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COMMENTARY

Censorship in Three Metaphors

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We write this article in early October 2008, coincidentally the same time that the American Library Association (ALA) has, since 1982, designated a Banned Books Week. This is a time, says the ALA, to remind Americans "not to take [a] precious democratic freedom for granted"—the freedom of "unrestricted access to information and ideas regardless of the communication medium used, the content of the work, and the viewpoints of both the author and receiver of information" (ALA, 2008, 1, 3). The ALA's expressed intent for Banned Books Week is to draw attention to First Amendment rights but also to "the power of literature...and...to the danger that exists when restraints are imposed on the availability of information in a free society" (ALA, 2008, 5).

Censorship occurs when published or shared works, like books, films, or art work, are kept from public access by restriction or removal from libraries, museums, or other public venues. Though challenges or outright censorship in our school libraries or classrooms often transpire out of the noblest of reasons—most often with the idea of protecting young people from something that someone finds offensive—the ALA sees attempts at censorship, nonetheless, as attempts to restrict someone's "right to read, view, listen to, and disseminate constitutionally protected ideas" (ALA, 2007, Who Attempts Censorship? section). We find such censorship of reading or viewing of materials in middle and high school classrooms disturbing and unjust to the rights of both students and teachers.

Though book banning was of some interest to us throughout our careers in public school classrooms, our recent investigations related to book banning and censorship started with a seemingly innocuous edition of a fairy tale called *Briar Rose* (Yolen, 1992). In *Briar Rose*, Yolen draws upon Grimm's familiar tale of *Sleeping Beauty*, but she recasts the story of the sleeping princess. In Yolen's version, the beautiful princess is a Jew who is not merely asleep, but nearly dead at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust. She is saved from death by a group of partisans, all of whom are later killed except one with whom she escapes. Her companion, labeled by the other partisans as the "prince," is a gay man whose gentle friendship and care enable her to

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live. Yolen's masterfully told tale is by turns horrible and poignant; most important, it is grounded in researched facts and includes descriptions of atrocities and injustices suffered by Jews and homosexuals at the hands of the Nazis at Chelmno, Poland, the site of an extermination camp. It is an important story. The ALA seemed to think so; the organization named *Briar Rose* one of their Best Books for Young Adults in 1993 (Carter, Estes, & Waddle, 2000). The book was also a Nebula Award finalist in 1992 ("Nebula Awards," 2006) and winner of the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature in 1993 ("Mythopoeic Awards," 2008).

And yet, there are some who would have the story kept from us. On September 15, 1994, *Briar Rose* was burned on the steps of the Kansas City Board of Education building by the Reverend John Birmingham, a minister of the Power Connection Church, along with members of a group that he represented, the Christian Act Now Coalition. Claiming that *Briar Rose* is a gay-themed book and grouping it with another book about gay men and women and a third book about AIDS, the protesters burned all three books because they saw the topics of homosexuality in the books as dangerous and potentially mind polluting (Barnett, 1994). Birmingham and his followers used a hibachi to "barbecue" *Briar Rose* and the two other books in Kansas City. What was the point of using the hibachi? we wondered. An easy clean up? Perhaps a subconscious acknowledgment that books really are forms of nourishment? In any case, the ironic juxtaposition of the burning of *Briar Rose* with the book burnings carried out by the Nazis and, especially, with the use of fire to destroy the Jews and homosexuals at camps like Chelmno did not, of course, escape us.

Although parents and guardians have the right to demand that their child will not read a particular book or view a specific film, no one parent or guardian has the right to demand that an entire classroom, school, or district should not read a particular book or view a film. Reading about just such a situation regarding Yolen's book—this time in Chappaqua, N.Y.—we were appalled by the apparent violation of First Amendment rights that might have occurred had the Chappaqua Central School District's Committee Addressing Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of Printed Materials acquiesced to a mother's formal request in November 1994 to have *Briar Rose* withdrawn from *all* students at Chappaqua's Bell Middle School where her child was a student. Interestingly, paperwork from the incident revealed that the mother had not read the book, but she was protesting students' access to the book based upon "disturbing passages" on one particular page (Chappaqua Central School District, 1994). Reading about these incidents in Kansas City and Chappaqua led us to investigate other incidences of book challenges and outright censorship and to think deeply about what book censorship means to all of us—educators and students. We address our concerns by using three metaphors to discuss issues of censorship.

