



Give Students the Freedom to Choose What They Read

By Educator Barnes – September 3, 2019

Once again there is a story about censorship in schools. A Catholic school in Tennessee has decided their students [should not read Harry Potter because they may conjure up evil spirits](#).

When the first Harry Potter book was published in the late 90s, I was in high school. I remember religious groups all over the news raising concerns about J.K. Rowling's book.

There were complaints about the book promoting witchcraft and evil. I even heard members of my church condemning the book.

As a parent, you have the right to dictate what your child can read, but the school should not be restricting books before parents even have a say. When books are banned, it brings more attention to the book. Book bans stoke students' curiosity about the book and makes them want to read it even more.

I remember when I was teaching middle school English and *Thirteen Reasons Why* was released. There were (and still are) concerns about the content of the book; some schools banned it. Students asked me if they should read it. I read the book with some of my students and parents were notified about the content. It wasn't a whole class assignment; some students chose the novel as part of their independent reading requirement for my class. The cherry on top of the ice cream sundae was author Jay Asher came to speak about the book. Yes, I was able to get my copy signed by the author.

However, I wonder how many of my students would have read *Thirteen Reasons Why* had people not raised all of these concerns about it. When teachers ask me how to get kids reading, I tell them to talk about books. If you don't want students to read a book, banning it is the worse action to take. Also, if you really have concerns, make a plan to support students, such as reading it with them. Banning a book and having students get their hands on it and reading it alone can cause more problems than if the book was not banned.

Students need a choice in what they read. It is one way they will become engaged in the text. Students who do not have a choice may not become good readers. You only become a good reader by reading. Schools should be the last place where reading is restricted.

These Harry Potter concerns are two decades old. I'm just waiting for real evidence of the spirits that have been conjured up from students reading Harry Potter. I thought schools were into data-based decisions.