

Standing Committee Against Censorship

Charge:

- To solicit and receive reports of [censorship](http://www2.ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/) (<http://www2.ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/>) incidents from NCTE members, constituent groups, and sources outside the Council;
- to serve as a resource on current patterns of censorship; to continue to raise awareness of censorship issues;
- to serve as an advisory committee to NCTE Headquarters considering the kinds of support and services that an Intellectual Freedom/Anti-Censorship Center could provide;
- to promote policies for literature adoption that allay the possibility of censorship;
- to help NCTE develop rationales for the teaching of controversial texts, and
- to develop a white paper that further explores students' right to write and all of its implications.

Major activities: What major actions, projects, initiatives, or studies in your charge have been completed by your group since July 1, 2018? In each activity describe the more important features of the work, and connect your work to the [NCTE Vision Statement](#), if applicable.

1. List names, affiliations, and geographic region for all committee members.

- CHAIR, Paula Greathouse (2020) (Tennessee Tech University, Cookeville)
- Annamary Consalvo (2021) (University of Texas at Tyler)
- Katharine Covino-Poutasse (2021)(Fitchburg State University, MA)
- Ann D. David (2021) (University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX)
- Brooke Boback Eisenbach (2021) (Lesley University, Cambridge, MA)
- Jennifer Farnham (2019) (Ponte Vedra, FL)
- Clay H. H. Francis (2020) (Hutchison School, Memphis, TN)
- Abena Hutchful (2020) (National Coalition Against Censorship, New York, NY)
- Gretchen Oltman (Emeritus – 2020)(Omaha, NE)
- Executive Committee Liaison, Alfredo Lujan (Monte del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, NM)
- NCTE Staff and Administrative Liaison, Patrick Owen

2. What actions, projects, initiatives, or studies are “in progress” at this time?

- NCTE’s vision calls for collaboration and community in an effort to support teachers and students in classrooms. The current members of the Standing Committee Against Censorship (SCAC) have collectively vowed to continue this support through both a summer project, presentations at the annual convention in Baltimore, and collaboration with other NCTE committees.
 - Our first project aimed to fill the gap in our current rationale list that NCTE members draw on when faced with a challenge of censorship in their classrooms. In addition to each member completing two rationales, several members have built the crafting of rationales into their current graduate English education courses, thus helping us add to this valuable resource. It is the goal of this project for educators to draw on these rationales as a means of supporting their commitment to student access of diverse literature. We will finalize all our rationales and submit to NCTE to be added to the available documents at the 2019 convention.
 - In addition to this project, we have been diligently working on the two presentations that will be sponsored by our committee at the annual convention in Baltimore. We have collaborated on creating resources to distribute and have secured panelists for a discussion on responding to violence in student writing and a discussion on freedom of inquiry in the ELA classroom. This endeavor supports NCTE’s vision of assisting teachers in providing access for more diverse voices in their curriculum.
 - Two of our current members, Paula Greathouse & Brooke Eisenbach, have collaborated with NCTE’s LGBT Advisory Board Committee. Together, with the chair of that committee (Cody Miller) we will be guest editing a themed issue of the *English Journal*. It is the intention of the SCAC to contribute to this issue with a collectively written article on censorship, thus adding to the research in our field.

- Lastly, we have continued to gather and submit research findings on age appropriateness to a shared Goggle folder. It is our aim to use these findings to support a potential position statement.

3. What have you accomplished so far, and what is your timeline for future work?

- We have met several times since the last annual meeting and have scheduled one more meeting before the annual convention to finalize our presentations and share our progress on the rationales. During this meeting a call to begin to consider our next project and session topics for the 2020 conference will be discussed.
- This past year, each member has continued to contributed research findings on age appropriateness to a shared Google folder. During our annual meeting in Baltimore, we will review these findings and continue our conversation on using our findings for a position statement on this topic.

4. How has the work of your group contributed to NCTE's role in shaping the profession of teaching and/or the understanding of literacy in educational contexts?

- The SCAC assists any and all NCTE members in the event that they find themselves facing a challenge of censorship in the classroom. Given the increasing number of recent challenges surrounding texts that explore race, gender and sexuality, our support is not only needed, but it is imperative in upholding the vision of NCTE. As a resource in this capacity, we are helping shape the profession of teaching and the understanding of literacy in educational contexts. In teachers' efforts to support student's literacy development and access to diverse texts, our committee continues to provide resources (rationales, position statements, censorship kits, etc.) that offer guidelines and frameworks that help educators advocate for students' rights to read and write.

