

September 26 to October 2 is Banned Books Week, a yearly celebration of the right to read by the American Library Association. In honor of this week, I have decided to read a banned book each day. Most, if not all of these books are still on library shelves all over the country, but they are books that have brought out the ire of groups or individuals who have labored to have them removed from libraries, schools, and bookstores.

Several of the books that have become issues for certain groups in the past are on our own bookshelves, so I am beginning by reading some of them. If I run out of “banned books” that we own, I will ask my local librarian to drop off others that are in the library.

So, on September 26th, I read J.D. Salinger’s *the Catcher in the Rye*. The reasons for some of the extraordinary rancor surrounding this book have never seemed very clear to me. I guess young Holden Caulfield’s vocabulary was deemed a little too earthy for some people who opposed teaching the book in high school English classes. In checking on this today I discovered that it was just considered immoral to be writing about sexual issues in a book that many young people were reading. I loved the book when I first read it and have re-read it several times since it first came out.

On the 27th, I read *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller. This is another of the books I re-read periodically. The book was condemned for indecent language in one town, and it was also cited later for racist and misogynist statements in a few places, reflecting the language common in military culture during World War II. But, a book with characters named Major Major Major Major and Colonel Korn has to have something going for it!

Today, I re-read *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. The theme of rape and the racism that was exposed in the novel were the reasons for many communities trying to ban the book. Fortunately, millions more people have loved this book for the way it brought understanding of racism to many of us who had never encountered prejudice in any form. And, countless young girls found a heroine they wished to emulate in the charming but unladylike Scout.

There are still a few “banned books” on our shelves. Laura Ingalls Wilder’s series, cited for racist views is there; some of Kurt Vonnegut’s work that incensed certain groups. Oh, there’s also a Bible on our shelves. Some groups want that banned, too. And others agitate against the Koran. There may be other books here in our bookcases that would be sources of dismay to some friends and neighbors.

But, tomorrow, I will have to decide which one to pluck from a shelf and open. The right to read whatever we want is a fundamental one. I must say, though, that most of the books on our shelves are, in the view of many people, subversive for reasons more political than moral. Or, they are works on environmental issues that many individuals, their heads in the sand, don’t wish to acknowledge. As much as we wish to avert our eyes, we are going down a steep path to global disaster with far worse consequences than those that might be derived from reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*.