

# Harry Potter Series – Selected Challenges

English 406.001

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*Note: The Harry Potter books have been conceived from their intellectual inception as a 7-book series, and challenges have normally been directed toward all the books thus far published as opposed to any single title. The obvious exception would be the challenges at the time when only the first book in the series, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, had been published (1998-early 1999). Furthermore, within three years of their publishing inception, the Harry Potter books had been the target of enough challenges to place the entire series in top positions on the ALA banned book lists for the decade, incredibly. The information below outlines some of these challenges.*

**Boston, MA (2007):** The pastor of a Catholic school declared that the Harry Potter books contained themes of witchcraft and sorcery that were inappropriate for a Catholic school and that it was “his job to protect the weak and the strong.”

**Gwinnett County, GA (2005-2007); AKA The Mother Who Will Not Give Up:** Challenged in Gwinnett County, Georgia (suburban Atlanta) by a parent who claimed that the novels were an “evil” attempt to “indoctrinate children in pagan religion” and should therefore be taken off the shelves of all Gwinnett County public schools. Parent Laura Mallory claimed the books were full of “evil themes, witchcraft, demonic activity, murder, evil blood sacrifice, [and] spells.” She also admitted that she had not read the books series because “they’re really very long and I have four kids,” but she argued that “I don’t agree with what’s in them. I don’t have to read an entire pornographic magazine to know it’s obscene.” Mallory told the school board that she wanted “to protect children from evil, not fill their minds with it. The ‘Harry Potter’ books teach children and adults that witchcraft is OK for children.” On her original complaint form, Mallory suggested that the Harry Potter books be replaced by C. S. Lewis’s “Chronicles of Narnia” or Tim LaHaye’s “Left Behind: The Kids” series. After the county school board voted her request down, Mallory appealed to the Georgia state Board of Education, which voted on December 14<sup>th</sup> to uphold the decision of the Gwinnett County school board. After Mallory took her case to a state court and was voted down by a Georgia judge, she threatened to take the case to federal court. “I maybe need a whole new case from the ground up,” said Mallory. Mallory’s website is at <http://hisvoicetoday.org/index.htm>

**Fort Hancock, TX (2004):** Challenged in Fort Hancock, TX school curriculum, for the “mysticism” and “paganism” in book. An alternate book was allowed for parents objecting to Harry Potter.

**2003.** Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) expressed concern that the Harry Potter books “erode Christianity in the soul” of young people.

**Moscow, Russia (2002):** The Moscow, Russia City Prosecutor’s Office decided not to bring criminal hate crime charges against Rosman Publishing for making available a Russian-language version of Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. The situation arose after a Moscow woman from the International Foundation for Slavic Writing and Culture filed charges that the book “instilled religious extremism and prompted students to join religious organizations of Satanist followers.”

**Lewiston, ME (2002):** A group in Lewiston, ME ceremonially shredded copies of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* the night before the film version was scheduled for release. The same group staged a similar ceremony in 2001 before the opening of the first Harry Potter movie. The group’s leader had originally wanted to burn the books, but city officials refused to grant him a burning permit.

**Cedarville, AR (2002):** The parents of a 4<sup>th</sup> grader in Cedarville, AR filed a federal lawsuit to reverse city school board’s placement of the Harry Potter series on a restricted borrowing list. Students were not allowed to check out any Rowling book without written parental permission. The restriction was placed after another parent—after hearing a series of anti-Potter sermons delivered by her minister, who is also a member of the school board—

objected that the series characterized authority as “stupid” and portrayed “good witches and good magic,” in violation of her beliefs. In April 2003 a U.S. District Judge ruled the school board’s restriction was unconstitutional and a violation of the landmark 1982 Supreme Court ruling on *Island Tree v. Pico*, which forbade officials from removing school library materials “simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books.”

**Alamogordo, NM (2001):** In Alamogordo, New Mexico, a local church held a bonfire event to burn works written by J. K. Rowling and other “offensive” works, including J. R. R. Tolkien novels, issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Young Miss* magazines, and *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.

