

Book-banning

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This is Banned Books week, and I am in Eugene, Oregon to speak tonight at the Eugene Public Library on the general topic of book-banning and specifically my own experiences with it, which have been many. Mostly my books have been challenged and not actually banned (though that has happened, too), but lately it seems as if there are more and more challenges, some against books that were published many years ago and have gone unchallenged till now. NUMBER THE STARS, for one. Last year it was brought to the school board in a Washington town and the school board voted 4-1 to retain it in school libraries. The failure to achieve a unanimous vote on such an issue is troubling.

There are always those who, with a malicious gleam, say, of a banned author, "He-or she-must be chuckling all the way to the bank." Not so. Not for any of us. Perhaps a flurry of publicity, even of a controversial sort, sells a few extra books. But the whole process diminishes us as a free society, and nobody chuckles their way to the bank on that account.

Are there things I wish children—my own grandchildren—wouldn't read? Darn right. But would I want them to grow up under a government that prevents them access to all literature? Not on your life.

One blog-reader had written to ask that I talk about that issue, and so I have. In Eugene tonight I will read them some of the inflammatory charges that have been brought against me and some of my books from time to time. But I will tell them also of the heroes and heroines out there on the front lines, the librarians, who (I was going to say "go to bat" but it would mix a metaphor) defend the first amendment with eloquence and vigor and often a great deal of courage.

Another question a reader has sent in seems simplistic at first: "Do you always start a story at

the beginning?" Well, duh, the quick answer would be: where else is there? But the truth is that sometimes a story, or a book, evolves backwards, starting from an imagined ending scene, or some truth that the writer wants to work toward, and so the thinking—the plotting—goes in a backward direction. Always the writing, though, the actual putting-down-the-words, for me at least, starts at the beginning, with a scene, a character, and a vague feeling of unease, of something being not-quite-right. Working toward the resolution of that feeling is what plot is for.



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