

Challenged, Censored – and Celebrated

Fight the forces of denial by reading

Censored? Eugene might not seem like a place where books get challenged too often, though in 1995, Lois Lowry's book *The Giver* got some negative attention and a formal challenge in the at the Danebo Elementary School (the challenge was denied, and the book was kept on the shelves).

But that's not as bad as *burned*. I was a senior in college when some conservative people in my home city burned copies of Nancy Garden's 1982 young adult (YA) novel *Annie on My Mind*. Though it's been over 14 years since that incident, books with positive depictions of lesbian, gay or bi characters remain on the American Library Association (ALA)'s 10 Most Challenged lists. For 2006, a nonfiction picture book, *And Tango Makes Three*, hit the top spot. Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell's sweet little tale of New York Central Park Zoo's penguin couple Roy and Silo, who raised a penguin chick named Tango, joined a select group: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* were also on the list, as was Carolyn

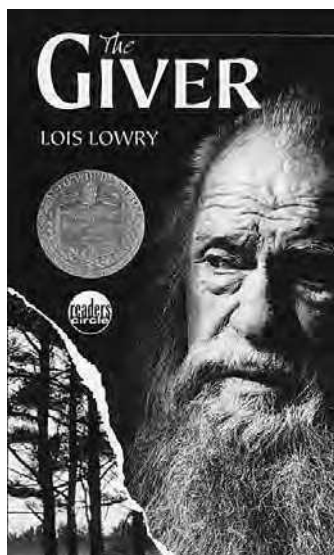
Macker's smart, hilarious *The Earth, My Butt and Other Big Round Things*.

Young adult books are most commonly challenged or banned (although, as with *Tango*, picture book challenges are on the rise). EPL Youth Services Manager Mary Ginanne says that this is because teens are at "an age where awareness about identity, sexuality, religion and politics start to get questioned." In wanting to protect those teens, some adults — and some youth —

confuse questioning with action.

In Brookwood, Ala., a young woman recently refused to return Ellen Wittlinger's book *Sandpiper* to her school library. The main character needs to learn that offering oral sex to boys won't earn her their love (an issue addressed differently in Laura Ruby's *Good Girls*). The young woman who won't return the book claims it is "offensive" and "sick." Wittlinger, in her response on the Authors Supporting Intellectual Freedom! blog (available at asifnews.blogspot.com), writes that the teen "didn't have to read the book if she didn't want to ... [but] she should not be able to decide what anyone else can or cannot read."

Closer to home, Tacoma author Brent Hartinger has seen his book *Geography Club* challenged and removed from University Place School District libraries ... in Tacoma! Ouch. Hartinger, in an interview on AfterElton.com, noted that "If every parent in every school district gets a veto on what books are allowed in the library, that means the whole idea of library is meaningless."



This is why the ALA created the annual Banned Books Week. This year, the Eugene library sponsors a visit from famed (and also often challenged or banned) author Lowry, with support from the University Bookstore. Lowry, who has two Newbery Medals to her credit, writes the Anastasia Krupnik and

Gooney Bird Greene series. Older youth often enjoy *Number the Stars*, not to mention *The Giver*, the book that most often finds her at the center of controversy. As in Ursula LeGuin's chilling short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," *The*

guidelines. And, she says, "We try to have a conversation about why an array of materials is available in the library." To her, as to most other librarians, it's a question of democracy. "In a democratic society, if people are voting and making choices, there needs to be an agency where people can get a diversity of viewpoints."

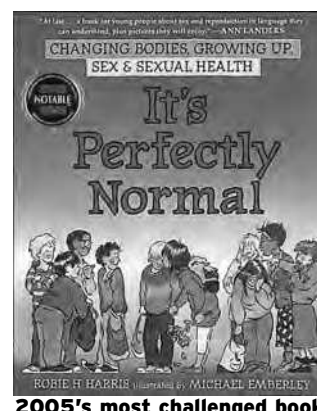
Also, there's that pesky Bill of Rights. "The Supreme Court has determined that the First Amendment does protect the right to read, and we are concerned about upholding that right for people," Ginanne says.

Perhaps next year Eugene can emulate Chicago, where there's a huge Banned Books Week Read-Out downtown. This year, uphold your rights by checking the ALA's lists at www.ala.org (where there's a list of the most banned books of the 21st century along with this year's list), snagging a book that sounds interesting and reading it ... in public.

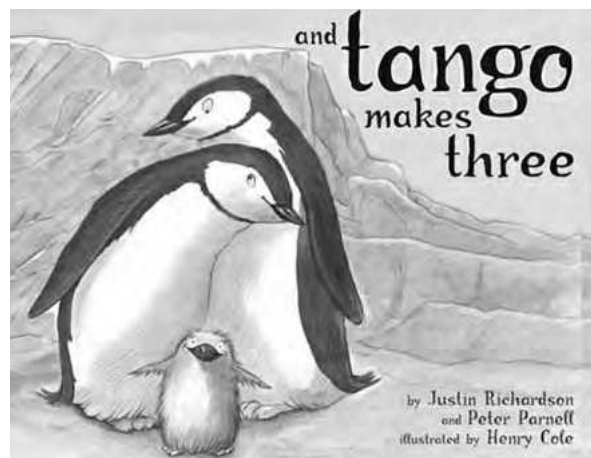
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Banned Books Week runs Sept. 29 through Oct. 6. Lois Lowry speaks at 6 pm Wednesday, Oct. 10, at the Downtown Library.

GO ONLINE at www.eugeneweekly.com for Web-exclusive Q&As with Brent Hartinger and Ellen Wittlinger!



2005's most challenged book



BOOK NOTES: Steven Pinker discusses *The Stuff of Thought*, 7 pm 9/28, Bagdad Theater, Portland. \$21 admission includes a copy of the book; **Greil Marcus** reads from *The Shape of Things to Come*, 7:30 pm 9/28, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Alice Walker** reads from *Why War Is Never a Good Idea*, 7 pm 9/29, Powell's, Beaverton; **Jessica Page Morrell** leads a mini writing workshop featuring her book *Writer's I Ching: Wisdom for the Creative Life*, 7 pm 9/29, Barnes & Noble. **Gen. Wesley Clark** reads from *A Time to Lead*, 7 pm 10/1, Powell's, Beaverton. **John Burridge** and **Damon Kazwell** will read from *Writers of the Future, Volume XXII*, in which they are featured; they'll be joined by **Nina Kiriki Hoffman**, **Stephen Stanley**, **Eric Wichey** and others, 6 pm 10/2, Tsunami Book. **Christina Katz** discusses "Writing Rhythms: How to Weave More Writing Success into Your Already Busy Life," 7 pm 10/4, Baker Building, 10th & High. \$10, \$3 stu. **Jonathan Kozol** reads from *Letters to a Young Teacher*, 7 pm 10/4, Powell's, Beaverton. **Akashic All-Stars** reading with **Felicia Luna Lemus** (*Like Son*), **Chris Abani** (*Song for Night*) and **Joe Meno** (*Tender as Hellfire*), 7:30 pm 10/7, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Gennifer Choldenko** reads from *If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period*, 7 pm 10/8, Powell's, Beaverton. **Garrison Keillor** reads from *Pontoon*, 7 pm 10/9, Bagdad Theater, Portland. \$29.95, including copy of *Pontoon*.

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