**Oskaloosa, KS (2001):** The Oskaloosa, KS public library canceled a summer storytelling presentation about “Muggle Studies” after some residents stated fears that their children would be taught witchcraft at the event.

**Chester County, PA (2001):** A former substitute teacher and security guard registered a formal complaint in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The school board there was informed that “Harry Potter teaches you it’s OK to get back at people.”

**Rural PA (2001):** A church in rural Pennsylvania held a burning of the Harry Potter books, as well as Shirley MacLaine books, Pinocchio videos, and music by Bruce Springsteen and Pearl Jam.

**2001.** The Harry Potter books had been banned outright in districts in Pennsylvania, Kansas, Illinois, and Wyoming.

**Bristol, NH (2000):** A parent in Bristol, NH appealed a district decision to allow the reading of Harry Potter books in class. The board refused to accept her appeal, reminding her that parents always have the right to request an alternative reading assignment.

**Arab, AL (2000):** A parent in Arab, AL asked the Board of Ed to remove the Potter books from school libraries and accelerated reading programs. Stating that she was speaking on behalf of other Christians, she charged that J. K. Rowling was a member of the occult and that her books encourage children to practice witchcraft. “It was a mistake years ago to take prayer out of the schools because it let Satan in,” she said. “We need to put God back in the schools and throw the Harry Potter books out.” The school board eventually decided to retain the books in the schools, though they would not be required reading.

**Santa Fe, TX (2000):** Santa Fe, TX school principals voted to require written consent before allowing children to check out any of the Harry Potter books from school libraries. The Rowling books are the only ones in the collection requiring such permission.

**Dallas, TX (2000):** In Dallas, TX the school board accepted the recommendation of a review committee to allow Harry Potter books to continue being read aloud at school. A group of parents had complained that the books emphasize violence and deception. One opposing parent remarked that “Unfortunately, the board’s main concern seemed to be with what the teachers thought instead of what parents’ concerns were for their children.”

**Rockford, IL (2000):** Holy Family Catholic School in Rockford, IL removed Rowling’s books from the school library on the principal’s fears that they present witchcraft and astrology “in a positive light.” The principal had not read any of the books himself, but made his decision after hearing from a pastor who had read two of them.

**Pace, FL (2000):** A citizen in Pace, FL insisted that Harry Potter be removed from all local school libraries, on the charge that they glorify witchcraft and the occult and opposed Biblical teachings. “I know a lot of parents and teachers love it because the kids are excited about reading,” he said. “But there’s excitement in drugs, there’s excitement in fornication, there’s excitement in crime, but that doesn’t mean they’re good for a person.”

**Jacksonville, FL (2000):** The Jacksonville, FL Public Library was forced to stop a promotion campaign for the Harry Potter books pending the complaints of some parents and a national religious organization—and a threatened lawsuit. The library had passed out a “Hogwarts’ Certificate of Accomplishment” to children who had completed

the books. Said one parent: “We don’t want our children to be exposed to witchcraft. If they are going to pass out witchcraft certificates, they should promote the Bible and pass out certificates of righteousness.”

**Salamanca, NY (2000):** The school board in Salamanca, NY decided to leave the Harry Potter books in the elementary school libraries. A family had complained about the dark themes in the book.

**Whittier, CA (2000):** A committee in Whittier, CA rejected a request to remove the Harry Potter books from district school libraries. A petition signed by 53 parents had charged that the series “exposes our young children’s minds to black magic and . . . horrible experiences that our children don’t need to hear or read about.” The review committee countered that “if books were to be banned from schools due to violence depicted, then stories such as Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, and the Three Little Pigs would need to be added to the list.”

**Cedar Rapids, IA (2000):** A couple in Cedar Rapids, IA asked the school to remove Harry Potter from the school libraries because of its “romantic characterization of witches, warlocks, wizards, goblins, and sorcerers.” Said one parent: “These things by their very nature erode the morality of our children, and therefore ultimately our society.”