Metaphors: Food for Thought and Action

We believe metaphors bring to mind concepts that stimulate thought and action. Often taught as a pedagogical concept in most high school English classes, a metaphor "is the direct verbal equation of something unknown with something known, so that the unknown may be explained and made clear" (Roberts & Jacobs, 1992, p. 622). Metaphors are typically linked to the "poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3), and many people—due to the literary and poetic nature of metaphors—perceive these figures of speech as beyond their means for interpretation and understanding. Indeed, it may be difficult to grasp the subtleties of metaphorical language when it is used as a literary device. For example, when Maya Angelou calls her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, she is not talking about confined birds, but rather, about how she was able to escape illiteracy, oppression, poverty, and her self-imposed muteness to liberate her voice and understand her life.

Within the natural contexts of everyday language, ordinary people use metaphors for everyday purposes. Perhaps that is why the media, to quickly capture the attention of readers, so often use metaphors. For

instance, a recent article lamenting the demise of the U.S. auto industry, illustrated by the front end of a Hummer, bore the headline "How Detroit Drove into a Ditch" (Ingrassia, 2008). Here, the reader is aided in understanding what could be a complex economic crisis by making inferences with the assistance of both a visual and linguistic metaphor.

Moreover, metaphorical, linguistic expressions such as "I've got you covered," "she is traveling down the road to destruction," "education is the key to a good life," "the father and daughter were joined at the hip," "put the grading on the back burner," and "the fog was thick enough to cut with a knife" are metaphors we might hear from a neighbor, friend, colleague or family member. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a renowned and eloquent orator who spoke to many ordinary and poor people, noted that he had "been to the mountaintop." With a melodic cadence, and signaling his vision for democracy and equity for all people, Dr. King graced his audiences with a metaphor that was powerful and chilling.

Metaphors have the potential to be mediators of understanding because they use more concrete or familiar references to help us understand abstract concepts that we cannot easily know. Metaphors can make apparent connections to experiential knowledge, and thereby, make abstractions more useful in thought even though they are difficult to understand. Kövecses (2002) commented on the intuitive sense of this idea: "Our experiences with the physical world serve as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domains" (p. 60). That is why a visual metaphor, like the picture of a Hummer, is helpful, and when linked with a linguistic expression such as "driving into a ditch," it prompts people to have not only an intellectual but also a visceral response. "Entailment" is the name that Lakoff and Johnson (1980) gave to the concrete references inherent in metaphors, the parts that "highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience" (p. 156). Thus, if we talk about love being a red rose, the entailments might be the aspects of the rose such as a deep red color and a lush fragrance that allow us to make meaningful inferences about the love being compared with that rose.

Censorship is about restriction and control of intellectual development, and the danger when educators fail to investigate what censorship truly means—for example, by attaching it to metaphors with abundant entailments—is that people will merely "shrug off" the removal of books from libraries and classrooms and fail to see challenges of books as a violation of First Amendment rights. When we strive to explain censorship through metaphor and collect as many entailments as we can to create powerful metaphors, then we can equip educators to truly know the danger of censorship. With this abstract knowledge, educators will be able to move forward with information that may elicit thoughtful responses to challenges that limit teachers' professional decision making and students' paths to a truly democratic society. In the following sections, we offer three metaphors to clarify the dangerous nature of censorship and book challenges.

Censorship as a Barbed Wire Fence

Barbed wire has clusters of short, sharp spikes set at intervals along it, and it is used to make fences; sometimes in warfare it serves as an obstruction. It is thorny and dangerous. Although one can see through the mesh of the fence, it effectively blocks all passage through it, and the spikes at the top make climbing over unscathed impossible. Thus, by using barbed wire fence as our first metaphor, we illuminate how censors evoke barriers to free thought and speech when they block knowledge acquisition, intellectual development, as well as creative and critical thinking by calling for books to be removed from libraries, classrooms, schools, and districts.

We believe that reading to make meaning goes far beyond reading for the moment to practice skills; nor is it an exercise for assessment and evaluation purposes. Reading should enable all people, especially young people, to "read the world" (Freire, 1991) as well as the word. This is impossible if censors present obstructions to a clear view of the world—erect "barbed wire"—making it impossible to gain access to the world through vicarious reading experiences. If we think of obstruction as an important entailment of a barbed wire fence, then standing on the outside looking in is one perception that we use to invoke our metaphor. This perception conveys limited vision

and runs both ways. On one side of the fence are the censors and those whom they want to control, standing behind and peeping through the mesh fence and over the barbed wire; on the other side is a book waiting to offer its readers a new, different, and fresh perspective.

