

Laura Gill
The Flaw in Censorship
December 2013

Think of your favorite classics: *1984*, *The Catcher in The Rye*, *The Lord of the Rings*. Beloved books like *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Books rising in popularity across the world like *The Hunger Games*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and others. What do they all share?

Each one of these titles has been heavily banned. Time after time, they have all been asked to be removed from library shelves. And why? All of the books I listed have been embraced by endless amounts of readers. The list of the most banned books of today is filled with wonderful, inspiring, change-provoking books that have been kept out of the hands of the public. Banning books is fearing the way they can help us grow.

Books are challenged for many reasons. Offensive language, sexual content, violence, homosexuality, and certain religious viewpoints, among other reasons. Books are generally banned from schools and libraries by concerned parents. But does removing books from libraries violate the US Constitution? The first amendment, established during the founding of America, is one of the foundations of our country's law. All citizens have the right, under the freedom of speech, to form and express their own opinions. While contradicting christian values can often get a book banned, this amendment specifically enforces religious freedom. However controversial a book may be, everyone has the freedom to develop independent thoughts on a topic and restricting access to books stunts that ability. We read to learn for ourselves. Banning books means we can only be exposed to certain opinions. "Banning books gives us silence when we need speech. It closes our ears when we need to listen. It makes us blind when we need sight." Stephen Chbosky, author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* said. Book banning is a violation of American law.

According to the American Library Association, parents have been the initiators in book challenging and banning over other group by an overwhelming majority. *Harry Potter* is the most banned book in America due to some parents' concern that it promoted satanism. Worried parents have also banned the *Captain Underpants* series for it's inappropriate content and *Pippi Longstocking* for racism. If the government had decided that these books were unsuitable for children, which happened less than 100 times in the past decade, banning them would understandably be the only way to enforce this because they cannot directly influence every child. However, it is rarely the government, but the most influential people in a child's life. Shouldn't a parent be able to restrict what their children can get their hands on? "If you didn't want your kids to eat candy, would you forbid all their friends to eat it too? If you didn't want your kids to stay up late, would you forbid all their friends to stay up too? If you didn't want your kids to read *Twilight*, would you forbid all their friends to read it too?" another author, Sonya Sones said of book banning. While some parents don't want to raise their children exposed to

certain books, that is their choice. Parents shouldn't enforce their censorship on everyone.

While some young children should not be exposed to various topics, anyone out of elementary school can find valuable messages in challenged books. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one of the most commonly banned books, uses racism to paint a story where love triumphs over hate. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* confronts what it means to grow up. *Harry Potter* is overarched with the values of friendship and unity. Since 1982, people have been celebrating Banned Books Week in late September to appreciate the amazing values of books we have banned. We should not be discouraging big ideas because all they can do is call for change. If words printed on a page can cause us to reassess how we live our lives, maybe we should listen. Book banning stems from the fear that these stories might influence us- they should. Ignorance is the spark for all imperfections in the world. Discrimination, disagreements, problems that need to be solved. Everything impossible just needs to be considered from a new angle in the way many banned books fall away from the ordinary plots. "The first condition of progress is the removal of censorship." Playwright George Bernard Shaw said. New ideas shouldn't be shunned- they may just have a point.

In summary, book banning stunts our progress as a modern society. Knowledge is power, and we shouldn't fear its opportunity but learn how to use it properly. Yes, there are themes that may be censored for young children, but there is so much to be learned from these challenged books. Every idea has the right to be heard in the United States and we should take advantage of the ability to express ourselves. Every idea has wor

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