Suggestions from your group: Your good ideas help direct future NCTE actions.

1. What significant changes or trends in our field point to action from the Council?

- NCTE has a policy on the preparation of ELA teachers, and a belief statement on the inclusion of technology in the ELA classroom, however, attention has not been given to the virtual ELA classroom, or the preparation of virtual ELA teachers. We would like to see more resources and discussion on virtual English language arts classrooms, pedagogy in the virtual ELA classroom, and teacher preparation of virtual ELA educators.

2. What trends need to factor into medium- to long-term NCTE planning?

- Given the rapid, and projected increase in the number of students opting to attend school in virtual contexts, this trend (virtual ELA classrooms, literacy pedagogy, virtual ELA teacher prep) should be considered.

Censorship Challenges NCTE Has Fielded July 2018-April 2019

July 2018

- *Objections to Pedagogy in NCTE Convention Sessions* – Georgia – The [Liberty Council](#) wrote [a blog](#) condemning these pedagogies and calling out teachers in the local school district for following them. NCTE has written the teacher who was cited in the blog. So far there is no response.

August 2018

- *Objections to Pedagogy in NCTE Convention Sessions* – Georgia – The [Liberty Council](#) wrote [a blog](#) condemning these pedagogies and calling out teachers in the local school district for following them. NCTE has written the teacher who was cited in the blog twice, once in July and once in August after school had started. The last time the message came back indicating the teacher is no longer at the school. I tried Googling her without success. On 8/27/18, a *HuffPost* reporter contacted Jenna about this. While Jenna had offered no information to offer on this case, she did refer the reporter to me in

case she wanted to chat about intellectual freedom and schools. So far, the reporter has not made contact.

- *Drag Queen Story Time* – Louisiana – [Drag Queen Story Hour](#) is a program established for libraries and bookstores where Drag Queens read stories to “capture the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and give kids glamorous, positive, and unabashedly queer role models.” Over time there have been many protests against these programs but, according to the American Library Association, the benefits of the program have proved to outweigh the complaints. A challenge to a program scheduled for a library in Lafayette, Louisiana, came to our attention. ALA and ACLU are involved in this challenge. The library is going on with the program despite the protests. NCTE will sign on ALA’s letter of support to the library.
- *#BlackLivesMatter Poster* – NV – a teacher was told by her principal to remove the poster from her wall following a parental complaint. Unfortunately, the school’s policy gives the principal the right to ask for the poster to come down. I worked with NCAC to provide information to the teacher.
- *Felix YZ* by Lisa Bunker – NY – a parent complained about the inclusion of the book on a summer reading book list of twelve books. Teacher is working with the union attorney but likely facing disciplinary action.
- *LGBTQ Displays in Public Libraries* – UT - [NCTE signed on letter with NCAC](#) objecting to the banning of these displays.
- *Habibi* by Craig Thompson – FL- two parents have complained that the graphic novel is pornographic and they don’t want it taught at the school. These parents have threatened a law suit if the text isn’t removed from the school and threatened to withdraw their monetary support of the school if the text is retained.

