

CORE 200: Liberal Arts Reading Salon

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Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know: Reading Banned Books

What do *Harry Potter*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Captain Underpants*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* all have in common? Believe it or not, they're each among the most-banned books of the twenty-first century. In fact, many of the books you cherished as a child or loved in AP Lit have been banned from classrooms and libraries across the country. Some people call such efforts censorship, but others feel it's imperative to protect young minds from works they call "profane," "vulgar," "indecent," and "pornographic."

What makes these books so dangerous, we might ask? How can a work like *To Kill a Mockingbird* be labeled both "a filthy, trashy novel" (NY School District) and "a novel of great sweetness, humor, [and] compassion" (*Harper's*)? And haven't parents and school boards ever considered that branding something "forbidden" is likely to make it twice as attractive to young readers?

This Reading Salon will explore these darkest and most dangerous of works. After surveying a selection of novels that have been banned on political, religious, and moral grounds in the first half of the semester, the class will collectively create a reading list for the second half of the course. Together we will revel in reading books that have been branded too obscene for the masses, asking what such labels can teach us about the texts themselves and the societies that have banned them.

Texts

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. NY: Little, Brown, 2009.

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. NY: Ballantine Books, 2009.

Blume, Judy. *Forever*. NY: Atheneum Books, 2014.

Orwell, George. *1984*. NY: Signet Classics, 1950.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. NY: Yearling Books, 2001.

This Film Is Not Yet Rated. Dir. Kirby Dick. 2006.