

Banned Books Exposed!

The freedom to read is *the* reason to celebrate Banned Books Week, September 23–29, 2006. And it is for that very reason that libraries and librarians in the United States have such a long history of protecting Americans' rights to read and access information—this week and every other week.

In 1939 in response to widespread challenges to John Steinbeck's new novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, the American Library Association (ALA) developed The Library Bill of Rights. The document as it is written today states, "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." To read the full Library Bill of Rights visit:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm>

In 1953 when McCarthyism was censoring material and monitoring the activities of average Americans, the ALA worked with publishers to develop the Freedom to Read Statement. The Freedom to Read Statement reads in part, "It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to information." To read the full Freedom to Read Statement visit:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ftstatement/freedomreadstatement.htm>

These two documents are based on the First Amendment which states, "Congress shall make now law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Despite these foundations, books are challenged and removed from libraries every year. Between the years 2000 and 2005 the ALA received notification of over 3000 challenges to books in libraries.

Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) run as an office within ALA, is charged with educating librarians and the public and tracking challenges to library materials. The OIF reports that the following books are the 10 most challenged books from 2000–2005:

1. Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling
2. "The Chocolate War" by Robert Cormier
3. Alice series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
4. "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck
5. "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou
6. "Fallen Angels" by Walter Dean Myers
7. "It's Perfectly Normal" by Robie Harris
8. Scary Stories series by Alvin Schwartz

9. Captain Underpants series by Dave Pilkey
10. "Forever" by Judy Blume

The OIF also tracks other statistics related to challenged books. You can find more statistics collected on book challenges at:

<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=bbwlinks&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=40912>

The American Library Association along with the American Booksellers Association, the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, the American Society of Journalists and Authors, the Association of American Publishers, the National Association of College Stores, and thousands of libraries and librarians celebrate Banned Books Week every year in the last week of September. During Banned Books Week organizations recognize the work librarians do to maintain our freedom to read, our freedom of expression, and our freedom to information.

Written by author/librarian Valerie Nye and presented with author, librarian and troubadour Beth Aeby Teel, at the Santa Fe Public Library, September 24, 2006, in conjunction with Lasting Impressions: The Private Presses of New Mexico, an exhibition at the Palace of the Governors, and Lasting Impressions: A Library Legacy, at the New Mexico State Library.

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