*.

**What advice would you offer to those parents who place emphasis on athletics?**

There are great lessons that can be learned from playing sports: lessons about discipline, camaraderie, what it means to work in collaboration, and about achieving your dreams, particularly at the high school level. But you cannot do that to the detriment of completely ignoring a kid’s education. For everyone who gets a college scholarship, or every rare one who gets to the pros, there are hundreds of thousands of kids who don’t get there.

These kids are going to wake up one day and they’re going to ask, “What happened? I have no education, I really don’t have any skills, and I don’t really like to read. What am I going to do?” Life is becoming more complex and more competitive worldwide. America is a very different place than it used to be. So, if you’re a parent and all you care about is sports for your Johnny and Judy, you’re leading them down a terrible path. And I think *Friday Night Lights* showed that.

If, however, you combine the lessons you can learn in sports with academics, then you will have raised a spectacular kid. I know this because the kids I went to high school with who were good athletes and also good in the classroom are the most formidable, competitive professionals I’ve ever met—and they’re enormously successful. So, sports can have a great role, but society must pay more than simple lip service to the value of education.

**Finally, what advice would you offer the parents who try to get books like yours banned in school libraries?**

They are absolutely just fooling themselves. Not only are they fooling themselves, they are fooling their kids. If they really think that by banning books they are protecting their children then they are crazy. They’re not going to be able to do it. Books are beautiful and wonderful, so to deprive a kid of books to shield them from the real world is ridiculous. And it often leads to the opposite; the more you deprive a kid of something the more he or she wants it. So, I think what these parents are doing is dangerous.
15 high school students from across the country will each be awarded a $7,000 college scholarship for their dedication to preserve our civil liberties. Those students will then become part of an elite “class” of student activists, whose talents and passion will be fostered by the ACLU National office.

For more information, please go to the ACLU of Texas website www.aclutx.org. If you would like to apply for an ACLU Youth Activist Scholarship, please contact ACLU of Texas Field Organizer Tracey Hayes at (512) 478-7300 x 124 or thayes@aclutx.org.

The deadline for submissions is Monday, November 23.
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