DON’T READ THAT: CENSORSHIP OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by

Lysha R. Thompson

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

December, 2011
Censorship is not a new problem, but the volume of literature directed at the young adult audience has created an increase in the number of challenges. This review of literature examines censorship of young adult literature and contains information pertaining to the increase and instances specific to young adult literature. Information was located by searching the print and electronic databases, journals, and catalogs available through the James C. Kirkpatrick Library, the American Library Association website, and web-blogs of young adult authors. This research concludes that censorship will continue because of the controversial topics addressed in the literature. The young adult reader desires and demands these topics, and the authors are responding. Educating parents, students, and the general public will alleviate some of the attempts at censorship, but censorship will never be eradicated completely.
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APPROVED:

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

New, unusual, or radical ideas can be frightening. They can change attitudes, influence beliefs, and even challenge morals and ethics. Sometimes a new idea is quickly proven wrong, impractical, or simply ignored, and eventually it falls by the wayside and is forgotten. However, history is fraught with radical ideas that have taken root, matured, and eventually led to fundamental changes in science, philosophy, government, and even religion. For trustees of the ‘status quo’ who dread the new or unknown, this can indeed be a frightening time. Yet these trustees are not defenseless and have a very powerful weapon at their disposal. They use it effectively to stifle the free and enlightened thinkers who propose new ways of viewing and evaluating the world around them. That weapon is called ‘censorship.’

The censorship of literature is not a new problem and has been in practice for over 2000 years.

In 360 B.C., Plato described the ideal Republic: “Our first business will be to supervise the making of fables and legends; rejecting all which are unsatisfactory.” . . . Henry VIII established a licensing system requiring printers to submit all manuscripts to Church of England authorities for approval, and in 1529 he outlawed all imported publications. . . . In 1559, in reaction to the spread of Protestantism and scientific inquiry, the Roman Catholic Church issued the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, likely the first published and most notorious list of forbidden books. . . . The Catholic Church continued to print this Index, which grew to 5,000 titles, until 1966. (Mullally, n.d., p. 1)
Humankind has made tremendous advances throughout the 20th Century in several areas including technology, communication, travel, and education. These advances continue in the 21st Century, but the ancient practice of censorship is still prevalent and seems still to be driven by the fear of the unknown. The American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom reports 3,736 book censorship challenges from 2001 to 2008. Thirty-one percent of these challenges were in classrooms while 37% arose in school libraries. Fifty-one percent of the challenges were filed by parents (American Library Association, n. d.). The remaining 49% were filed by teachers, students, and concerned citizens. These statistics suggest that many of the challenges come from parents wishing to protect their child or children from ideas, concepts, or philosophies that they find distressing or offensive. While their motives are noble, and they should certainly have the right to influence the reading choices of their own children, problems arise when their actions reduce or restrict the choices for other readers who may not share their views or ideology.

The censorship of young adult literature in the 21st century is the continuation of a problem that has been in existence for many years. However, 21st century teens are exposed to so much more than teens of even 10 years ago. Young people can experience sex, drugs, or violence with the click of a mouse or with a tap on a smart phone. They can subscribe to the ‘tweets’ of shock pop star Lady Gaga or the volatile Charlie Sheen. Ten years ago, teens had never heard of sexting and didn’t have to deal with cyber bullies. Teens and tweens of the 21st century are natives to technology and exposed to all facets of life through media and music. Because of these things, I came to this topic.
The words associated with the act of book challenges, “challenge” (to call into question or take exception to), “ban” (to prohibit, forbid, or bar), and “censure” (strong or vehement expression of disapproval), have the same central theme of restricting an individual’s access to literature (Random House, 1984). Individuals who challenge the reading material of young adults have just that in mind. They feel the material is inappropriate for whatever reason and, therefore, attempt to keep all teens from having access. The first amendment guaranteeing free speech to everyone encompasses intellectual freedom. “Governments (including school boards) may not restrict minors’ access to materials based on the viewpoint expressed therein” (Ennis, n.d.). The would-be censor does not realize or chooses not to realize that first amendment rights have no age limit.

Is censorship commonplace? According to the Office for Intellectual Freedom, 513 book challenges were reported in 2008. The office also estimates that for every reported challenge, one goes unreported. Sixty-eight percent of the challenges took place in school libraries with parents logging 56 percent of the complaints (American Library Association, 2009). Applying this information to the state of Missouri would imply nearly two challenges a day with a 180 day school year.