September 2018

- *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth – 11th Grade AP English in Texas – complaints about profanity. Other options were offered for students to read but district administration did not follow the challenge policy and pulled the book, replacing it with *The Great Gatsby* and a brand new approved reading list for all the grades in high school—a list mostly out of the 17th-19th centuries. I sent a letter criticizing the approved booklist, reiterating the requirements of AP, and offering NCTE resources, including my offer to help the school develop both text selection and challenge policies. Going forward the language arts director has committed to get the "approved book list" back to its original condition, to create a committee to approve books for the future, and to have trainings for teachers and administrators on how to handle parents who object to texts. Hopefully, a new book policy, will be drafted by the new committee, in the hands of the legal department by January so that by the end of the year there will be something to get approved by the board.
 - *Drag Queen Story Time* – Louisiana – Lafayette’s Mayor-President Joel Robideaux declared he was going to stop the event. Drag Queen Story Hour is a program established for libraries and bookstores where Drag Queens read stories to “capture the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and give kids glamorous, positive, and unabashedly queer role models.” The Lafayette, Louisiana, program planned to go forward regardless of protest from the mayor and others. [NCTE signed on ALA’s letter of support and resources to the library](#). The letter was well received by the librarian.
 - *Fun Home* by Alison Bechtel – 12th grade English - New Jersey. Parents complained last spring about inclusion of the text in the curriculum, but while the school district heard the complaints, they kept the book. This time the director of curriculum was requesting resources to help her develop a rationale for including this text and other LGBTQ+ texts as well as educational materials for parents.
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- *Habibi* by Craig Thompson – Florida - two parents have complained that the graphic novel is pornographic and they don't want it taught at the school. These parents have threatened a law suit if the text isn't removed from the school and threatened to withdraw their monetary support of the school if the text is retained. The challenge is currently in the hands of the school's lawyers.
 - *LGBTQ+ Books in Banned Books Display* – Public Library – Rumford, Maine. [A group of local pastors tried to ban the LGBTQ+ books from the display](#). NCTE joined NCAC and CLDF to send a letter of support and guidance to the library to retain the books in the display. The display was retained with all the books included.
 - *Looking for Alaska* by John Green – One of 75 books on a summer reading list – California. I sent a rationale for the novel as well as advice on the Students' Right to Read, [text selection](#), a reminder of the school's policy and how it should be followed, and an offer for additional help.
 - *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien - 10th grade English (IB MYP at an IB World School), Texas. Parents challenged the text for language. I sent a rationale for the text along with a letter reiterating the requirements of IB and offering NCTE resources, including my offer to help the school develop both text selection and challenge policies. This was the first request to come in from our newly designed [Rationales page](#) which gives instructions for requesting a rationale:

Write an email to intellectualfreedom@ncte.org with your request and the responses to the following questions:

1. What are your name, your school and state where you teach, and the grade level of your students?
2. Are you having a challenge to a text?
3. Do you think you might have a challenge to a text and want the rationale to be prepared?
4. Are you planning to teach the work and want the rationale to plan curriculum for that?
5. Are you looking for texts to use to meet your curriculum and would like to use the rationales to help you choose?

October 2018

- *City of Thieves* by David Benioff – 10th Grade English – explicit language. NCTE signed on [a letter with NCAC and six other First Amendment Groups](#) opposing the removal of the book from the curriculum without following the school's policy for reconsideration of texts.
 - *Drag Queen Story Time* – Houston, Texas– A few citizens filed a lawsuit saying the library is misusing taxpayer money by hosting Drag Queen Story Hours when they don't host Heterosexual Couple Story Hours- Emily Kirkpatrick and I have sent a letter of support to the library and the mayor.
 - [EBSCO databases used in Utah schools](#). – challengers suggested that students could find pornographic material through these online databases. NCTE signed on a letter with ALA and four other First Amendment organizations to protest the removal of the databases. *The Utah Education Network voted to restore access to EBSCO K-12 databases for the students of Utah!*
 - *Felix-YZ* by Lisa Bunker – NY – a parent complained about the inclusion of the book on a summer reading book list of twelve books. Teacher is working with the union attorney but likely facing disciplinary action. *UPDATE—the teacher was forced to resign.*
 - *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie – GA. Sent rationale.
 - *Habibi* by Craig Thompson – Florida - two parents have complained that the graphic novel is pornographic and they don't want it taught at the school. These parents have threatened a law suit if the text isn't removed from the school and threatened to withdraw their monetary support of the school if the text is retained. The challenge is currently in the hands of the school's lawyers.
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UPDATE: the book was removed when the objecting parents threatened the teacher with a criminal lawsuit.

November 2018

- *A Suicide Bomber Sits in the Library* by Rotten Ralph creator Jack Gantos and comics illustrator Dave McKean. Pulled by publisher Abrams. No action on our part, just awareness that this is another book that has met this fate.
 - *Beartown* by Fredrik Backman – Rockingham County, NC – 10th grade honors English – book pulled because [parents complained](#) it was inappropriate and “not fit for the Bible Belt.” [NCTE signed on letter with NCAC](#).
 - *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison – fear that book might be challenged. Sent rationale.
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December 2018