Often censors stand on one side of the fence and make uninformed decisions about what books should and should not be read by students. Access to information is denied and more often than not, this denial is due to only a word(s), an isolated concept, or mention of lifestyles that censors find offensive. For instance, *Briar Rose* has been burned due to content related to homosexuality. In fact, *Briar Rose* was "barbecued" because one character was admittedly gay, and we contend that the censors who did that burning stood behind a barbed wire fence blocking students who might read the novel from an opportunity to acquire knowledge. Using blurred and narrowed vision, the book burners denied young people access to information about the inhumane treatment of others and the horrific injustices that innocent people suffered at the hands of the Nazis. How could the censors see and be critical of the gay man in the story and be so completely blind to the savage annihilation of gays during the Holocaust?

The gay character in *Briar Rose* is strong, and because of the censors' misplaced focus, they missed an opportunity to delve more deeply into a historical event that is often omitted from history textbooks written about the Holocaust. This omission perhaps is itself a longstanding form of censorship that blocks school children from a complete view of an important historical event.

Like all great authors, Yolen conducted extensive research about her topic while she was writing her novel. In a letter addressed to Yolen, one of her fans asked, "Is *Briar Rose* in any way autobiographical? It's too real to be 'made up.' Where did you find out the information about the refugee center at Oswego? Boy have you done a ton of research" (C. Tuteur, personal communication, August 6, 1993). Yolen traveled to Poland and spent many months researching the plight of gays during the Holocaust; it is a horrendous and weighty historical event. It is perplexing to think that anyone would destroy the information, ideas, and ideals she offers with the strike of one match.

The Children's Literature Research Collections (CLRC) at the University of Minnesota owns a copy of *Briar Rose*, and on the title page autographed by Yolen, she wrote, "This is the only novel I was ever seriously late in getting in—because it was so damned difficult to write." Here, as she does in other places where she talks about writing about the Holocaust, Yolen implies the physical and emotional strain she experienced while writing *Briar Rose*. In conducting her research about the Holocaust and assigning herself the role of witness, she crossed over the barbed wire and walked through the steel mesh to see clearly the horrific conditions that killed innocent people, including gays. This was, apparently, a deeply moving and laborious task, and it would have been easier to avoid gazing upon the horrors that she saw among the records she examined. Wiping away any narrow, blurred vision, Yolen wrote *Briar Rose* as a clear picture of what the worst of history has left us, and this is a picture that others who fail to cross the barbed wire would deny themselves and others.

Censorship as Patina

A patina is a layer or coating that appears on metals or other surfaces as a result of age or exposure to elements like chemicals or weather. Sometimes, as when it is used to describe wood furniture, the word patina has positive associations, as it indicates a mellow surface that comes with waxing and care, lending "character" to a piece. Other times, however, the word refers to undesirable surfaces caused by corrosion. Nicks, cracks, or crusts cover a more desirable and valuable layer. It is from this latter meaning of the word that we draw our second metaphor.

We see censorship as patina when book challenges and bannings serve to cover, hide, or obscure the ideas that are important for deepening concepts, seeing from different perspectives, and understanding universal qualities of humans and events. Many of us who teach literature do so because of the power of books to stretch and open minds to new ways of looking at the world and to new experiences—albeit vicarious. Like Freedman and Johnson (2000), we are aware of the "power literature has to engage young

people in deliberate questioning, genuine dialogue, and critical reflection" (p. 358). It is through literature that a child can learn how the world beyond his window works or an adolescent can discover personal attributes that she can weave into who she wants to be. Good literature can also expose human frailty and historical injustice; Willy Loman's story (in *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, 1949), can be a cautionary tale, as can the one told by Scout Finch (in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee, 1960). Donelson (1993) pointed out the great power of books: "Some books challenge us, make us think, make us wonder, make us doubt" (p. 17). It is these books, Donelson says, that make reading so important—but also so dangerous to those who would indoctrinate instead of educate:

> Education implies the right of students to explore ideas and issues without interference from anyone, parent or teacher or administrator. Indoctrination implies the right to force onto students certain values determined by what purports to be the dominant culture.... Banning books or screening out "dangerous" issues or "controversial" ideas from classroom discussion typifies a school dedicated to indoctrination. And when the rights to inquire and question and even doubt are denied young people, education inevitably degenerates into indoctrination. (p. 15)

When teachers and librarians are forced by challenges from parents or interest groups to remove books from their curricula and library shelves, they must subordinate their pedagogical knowledge about the importance of sharing timeless ideas from good literature to their instincts for self-survival. Thus, these challenges, or the censorship that too often grows out of them, act like a patina, a layer of corrosion that effectively seals beneath itself the wealth of our nation—the values and ideas that we live by in a democratic society.