Statement of the Problem

Censorship is practiced in the 21st century. Young adult literature has especially come under fire due to the increase in books and materials directed at this age group. *School Censorship in the 21st Century: A Guide for Teachers and School Library Media Specialists*, by John S. Simmons and Eliza T. Dresang, devotes 10 chapters to the problems of censorship of literature prevalent in the 21st century. Simmons and Dresang
(2001) express their concerns about the continuation of censorship in general. However, the authors’ main concern is the increase in challenges of books for students.

According to Simmons and Dresang, the content of young adult literature has evolved and changed over the last 20 years. Young adults expect to read about real-life problems involving situations and settings to which they relate. For example, teenage sex no longer carries the negative social stigma it had 40 years ago. Violence in schools has risen dramatically in the last two decades. Students are victims of bullies, and suicide has become more commonplace. These are just a few of the issues young adults face on a regular basis, and literature dealing with these issues is in high demand. Not only do young readers identify with the characters and problems presented in these books, but often this literature can also be used as a springboard for discussion about many of these controversial issues. Young adult authors, like Helen Hopkins and Chris Crutcher, provide their readers with the types of literature they want to read. The topics teens want to read about are considered shocking by some adults, and many feel those topics are inappropriate. Parents undoubtedly have the right to control what their teen reads. The problem occurs when disapproving adults feel they know what is best for every teen and request the book(s) be removed from the library media center or the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to look at the ways young adult literature is called into question in the 21st century. The history of censorship was explored and compared to the censorship of young adult literature today. The research reveals that censorship has been in practice for over 2000 years and it appears to be increasing.
The demand for literature directed to young people has increased in the last 20 years. Teens expect to read about events and experiences with which they can relate, and young adult authors have responded to this demand. It appears that the increase in the availability of literature specifically for young adults has helped to maintain and even increase the number of challenges.

Research Question

Several questions are examined to understand why attempts to censor take place and how these attempts can be met or even avoided all together:

1. Who attempts to censor books and what are their reasons for doing so?
2. What if the attempt at censorship comes from a teacher, staff member, administrator, or school board member?
3. Who opposes the censorship of young adult literature?
4. Why is intellectual freedom important?
5. What laws protect students’ intellectual freedom?

Limitations of the Study

The study of the censorship of young adult literature in the 21st century has been limited by the amount of scholarly research available and by the focus on young adult literature. The intended audience for young adult literature focuses on teens ages twelve to eighteen. This study was limited to challenges of young adult literature in the United States.

Definition of Terms

Unless one is familiar with library and literary terms, one would not be familiar with censorship and its related terms. The following terms were defined to aid the reader.
Banned book – A book that has been removed from the library or classroom because of supposed controversial topics.

Censorship – The American Library Association (2008) defines Censorship as “the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons – individuals, groups or government officials – find objectionable or dangerous.”

Challenged book – A book that has been singled out as having content that the challenger feels is inappropriate.

Intellectual Freedom – The American Library Association (2008) defines Intellectual Freedom as the “right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored” (n.p.)

Research Design

The information documented was retrieved from educational databases provided by the James C. Kirkpatrick Library, the American Library Association website, and the First Amendment Center website. Terms searched include censorship, young adult literature, intellectual freedom, school libraries, Island Trees vs. Pico. The search terms were used in various orders and combinations to retrieve needed materials.

Chapter one introduces the topic of censorship of young adult literature and how literature is still being challenged and sometimes even banned in the 21st century. Chapter one includes the research questions that provide a framework for the analysis of the literature. Chapter two presents some of the literature written by young adult authors, scholars, and the American Library Association as they express their opinions and
relevant facts about censorship. The final chapter provides answers to the questions posed in chapter one using the review of the literature from chapter two.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

