

## Cheng Chat: Remove that Book from the Library!



by Kurt W. Wagner

Perhaps the highest aspiration of your Library is to remain unbiased, neutral, and preserve your right to determine the worth or suitability of information by making everything available. We support free and equal access to information by all people.

Cheng Library may contain works you find objectionable, ideas you do not agree with, or perspectives that are not your own. In accord with the American Library Association's Statement of Intellectual Freedom (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom>), we believe that *all* perspectives should be preserved and that the Library itself should not promote any as being right or wrong. We provide the materials for you to make your own judgments.

It's fascinating to see how this idea has been challenged. Libraries are regularly contacted and asked to remove materials from their collections that an individual or group finds objectionable.

The American Library Association keeps a close watch and thorough records of materials challenged (asked to be removed) or banned (taken off shelves). In 2013, the following were the top five titles challenged:

1. *Captain Underpants* (series) by Dav Pilkey, due to offensive language, unsuitability for age group, and violence.
2. *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison due to offensive language, sexually explicit content, unsuitability for age group, and violence.
3. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie due to content containing drug, alcohol and tobacco use, offensive language, racism, sexually explicit content, and unsuitability for age group.
4. *Fifty Shades of Grey*, by E. L. James due to content containing nudity, offensive language, religious viewpoint, sexually explicit content, and unsuitability for age group.
5. *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins due to religious content and unsuitability for age group.

Even books considered classics are frequently challenged, such as:

*The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald  
*The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger  
*The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee  
*1984*, by George Orwell

Topics that are controversial, difficult, or objectionable to individuals or groups are often the focus of these challenges. Sometimes, it is because of crude language, sometimes because of ideas that are not orthodox, but always it is about a person or a group who tries to censor your library's collection so that you are unable to get this information.

Would you value a library that only collects works that agree with one political party or religious point of view? George Orwell's novel *1984* dealt with this topic in depth. In this dystopia all information is carefully managed by the government. All media projects a controlled and managed message. How can you honestly research topics if you are only exposed to one side – the politically correct side – of the issue?

So, please take a moment to consider the freedom of thought that your library is committed to protect. Though there are ideas and scenes and language in the collections that some may object to, we include them all. Your library is a place where all ideas are honored and all information is equal, and, we promise to keep it that way.