

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Banned

Fault in Our Stars Kicked Out of California Middle School

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

A committee for the Riverside (Calif.) Unified School District banned *The Fault in Our Stars* from the district's middle schools. The book, which deals with a pair of cancer-stricken teens who fall in love (and have sex), was expelled by a vote of 6-1.

Committee members were troubled by the story's mature content. They also felt that a book dealing with such critically sick kids who talk about death so much might be inappropriate for middle-schoolers. Author John Green issued a tongue-in-cheek statement regarding the ban.

"I guess I am both happy and sad," he wrote on Tumblr. "I am happy because apparently young people in Riverside, Calif., will never witness or experience mortality since they won't be reading my book, which is great for them. But I am also sad because I was really hoping I would be able to introduce the idea that human beings die to the children of Riverside, Calif., and thereby crush their dreams of immortality."

The Fault in Our Stars joins some all-star books that at one time or another also have been censored. Some of the most famous works of literature have been banned or challenged, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Call of the Wild* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

We're not including the Bible—a book loaded with adult content and controversial themes that entire *countries* have banned. While most school libraries still stock the book on their shelves, there have been instances of students not being allowed to read the Bible including during free time.

Talk About It

Just because a book is banned from a school doesn't mean it's bad. Some books might be too mature for some readers. The truth is, we censor things all the time. Kids under the age of 17 technically aren't allowed to see R-rated movies or buy M-rated video games. Sometimes we censor what we see or read ourselves. That's just part of having self-control.

Do you think Riverside should've banned *The Fault in Our Stars*? Is the subject too mature for middle schoolers? Is it healthy for young teens to grapple with some of the issues the book raises? Could the answer for both questions be yes?

Madeline L'Engle once wrote, "If the book will be too difficult for grown-ups, then you write it for children." Many books written for teens and young adults such as *The Fault in Our Stars* can deal with some pretty heavy issues. Do you think middle schoolers and high schoolers have a better ability to deal with tricky subjects than some adults tend to believe?

Can you think of a time when your parents censored something you wanted to read or see? Forbid you from going to a certain movie or watching a certain television show? Have your parents ever watched a movie with you and fast-forwarded through parts they didn't want you to see? When things have been censored for you, did that censorship make sense?

Have you ever tried to guard your younger siblings from things you thought they were too young to see or experience? Have you ever acted as a censor for yourself, deciding for example not to see a scary movie because you thought it might bother you? Have you ever *wished* you had avoided a book or movie or TV show? When?

What the Bible Says

"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov. 25:28).

"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness" (2 Pet. 1:5-6).

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com* and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book *The Good Dad*. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Check out his entertainment blog at Patheos.com/blogs/watchinggod or follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.