First Amendment and Intellectual Freedom

“First Amendment rights ensure United States citizens have freedom of speech and of the press, among other freedoms relating to expression of beliefs and ideas. The right to receive information has been interpreted as a corollary to the First Amendment, implying the right to read and think for oneself” (Kelsey, 2007, p. 27). Adults, but particularly parents, tend to overlook the inclusion of students under the First Amendment. The First Amendment applies to all citizens. Minors are still considered citizens even though they are not considered to be adults under the law. Therefore, their rights are still protected under the first amendment. Kelsey (2007) reminds media specialists that these rights by no means imply that students should have the same access as adults or that all students should have the same access. Media specialists must find a middle ground for their students while keeping intellectual freedom as their goal. It is understood by both lawmakers and school officials that there are some limits to First Amendment rights. Even the much-coveted right to ‘free speech’ is not absolute. One could assume a reasonable media specialist would never suggest placing pornography in the school library and attempt to cite the First Amendment as justification. Likewise, young adult literature dealing with sex, drugs, or violence should not be available to elementary students. However, by keeping ‘intellectual freedom’ as the goal as Kelsey suggests, we can make sure literature is reaching its intended target while still tempering our decisions with some common sense.
The incidence of book removal in the Island Trees School District in New York resulted in the lawsuit, Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico by Pico. This case is the perfect example of administrators censoring books. In 1975, two school board members removed books from the school’s library based upon a list of books they felt was “ant-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy” (Board of Education v. Pico, 1982). After written objection by the Superintendent, a committee review that recommended only two of the books be removed, and a public hearing, the board members upheld their decision on nine of the original books and only reinstated one title back to the shelves (Foerstel, 2002).

Steven Pico represented students in the legal action that ensued. Kelsey (2007) reports the Supreme Court ruled in 1982 that school boards had the right to remove materials they deemed ‘educationally unsuitable’ or ‘pervasively vulgar,’ but the restriction to materials cannot be justified on the basis of the school boards’ belief of what is not appropriate. Justices Brennan, Marshall, and Stevens concluded that, “While students’ First Amendment rights must be construed ‘in light of the special characteristics of the school environment,’ ibid., the special characteristics of the school library make that environment especially appropriate for the recognition of such rights” (Board of Education v. Pico, 1982). Although the Pico case is not the only court case regarding student intellectual freedom, it is possibly the most-referenced in regards to attempts to censor literature in the school library. The American Library Association (2007) reminds its members that censors don’t always take into consideration the fact that their reasoning for censoring may backfire. The standard they set when successfully challenging material may later be used to challenge something with which they agree.
Article V of the Library Bill of Rights states, “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background or views” (American Library Association, 1996). The American Library Association advocates for the use of the library by everyone. “Every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources, based solely on the chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation of user violates Article V of this bill of rights” (American Library Association, 2008).

The American Library Association (2008) states it is the school media specialist’s role to model the principles of intellectual freedom by the resources they choose and by “sustaining an atmosphere of free inquiry.” The school library is a place of solace for many students; a place where they can locate the information they need or desire without fear of judgment or ridicule. According to the American Library Association (2008), the resources provided by the school library media center should meet all the needs of each student. A good example is a response by author Chris Crutcher in response to a challenge to his book Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes: “When we ban books about kids who feel marginalized and diminished, we ban the kids themselves. We say, ‘Your life is not worth examining, not worth being brought into the light. You don't matter.’ I would want to think long and hard before allowing my school to be perceived in that way” (Crutcher, 2010).

Censorship

“Henry Reichman defines censorship as ‘the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of literary, artistic or educational material – of images, ideas and information – on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of standards
applied by the censor” (Mullally, n.d., p. 1). People who challenge books do not generally consider what they are doing as censorship. Many feel they are offering a service to their community and are proud of the ‘protection’ they are providing for youth. The challenges placed by parents or community members are based upon their beliefs and values, and most feel they are doing the right thing for all children. This can be especially troublesome in a diverse society. Politics, religion, and other personal philosophies vary greatly depending on a person’s background or culture. Bailey (2009) reminds his readers that even though parents or guardians should monitor what their children read and watch, no one has the right to restrict what others’ children read or watch. Censors fail to see their attempt as possibly violating First Amendment rights of all students if their challenge is successful in removing the book from the curriculum or library media center. The First Amendment not only guarantees the right of free speech, but also the right of access to information, ideas, and literature (Larue, 2007). The censor threatens an individual’s right to choose what he or she wants to read.

The American Library Association (2010) reflects on a censor’s motives and states these persons are sincere in their attempts to protect those who cannot protect themselves and feel they are doing the correct thing. According to Cart (2006) the attempt to control is the general reason for censorship.

Reasons for Censorship

Dianne McAfee Hopkins performed two studies in the mid-1990s regarding the challenge of young adult literature. One study was performed at the national level and included middle, junior, and senior high schools. The second study was performed at the state-level in Wisconsin. Hopkins’ (2001) study found scenarios of sexuality to be the
number one reason for complaints. Campbell (2007) quotes the Office of Intellectual Freedom’s documentation that sexually-explicit content is the top reason for challenges. Children are bombarded with sexual innuendoes and sexual content on a daily basis from television, movies, ads, the Internet, music, and especially from their own peers. Some parents feel the only avenue where they can control exposure is through the materials their child reads. Campbell (2007) states that sex is the overriding interest of teens, and they need not only to know the facts about sex, but they also need to understand the feelings and pitfalls of human coupling.