- *A Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood – Indiana – teacher disciplined for teaching the book, told she broke district ethical policy by doing so and then disciplined for a post on her Twitter account. We’re working with the National Coalition on this and we’ve strongly suggested that the teacher get legal support/advice from the teachers’ union. If she still wants us to write a letter we’ll do so after the first of the year.
 - Har-Ber High School Student Newspaper, Springdale, Arkansas – students wrote an article exposing improprieties in the sudden mid-year transfer of five varsity football players to a different school. The article was censored, the paper suspended, and the advisor threatening with disciplinary action and maybe termination. We joined others [to sign on a letter with the Student Press Law Center](#). Also see 12.12.18 blog [A Free Press Begins at School](#).
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January 2019

- *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erica Maria Remarque – Louisiana. 8th Grade, a part of the Wit & Wisdom section of the Great Minds™ curriculum which the school and state had purchased. Administration redacted passages they disapproved of – Abena Hutchful from NCAC and I worked with the teacher who brought this to our attention and then, while a letter was planned, instead spoke with the Executive Director of the school who apologized for defacing the books and said new books were on order and would arrive within the week. She also promised that the charter school would begin work on their policies for curriculum and text reconsideration. We both offered our help with this.
 - *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel – New Jersey – High School Library. Principal, hearing about a challenge to this book in another New Jersey district where, ironically, the book was retained, has ignored the district policy for text reconsideration and asked the librarian to remove the book from the library. She has refused and is supported by her union representative. A meeting on February 1 will either end or exacerbate this challenge. NCTE, NCAC, and ALA are all working to support the librarian.
 - *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami – Maine – High School. This challenge was brought to NCTE by ALA. At this moment, there seems to be confusion about where the challenge stands.
 - [H.P. 80: An Act To Prohibit the Dissemination of Obscene Material by Public Schools](#) – Maine – Republican state representative Amy Arata [has proposed this bill based on her reading of *Kafka on the Shore*](#). In her words, she is taking steps to try to make sure books she considers obscene don’t wind up in the hands of schoolchildren. NCTE is working with ALA on this.
 - *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky – Illinois – Grade 12 – a challenge to the novel arose in a school board meeting. NCTE sent a letter to the superintendent, board, and teacher
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supporting inclusion of the book in the curriculum. The letter was to be read to the board during a scheduled curriculum discussion on Wednesday.

February 2019

- *Arrest of a 6th Grader for Refusing to Say the Pledge of Allegiance* - This happened just as the [Tinker Tour, a 50th Anniversary celebration of students' rights in school](#), was getting started. We joined others to sign on [a statement from NCAC](#).
 - *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel – New Jersey – High School Library. Principal, hearing about a challenge to this book in another New Jersey district where, ironically, the book was retained, has ignored the district policy for text reconsideration and asked the librarian to remove the book from the library. She has refused and is supported by her union representative. A meeting on February 1 will either end or exacerbate this challenge. NCTE, NCAC, and ALA are all working to support the librarian. **This challenge went on all month and, frankly, got pretty nasty. However, when the superintendent received [the letter from NCAC that we signed onto](#) with many of the usual organizations but also others like the ACLU and Lambda Legal and the letter from ALA, the story changed and the principals of both high schools in the district put Fun Home back on the regularly accessible library shelves. The librarian was a superb defender of the student's rights to read this book.**
 - *Assassination Classroom*, a manga comic by Yusei Matsui – New York – Intermediate School Library - a parent complained about the book's title and fictional superhero themes. NCTE joined others [to sign on a letter from NCAC](#). The book was pulled from the library shelves. As the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund [explains](#), "the title for the comic sci-fi manga series is unfortunately misunderstood by many unwilling to delve into its pages. *Assassination Classroom* is not about the real-life violence that plagues schools, but rather a class of misfit students pledged with saving the world by killing their alien super-villain teacher (who has already blown up a decent chunk of the moon)."
 - *H.P. 433 House of Representatives, February 5, 2019 Resolve, Directing the State Board of Education To Adopt Rules Prohibiting Teachers in Public Schools from Engaging in Political, Ideological or Religious Advocacy in the Classroom* – Maine – I sent the Maine Council (MCELA) resources and suggestions for speaking against this bill which has not yet moved.
 - *H.P. 80: An Act To Prohibit the Dissemination of Obscene Material by Public Schools* – Maine – Republican state representative Amy Arata [has proposed this bill based on her reading of *Kafka on the Shore*](#). In her words, she is taking steps to try to make sure books she considers obscene don't wind up in the hands of schoolchildren. NCTE worked with NCAC and ALA on this. [NCTE joined the National Coalition Against Censorship and others in a letter](#) to the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee of the Maine Legislature strongly encouraging them not to pass the bill forward. **[The committee sent the legislature a recommendation to vote against LD 94](#)**. See blog story: [Kafka Started It and the Maine Legislation Finished It—for Now](#)
 - *LGBTQ+ Books (I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel, *Lily and Dunkin* by Donna Gephart, and *George* by Alex Gino) – Andover Public Library, Kansas – a community member objected to these books on moral grounds. NCTE joined NCAC and other organizations in [a letter to the library supporting the books](#). **The board of directors of the library [voted overwhelmingly to keep the books in the youth sections!](#)**
 - *Texts in Florida* – fyi, a [news report](#) on the many challenges the new textbook law has elicited.
 - *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas – Iowa – high school – vulgar, propaganda, not required by syllabus. This challenge is young but may be on a fast track to a school board that seems not to have a reconsideration policy.
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March 2019