A challenge to *Briar Rose* in Vermont in 1999 nearly became just such a seal when a mother of a middle school girl asked that Yolen's book be pulled from the school library, thereby removing it—and its important lessons about prejudice, hatred, and injustice—from the reach of all the students in the middle school. Claiming that the book "doesn't have much to say about the Holocaust," the mother said, "The book features widespread profanity and sexual themes...." After a public hearing, a specially formed challenge committee comprised of parents, townspeople, and educators decided to keep the book in the library.

An editorial commenting on the case and its subsequent conclusion in the Barre, Vermont *Times Argus* (Teaching Tolerance, 1999) commended the decision and reminded the newspaper's readers how important ideas about diversity like those presented in *Briar Rose* could be to young people living "in such a homogeneous state" as Vermont. Further addressing the mother's claim that the book made her daughter feel uncomfortable, the editorial continued: "And yet this is the active ingredient in all education: To experience the collision—often violent—between one's own view of the world and the world's view. By postponing that collision, we do our children no favors" (p. 8). The editorial makes clear that hiding the unpleasant or unjust beneath a veneer of denial or distortion of facts does not protect young people, but merely makes them unprepared for what life will present in the future.

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The *Times Argus* editorial also reminds readers that tolerance and the ability to respect human differences does not happen automatically: "It must be taught. And if teachers, parents or books don't teach it, then who or what will?" (p. 8). We too wonder about this, especially when we think about the role of book challenges that make teachers want to teach only what is "safe," preventing the possibility of offending parents or any other would-be censors. If books are challenged and disappear from the curriculum, who will teach students to think about and question the status quo when what passes as the norm is privilege for one group at the expense of another, or when denigration of people from diverse backgrounds is so routine that many do not even see it? Books that can open our eyes to white privilege, for example, or to injustices suffered by members of our society are often the very ones that are challenged. "It is no coincidence," said Noll (1994), "that censored literature is usually that which challenges some 'authority' by offering alternative perspectives of reality" (p. 63).

In talks and interviews, Yolen often decries such censorship for violating readers' right to read and also

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for denying young people a chance to know about their world in ways that will make them better human beings. Speaking to an audience at the International Reading Association's annual conference in 2005 about the mail that she has received from children in regard to *Briar Rose* and the Holocaust, Yolen pointed out the power of books like hers to expand the understanding and awareness of the children who read them. Those who write to her, she said,

> are wrestling—most of them for the first time—with the idea that because they are who they are, born to particular parents, they would have been on one side or the other of a concentration camp's barbed wire. They are struggling to understand how human beings could bring themselves to capture, to torture, to experiment on, to humiliate, to kill other human beings. (Yolen, 2005)

Yolen's mail makes quite clear the value of books like *Briar Rose* and what will be lost if we allow such books to be removed from our classrooms and libraries as a result of the challenges of those who would layer their beliefs, like a patina, over the desire of others to know. Such a patina can obscure, cover, even make disappear what is beneath it. It is a fear that important memories will disappear altogether that drives Yolen to write stories like *Briar Rose*, though they can be painful to write. "I was years deep in the midden piles and torture chambers and the devil's count of bodies," she said (Yolen, 2005).

Yet, she tells us, she wrote about the horrors of the concentration camp at Chelmno so that others would remember. Remembering is important for preventing future Holocausts and other atrocities. *Briar Rose* and books like it show us that knowing what the worst of us can do is vital for helping us to strive for what the best of us can be. And yet, those who challenge books like *Briar Rose* would seal those memories away, making them unavailable to young people. We are told often enough the fate of those who fail to learn and remember the lessons of history. Banning books may well be the way to such a fate. Yolen (2005) argued, "Censorship—in the classroom, in the library, at the school board level—will make forgetters of us all."