**Band-La Pine, OR (2000):** The Band-La Pine, OR school board ruled to keep the Harry Potter books available to students on an unrestricted basis after a set of parents requested that the school board ban the series altogether, arguing that it “threatened the fundamental morality of students.”

**Carrollwood, FL (2000):** Administrators at Carrollwood Elementary School (FL) decided to prohibit any future purchases of Harry Potter books for the school library, fearing that parents might object to their presence there. No formal complaints had been lodged against the books, but the principal ordered the action to remove the possibility of future problems.

**Bend, OR (2000):** A couple in Bend, OR asked school officials to ban Harry Potter from the district’s schools, charging that the books would lead children to hatred and rebellion. They also complained about the books’ reference to witchcraft and divination. The school superintendent, however, rejected their request on the grounds that the couple should not determine the reading materials not only for their child, but for all students.

**Moorpark, CA (2000):** Parents of a student in Moorpark, CA removed their son from school because of Harry Potter’s presence. Said the parents, “It was a horrible book. . . . It talked about death and killing. It talks about drinking animal blood. That is witchcraft, and as a religion it doesn’t belong in school.”

**2000.** High-profile protests occurred in Marietta, GA; Simi Valley, CA; Douglas County, CO; Lakeville, MN.

**Saginaw, MI (1999):** The Bruckner Elementary School in Saginaw, MI came on record as the first school in the country to remove the Harry Potter books from the classroom. One parent complained that “the books are based on sorcery, which is an abomination to the Lord. . . . I read a couple of chapters and felt like God didn’t want me reading it.” In response to the parent’s protest, the principal decided to prohibit the reading of the books in class in order to avoid further controversy.

**Frankfort, IL (1999):** A parent in Frankfort, IL schools complained that the Harry Potter books contained lying and smart-aleck retorts to adults. The district chose not to remove the books from the school.

**Simi Valley, CA (1999):** A parent in the Simi Valley, CA school district charged that the book was “violent, antifamily, had a religious theme, and lacked educational value.” A review committee voted to allow its continued use as a “read-aloud” book in the classroom, but decided that it would not be required reading and that parents could take their children out of the classroom during this reading time. The parent, who protested the committee’s decision, stated, “I think it’s pathetic that the school district is afraid to make a moral decision.”

**South Carolina (1999):** A group of parents asked the South Carolina Board of Education to ban the Harry Potter books from all South Carolina schools on the grounds that “the books have a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect, and sheer evil.” Stated one parent: “They’re trying to disguise things as fun and easy that are really evil.”

**1999.** Parents in Douglas County, CO, Moorpark, CA, and Buffalo, NY brought formal complaints to their school boards against the Harry Potter books.

**Sources:** *Gwinnett (GA) Daily Post*, 19 April 2006; “Free People Read Freely: An Annual Report on Banned and Challenged Books in Texas Public Schools, 2004-2005,” ACLU of Texas; *American Libraries* 34.4 (April 2003); “Pope Concerned Over Harry Potter Books,” *Salon*, 14 July 2005; *American Libraries* 32.7 (August 2001); *American Libraries* 31.9 (October 2000); *American Libraries* 31.4 (April 2000); *American Libraries* 34.2 (February 2003); *U. S. News and World Report* 130.20 (21 May 2001); *American Libraries* 33.2 (February 2002); *Library Journal* 128.3 (15 February 2003); *School Library Journal* 49.1 (January 2003); Foerstel, Herbert N. *Banned in the U.S.A.: A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools and Public Libraries*. Rev. ed. N.p.: Greenwood Publishing, 2002; [http://bookshelvesofdoom.blogs.com/bookshelves\\_of\\_doom/books\\_challenged/index.html](http://bookshelvesofdoom.blogs.com/bookshelves_of_doom/books_challenged/index.html)

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