- *Big, Bad Ironclad* by Nathan Hale, from *Nathan Hale's Hazardous* - elementary school library, Wyoming. Suggests suicide. We offered a policy review and suggestions for managing the challenge.
- Children's Book Exhibit at University of Minnesota – [books selected don't include diverse books](#). Complaints surfaced on Twitter and on [Debbie Reese's blog on the exhibit](#). The University of Minnesota made some of the recommended revisions to the exhibit.
- *Devil in Thurgood the Grove: Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America* by Gilbert King – AP English, Ohio - use of "N-word." English department is looking to adopt this 2013 Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction and the superintendent has stated that a board member is to be present at all the committee meetings *before* the actual presentation to the board.
 - *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. [New Jersey lawmakers propose resolution asking schools not to teach 'Huckleberry Finn'](#).
 - *Texts in Florida* – fyi, a [news report](#) on the many challenges the new textbook law has elicited. **See results so far below under Florida Defenders.**
 - *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas – Iowa – high school – vulgar, propaganda, not required by syllabus. This challenge is young but may be on a fast track to a school board that seems not to have a reconsideration policy. **For now, this seems to have blown over. There was no mention of the text at the last school board meeting and support of the teacher by the principal is strong.**
 - Trump Order on Free Speech on Campus. [NCTE signed on letter with AAUP](#).

April 2019

- *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins, Wisconsin – middle school libraries – NCTE sent rationales for the text as well as information and policies for combatting the challenge.
 - *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, New Jersey – district Libraries - Just weeks after the text was retained in the district libraries, the superintendent and board revised their policies on selection and reconsideration of texts – [NCTE signed on another letter](#) with NCAC and others to the superintendent and board. – see blog, [Keep the Light On](#).
 - *Girls Like Us* by Gale Giles, Washington – 12th Grade English - sent rationale so teacher can be prepared for a possible challenge when she teaches the book.
 - *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, Minnesota – 8th and 10th grade English - "mutterings of a challenge coming for both novels" – sent rationales for the text as well as information and policies for combatting the challenge.
 - *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, North Carolina – high school English – "scenes of explicit sex not appropriate to the grade, and the ending "glorifies" suicide" - sent rationales for the text as well as information and policies for combatting the challenge.
 - *Love Is Love* edited by Marc Andreyko, Sarah Gaydos, Jamie S. Rich, Texas – this is a review of the situation surrounding the banning of the book a year ago – spent time consulting with CBLDF, NCAC, and the teacher involved in the original challenge who is no longer in the district. It was decided not to register the challenge but to work in other ways to help parents make sure their students have access to good diverse literature. – see blog, [Keep the Light On](#)
 - *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders and illustrated by Steven Salerno, Virginia – 2nd Grade –parent objected to the book on the grounds that teaching about the existence of gay people and the history of their struggles for civil rights in the United States is "inappropriate" for children of that age and objectionable to her faith. In speaking with the press, she mischaracterized the book as a book about marriage and about sex. – had extensive conversations
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with teacher and NCAC, sent information and policies for combatting the challenge and working with NCAC on a letter to the school board – see blog, [Keep the Light On](#).

- *Undocumented* by Duncan Tonatiuh, Illinois – elementary school (K-8) library – “the content is not suitable for anyone under the age of 14” - school is forming a committee to reconsider the book while NCTE and NCAC are working on a letter to the school board.

Paula Greathouse, Chair