Maturing through adolescence and puberty can be a very emotional and very lonely time for teens. They may feel no one else could possibly be feeling the level of desire, heartbreak, confusion, or pressure as they are. Young adult authors writing about teen relationships and sex are providing adolescent readers with characters with whom they can identify and situations with which they can relate. This literature provides not only the explanation of feelings but tries to frame the story in a context the reader recognizes. If effective, readers perhaps realize they are not alone in their confusion about what they are feeling or experiencing.

Hopkins lists the other primary reasons for challenges: profanity, morality, and obscenity. Strothmann (2009) states censors generally do not take the entire work into consideration but instead focus on words or scenes they find inappropriate. The complainant rarely has read the entire book but concentrate instead on what he or she perceives to be objectionable. Whelan (2009) quotes Carolyn Mackler, author of the Printz honor book *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*, regarding the inclusion of sexual scenarios and curse words. Carolyn Mackler describes her strategy
when using sexual scenarios and curse words as “I don’t throw in sex or swear words just to hook a reader. I put it in if it’s in the context of a story, and I try to have my characters make smart choices” (quoted in Whelan, 2009, p. 30). She argues that it is naïve of adults to believe their teenagers live in a world free of profanity and obscenity. Authors, in order to create a realistic context for their stories, are simply using the words teenagers use and hear every day in emotional or stressful situations.

Self-Censorship

Media specialists fall prey to censorship even when the choice is justified as selection. *School Library Journal* asked 655 media specialists about their collections and found that 70% say they won’t buy certain controversial titles simply because they’re afraid of how parents will respond. Whelan (2009) found other common reasons for avoiding possible troublemaking works: potential backlash from the administration (29%), the community (29%), or students (25%); and 23% of media specialists who say they won’t purchase a book due to personal objections. The likelihood of this type of self-censorship taking place increases when media specialists have already encountered frequent or difficult challenges. The process of defending a piece of literature or book can be a demanding and emotionally draining one. Many media specialists choose the easier option of simply not placing a controversial work into circulation. Even though a media specialist may try to justify this action by claiming the book was unsupportive of the school’s curriculum, it is still a form of censorship, and perhaps the most difficult to fight.

The common goal of school media specialists is to build a collection that supports their schools’ curriculum. The choice of not including a book in the collection because it
does not support the curriculum can be considered selection, but Whelan (2009) contends self-censorship comes into play when a book is not selected because the theme of the book “would cause you some problems” (28). Any student should feel comfortable coming into the media center and locating books to which they can relate, even if the topics are considered to be controversial. *An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights* (American Library Association, 2008) clearly explains the Library Bill of Rights and the role the media specialist plays in protecting students’ rights regarding access to information.

Teachers, too, fall prey to self-censorship when they remove books from classroom collections or from required reading lists because of their own beliefs or fear of objections. The classic works of Mark Twain seem to fall prey to removal from reading lists because a teacher has heard of removal by teachers in other schools or of a challenge faced by another school. “The major basis for such charges is that some of the book’s characters use the racial epithets common to the Mississippi Valley thirty years before Emancipation” (Foerstel, 2002). Foerstel (2002) gives examples of other titles that have fallen prey to teacher censorship such as the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier, and *My Brother Sam is Dead* by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier.

**The Fight against Censorship**

Doyle (2009) reports the majority of challenges remain unknown to the public and are not reported to the American Library Association. Young adult authors such as Chris Crutcher and Laurie Halse Anderson are working hard to change this by publicizing attempts to ban books through their work, their websites, and blogs. Crutcher’s book
Deadline is among the books that began a 2009 censorship fight in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. The number of books challenged in Mt. Sterling grew to seven before reaching the challenge committee. Crutcher and Anderson have responded through letters to the superintendent, posts to their blogs, and attendance at a student-organized protest (Crutcher, 2009 and Anderson, 2009). Author involvement not only helps publicize the attempts at censorship, it also allows authors to explain the content of their books more thoroughly. Since many would-be censors have not actually read the books in question, an author’s unique perspective on the intended overall message can often make the challenge seem trivial or inconsequential by comparison.