Censorship as a Dangerous Tightrope

Teaching at its best is a delicate balancing act. Teachers, like skillful tightrope walkers, must often teeter between what they know is good pedagogical practice, what their students need and want, what their students' parents demand, and what school administrators ask them to do. Finding alignment among their many requisite tasks may seem challenging, if not downright impossible. As we tell the teaching candidates in our classes, teaching is not for the faint-hearted. The job at its best requires graceful balance and skillful decision making. If we add to all of this the specter of a threat regarding the choice of literature that is taught or methods for teaching reading and writing, and the possible ensuing public uproar that can occur, teachers may indeed feel that they are walking a very tenuous and dangerous tightrope.

Teachers can see censorship as the frayed edge or slippery spot on their tightrope from which they can fall at any moment once the process of a book challenge is begun. In fact, when teachers have "fallen" from grace during or after a district- or community-wide censorship debate that began in their classrooms, they have been known to lose the support of colleagues and supervisors (Tigner-Rasanen, 2001), lose confidence (Agee, 1999), and even lose their professional lives when fired (Lacks, 1997). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that metaphors are "among our principal vehicles for understanding" (p. 159), and certainly the metaphor of censorship as a dangerous tightrope is very helpful to understand the stresses that teachers feel when books are challenged or when even the threat of a censorship debate forces them to act in ways that they ordinarily wouldn't.

The case of Cissy Lacks (1997) is a disturbing reminder of just how dangerous censorship can be to teachers. By most accounts, Lacks was a creative and ambitious teacher at Berkeley High School in a suburb of St. Louis for well over 20 years when she was suspended without warning from her classroom in 1995 for allowing her students to write dramatic scenes about their lives using the authentic voices that they heard daily. Lacks had been using this method for a

number of years to push her reticent students to write and, particularly, to show students that both their lives and their voices are important. The resulting scenes included a good amount of profane language.

Lacks filmed the dramatic scenes so that, as she later explained, students could critique their productions and discuss how different types of language are used for different purposes in daily lives. Though Lacks had promised her students that the videos that they made would be aired only for and during the class, the tapes were confiscated by her principal, and after a public hearing in which portions of the films were shown, Lacks was fired. In 1996, a federal court claimed that Lacks' academic freedom had been violated and that the school board had discriminated against her because of race since she, a white teacher, had used with her African American students methods that were similar to those used by African American teachers to stimulate the creativity and engagement of students like hers (Lacks, 1997).

She was awarded a large sum and reinstated in her job, but this decision was reversed in a court of appeals in 1998 (Simpson, 1998). Though Lacks was later awarded the PEN/Newman's Own Award, which is given each year to one person in the United States who has defended First Amendment rights at a personal risk, she is no longer teaching. Lacks's case is often cited as an example of the dangerous spots on the tightrope that teachers walk—creative, student-centered, innovative teachers, in particular—when they attempt to push the thinking of their students by introducing them to texts about complex social issues and diverse cultures. Such a challenge—or even the threat of one—can interrupt the budding confidence of inexperienced teachers, the support of colleagues and supervisors who abandon the challenged teacher in moments of crisis, and the intact reputations of experienced, formerly confident teachers.

Fearing the unsettling repercussions of cases like Lacks' that have been witnessed firsthand or, perhaps, only heard about, more experienced teachers are apt to teach in ways that allow them to "avoid a hassle" and less experienced teachers are very likely to make "safe" choices, especially in their selection of literature—even when they know that such decisions and choices make them less than the excellent teachers they desire to be.

Agee (1999) wrote about teachers that she studied who, fearing threats of challenges and censorship, chose "safe" books to study with their classes, selected "safe" methods for teaching literature, and made decisions about both their teaching and their curriculum based upon how they might protect themselves from possible complaints by parents or other potential censors. "A particularly insidious effect of censorship," wrote Agee, "is its power to silence teachers" (p. 62). All but one of the teachers in her study had, to greater or lesser degrees, largely sublimated their desires to use nontraditional, multicultural texts or books that dealt with controversial social issues out of caution, outright fear, or a desire to avoid the disruption of book challenges. Yolen (cited in Newman, 1995) called this type of self-censorship by teachers "gray censorship," and she explains it this way:

> Everyone in the teaching community turns to one another and says, "This took up too much money and too much time and too much energy. Next time, let's be more careful...." It's like winning the battle and losing the war. (p. 21)

The war, of course, is a struggle for freedom of speech and a fight for the rights of children and young adults to question their own assumptions, to hear perspectives with which they are unfamiliar, to confront stereotypes, and to have secure (vicarious) experiences through which they can connect with the wider world.

