

6-28-2000

## Outcry Over Wizardry in Harry Potter Books Lands the Series in Banned Literature Class

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### Recommended Citation

"Outcry Over Wizardry in Harry Potter Books Lands the Series in Banned Literature Class" (2000). *News Releases*. 9026.  
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WACI



June 28, 2000  
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**NEWS RELEASE**

**OUTCRY OVER WIZARDRY IN HARRY POTTER BOOKS  
 LANDS THE SERIES IN BANNED LITERATURE CLASS**

DAYTON, Ohio — Mark Twain's classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, has been controversial since before its publication as a book. John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger have drawn protests since they hit the shelves.

The Harry Potter series, with its fourth installment due to be released July 8, has joined the list, with objections to the wizardry it portrays as being anti-Christian as one of the top complaints.

Brian Conniff, associate professor of English at the University of Dayton, for the first time is including the J.K. Rowling series in his summer class on teaching banned literature. The two-week, three-credit graduate-level class, which runs through June 30, is aimed at teachers, administrators and master's degree students.

"Every 10-year-old boy in the country wants to buy *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. I've never seen anything like it. It's amazing to me," Conniff said. His own 10-year-old son, Brendan, is one of the fans panting for the newest book, and Conniff is currently reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the second book, aloud to his 7-year-old twin girls.

Whether it's great literature isn't the point, said Conniff, who calls the series "fun." At issue is the climate of censorship.

"We've seen more and more challenges against adolescent literature, including some very good adolescent literature," he said. "The Harry Potter series will give us a way to address the issue of this attack in class. In the American Library Association's list of challenged books, adolescent literature has risen way up on the list."

The other books in the class are usually aimed at slightly older audiences.

*Of Mice and Men*, generally taught in middle schools, raises "pretty big issues," Conniff said. "It's readable and teachable for bright 12- and 13-year-olds, but it includes violence and prostitution and is sometimes difficult for teens that age to deal with."

*The Catcher in the Rye*, in the 1960s the most frequently taught work of American

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literature in colleges, still shows up on reading lists in high schools and universities. "It has all the ingredients to set off parents – language and objections that it is anti-Christian," Conniff said.

*Huckleberry Finn*, previously marketed as a book for boys, is taught in high schools and at the college level. "It's one of the most essential books in the history of the American novel," Conniff said. "Twain creates the vernacular voice, and it's a very important moment. To most of us who work in American literature, it's hard to understand American literature without understanding *Huckleberry Finn* — and it's important for students to understand the controversies it raises."

Much of the recent controversy about *Huck Finn*, Conniff said, results from Twain's use of stereotypes in his depiction of black characters. Although critical of slavery, the book includes racist language, and the ending undercuts much of the progress Huck has made, especially in his understanding of Jim.

"Some of the racial issues are pretty complex, and teachers have to be aware of the effect on students. What happens when the black kids in class hear that language over and over again? You can't just say 'They used to talk like that' and dismiss it. You have to teach the book without letting the issues become harmful."

As for Harry Potter, Conniff said he could have predicted the outcry from those opposed to the books. "Here's a series of books that kids have gone absolutely crazy about," he said. "Naturally someone is going to try and ban it."

Once readers have devoured the next installment, teachers, parents and librarians may be able to capitalize on the fascination adolescents have developed for Harry, he said. "It gives them great leverage to be able to get kids to read other fantasy books — books that appeal to the same sense of magic and fantasy that they find in Harry Potter."

He suggests adults review the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* and *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl as possible antidotes for Harry Potter withdrawal.