Young adult author Ellen Hopkins also came under fire during 2009. She had donated a school visit as a fundraiser raffle that was won by a school media specialist in Norman, Oklahoma. A parent who objected to Hopkins’ novels, Crank and Glass, not only succeeded in getting the superintendent of the school to remove the two novels, but also succeeded in getting Hopkins’ school visit cancelled. While Hopkins’ descriptions of the consequences of methamphetamine addiction are disturbing, they could certainly not be considered explicit. Hopkins argues that the novels’ very real and frightening depictions of her daughter’s own struggles with methamphetamine might be a deterrent to future users.

The American Library Association’s list of books challenged and banned in 2008-2009 includes recently-published books challenged for a variety of reasons. From a perusal of the 2008-2009 list, ‘sexually explicit’ and ‘profanity’ often lead the list. ‘Homosexuality,’ ‘violence,’ ‘anti-family,’ and ‘anti-Christian’ are also well represented. Even books with older copyrights that were challenged in the 1970s and 1980s still
frequently appear on the ALA’s top ten list. Surprisingly, a number of “classics” continue
to make the list each year. Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, J.D. Salinger’s *The
Catcher in the Rye*, and Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are

Banned Books Week, celebrated each year during the last week of September,
was organized in 1982. Banned Books Week (American Library Association, 2010) seeks
to raise awareness of individuals’ rights to intellectual freedom and first amendment
rights. Public librarians and school media specialists participate in the event with displays
and activities to promote intellectual freedom. The event is sponsored by the American
Library Association, American Booksellers Association, American Booksellers
Foundation for Free Expression, American Society of Journalist and Authors, Association
of American Publishers, and the National Association of College Stores. In the
introduction to the 2008-2009 list of challenged and banned books published by the
American Library Association, Robert Doyle (2009) reminds librarians that documented
challenges are requests that would deny anyone the opportunity to read the challenged
material. According to Doyle (2009), in at least one of these cases, challengers were
actually advocating a book burning. Ruth Allen and Alison Kastner began promoting a
teen censorship awareness program in 1998. They take the program into area schools and
discuss censorship, intellectual freedom, and first amendment rights with students. The
program focuses on books, and also song lyrics, which catches the teens’ attention. Allen
and Kastner (2002) state they are careful in their talks with teens who tend to see issues
as black and white.
Allen and Kastner (2002) touch on the issues of intellectual freedom but their main goal for their students is to understand the terms: banning, challenging, and censoring. Many times challenges and bans take place with very little or no media coverage. People within a community and sometimes even the students in a school aren’t always aware that material in their school is being called into question nor are they made aware of the outcome. Allen and Kastner believe that making students aware of their rights will consequently make them more proactive in trying to protect these rights.

Nancy Bailey and Fenice Boyd (2009) write about censorship through the use of metaphors. The duo state they were aware of book banning during their careers but began looking into the practice more thoroughly after the challenges to *Briar Rose* by Jane Yolen. Yolen’s fairy tale received the Best Book for Young Adults award in 1993, was a Nebula Award finalist, and won the Mythopoeic Award. The book has also received negative attention by being challenged and removed in Chappaqua, New York, and being burned on the steps of the Kansas City Board of Education building by the Christian Act Now Coalition on September 15, 1994. These events intrigued the authors and inspired them to begin researching the reasons and motivations behind censorship. They published their research in the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* using metaphors to define censorship.

Bailey and Boyd use the metaphors “Censorship as a Barbed Wire Fence,” “Censorship as Patina,” and “Censorship as a Dangerous Tightrope.” The authors chose the use of metaphors because “metaphors bring to mind concepts that stimulate thought and action” (Bailey, 2009). Their writing is clear, and the metaphors are fitting to the
topic of censorship. Discussion of the authors’ ideas and the metaphors used will be beneficial in the education of young adults regarding censorship.

Censorship as a barbed wire fence (Bailey, 2009) brings to mind the use of the fencing to keep animals in and predators out. Censors attempt to keep new ideas and thoughts from being brought to the attention of the reader. Situations and experiences the censor feels are inappropriate may never be explained if the person who disagrees has his or her way in the situation. Censorship as patina (Bailey, 2009) relates to looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. Nothing that is unpleasant will be heard or seen. Censorship as a dangerous tightrope (Bailey, 2009) refers to the place in which the teacher or librarian may find himself or herself when literature is challenged. The tightrope implies the decisions will be hard because of the possibility of repercussion.
CHAPTER THREE
CONCLUSIONS

With a better understanding of how and why censorship takes place, media specialists, administrators, and concerned parents can deal with challenges in a more informed and logical manner. The questions presented in chapter 1 provide the basic framework to begin understanding censorship of young adult literature. The literature reviewed in chapter 2 can be applied to these questions. As connection are made between chapters one and two, it becomes clear there are no easy answers to alleviating censorship.