Once again, as we saw by employing the former two metaphors, when we look at censorship as a dangerous tightrope, we can see that censorship impinges upon First Amendment rights of children and adolescents and severely limits their opportunities to expand their worldviews. When school superintendents or principals arbitrarily order the removal of books from school libraries, when librarians decide that though a challenged book has not been banned they will remove it from the library's shelves to avoid future challenges, or when teachers plan only a "safe" literature curriculum to head off conflict and confrontations from objecting parents, students are denied opportunities to explore, to question, and to

learn about something that someone else has decided they would find fearful or "corrupting." Thus, they will miss powerful lessons in significant books, and the education that results will be less than it could or should be.

Dangers of Censorship Persistence

Our audience may query "Why write a commentary about censorship using three metaphors?" Unequivocally, censorship is an "old" topic that has been mulled over time and time again. And like many old topics, it could be easily dismissed because many people might argue that the issue has been examined, discussed, thought about, and when problems related to it emerge, resolved. To remind us that censoring books is no dead issue, Muzevich (2008) noted, "The Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) of the American Library Association (ALA) recorded 3,019 challenges between Jan 1, 2000 and December 31, 2005." She said further that "The OIF also notes that '...for each challenge reported there are as many as four or five which go unreported'" (p. 24). Given the times, and the fact that book challenges are as prevalent today as they were decades ago, clearly, the problem of censorship has not been resolved and remains persistent.

The late scholar, Joseph Campbell once told Bill Moyers (Gross, 2008), "If you want to change the world, you have to change the metaphor." With Campbell's admonition in mind, we refute the metaphors of censors who would burn important books in public places or lobby school officials to remove critical texts from the curriculum or libraries. In their place, we offer our own metaphors to capture the dangerous and stultifying nature of censorship. Censorship as barbed wire, patina, and a tightrope affords us a way to discuss the dangers of censorship in the 21st century, and these metaphors enable us to reopen the conversation as a fresh new chapter so as to analyze a persistent problem.

What metaphors do censors tend to live by? We argue that the metaphors of censors are designed to maintain a sense of reality that does not exist. They try to keep people from seeing life as anything other than a safe, neat world where everybody looks the same and behaves in similar ways. This view of the world, however, looks to us a lot like the world found in Lois Lowry's (1993) *The Giver* where only a few citizens made decisions for all others. The metaphors that censors live by would have us believe that in life we all live "happily ever after," but at the same time, reality stands knocking at the door. Unfortunately, this view of reality that does not exist too often influences teachers to make decisions they would not otherwise make about literature they will teach. Wollman-Banilla (1998) argued that teachers, attempting to protect their students from what they see as harsh realities, have "outrageous" criteria for rejecting certain works of children's literature when they select texts for classroom use. In particular, they "avoid addressing sociocultural differences and discrimination," appear to "lack the courage to present nonmainstream perspectives and experiences, and they lack the faith in children's ability to recognize and handle difficult issues" (p. 287).

When censorship is practiced, what is at stake? The professionalism of teachers—who were hired due to their knowledge, skills, dispositions, and expertise—is placed at risk. When parents or guardians find materials objectionable, rather than broach their children's teacher, they take their grievance to the principal—and in some cases the superintendent—to resolve the problem. Besides violating First Amendment rights, when parents or guardians do not honor the process for challenging books, and complain to the principal or superintendent, their actions de-professionalize teachers. "Going to the top" is not without consequences. First, by bypassing the teacher on their way to the principal or superintendent, would-be censors project the message that the teacher has neither expertise nor power. A superintendent or principal, who does not encourage the censor to talk to the teacher and, instead, acts on the spot to remove the text in question, reifies the parents' image of a powerless teacher. Often, moreover, this approach results in removing a book from the library shelves or from the curriculum immediately without consideration of the book's value to students. Honoring a process is one thing that makes a school a "good school." Leadership is not about making rash decisions on the spot to make the issue go away but rather about respecting the professional knowledge of teachers and guiding the objectors to take the appropriate

and proper procedures. They should be encouraged to work within the system that's in place, rather than against it. Such a stance will ensure that teachers have administrative support and that teachers and students receive due process.

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