Who and Why They Censor

*Who attempts to censor books and what are their reasons for doing so?*

Censorship can come from many directions, but many are aimed at removing information from young adult readers. Parents censor books in the attempt to protect their child and all children from ideas they feel are inappropriate or immoral. Public interest groups, like PABBIS, have become prevalent in the last decade. They attempt to remove all books with themes they deem inappropriate for children. Administrators fall into the role of censor when they agree to the removal of books. Finally, media specialists also find themselves censoring when they self-censor. Media specialist also censor when they choose not to add material to the library media center for fear of retaliation or in the attempt to avoid a book challenge.

Censorship Within the School

*What if the attempt at censorship comes from within our own school/district?*
Media specialists fall prey to censorship when choice is justified as selection. Teachers fall prey to censorship when they choose to not include a book in their classroom libraries because they fear repercussions. Administrators fall prey to censorship when they bow to a request for removal of a book and fail to follow the district’s challenge policy. These are examples of censorship occurring in school districts on a regular basis. Media specialists must be diligent in their selection of materials with censorship ever in mind. They must ask themselves if their decision not to include a book is because it truly does not fit into the curriculum or if it is because of the fear of a possible challenge. Encouraging our current and future media specialists to remember professional priorities and goals will help them to avoid the pitfalls of censorship. School media specialists are charged with the responsibility to protect students’ intellectual freedom and first amendment rights.

Who’s Leading the Fight?

Who is fighting against the censorship of young adult literature?

The American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights ensures all library patrons the right of access to library materials without restriction of age, educational level, literacy skills, and legal emancipation. The American Library Association also compiles annual statistics on challenges. The Association advocates for the media specialist and the right to free access in the event of a challenge.

Young adult authors also advocate against censorship. In the research process, author websites and blogs were accessed for author’s quotes and responses to challenges of their material. Chris Crutcher, Laurie Halse-Anderson, and Ellen Hopkins were quoted, but they are but a few who are actively fighting censorship.
Finally, throughout their careers, school media specialists advocate against censorship. They educate their students in regards to censorship, intellectual freedom and their first amendment rights. Many media specialists celebrate Banned Books Week and use this as a spring board for discussions and the opportunity to educate their students. Most media specialists also fight against censorship when faced with a challenge. They follow the procedures outlined in their school-board-approved manual and report any challenges to the American Library Association.

The Importance of Intellectual Freedom

*Why is intellectual freedom important and what laws protect students’ intellectual freedom?*

The American Library Association defines Intellectual Freedom as the “right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. Intellectual Freedom provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question cause or movement may be explored.” The first amendment of the United States Bill of Rights guarantees individual rights to the freedom of inquiry and expression. Censorship challenges first amendment rights. Adults sometimes forget or choose to overlook the fact these rights are guaranteed for all, regardless of age.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

The censorship of young adult literature continues to be a problem in the 21st century due to the changing nature of books for young adults. Authors are meeting the needs of young adult readers by responding to their desire to read about topics to which they can relate. Life isn’t always smooth sailing, and young adult books available today
address true life events such as drugs, sexual orientation, sexual situations, homelessness, suicide, and other such events that can happen in the life of today’s youth.

Adult reactions are to protect children and most have that idea in mind when they issue a challenge. Control, in and of itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. What parent hasn’t at one time or another lamented a lack of control over an unruly teen? However, many times a parent will attempt to control a teen’s behavior by attempting to control a teen’s environment. The parent has overstepped his or her authority when the attempt to control spills into a public arena, such as a school or public library. Parents, no matter how well meaning, should not be allowed to limit the choices for other parents and their children. The unfortunate outcome to a challenge can be removal of the material, which denies the right to read it from all. Education is certainly the key to reducing the number of challenges issued.

Perhaps the best place to fight the battle against the censorship of young adult literature is with the young adults themselves. By instilling a sense of pride in their freedom to read, research, and learn whatever they wish, perhaps young adults can be motivated to lead the fight themselves. Hopefully, as each generation educates the next, censorship will not be as prevalent as it is today.

It would be interesting to continue this research by interviewing young adults who have been affected by attempts at censorship and comparing those interviews to young adults who are unaware of censorship and their right to intellectual freedom. It would also be interesting to pick up this research again in five years and then ten years to compare it with these findings.
References


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