



NCTE National Council of Teachers of English Archives at the University of Illinois Archives

[Home](#) [About the NCTE Archives](#) [NCTE Archives Holdings](#) [Needs of the Archives](#) [NCTE Homepage](#) [Return to UIUC Archives](#)

MONTHLY EXHIBITS

[January](#)

[February](#)

[March](#)

[April](#)

[May](#)

[June](#)

[July](#)

[August](#)

[September](#)

[October](#)

[November](#)

[December](#)

Search NCTE Holdings

Search

The Fight Against Censorship in the Classroom

"The techniques and procedures they employ undermine the basic freedoms we cherish and if permitted to flourish would ultimately destroy our way of life."

*From **Censorship and Controversy**, prepared by NCTE's Committee on Censorship of Teaching*

When NCTE first formed, advocacy against censorship was not a significant part of the Council's activities. Instead, NCTE was largely occupied with improving the workload of English teachers, setting standards in English instruction, and promoting reasonable college entrance requirements.

However, censorship became a central issue in the 1950s, with McCarthyism spurring the NCTE to take a more active stance against the issue. In 1953, NCTE's Committee on Censorship of Teaching Materials published *Censorship and Controversy*, which condemned McCarthy's tactics and championed freedom of thought.

Although McCarthyism soon died away, the NCTE continued to rally against book bannings, with several committees dedicated to working against this suppression around the country, including the Committee Against Censorship, the Committee to Report Case Studies on Censorship, and the NCTE Task Force on Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Nonprint Materials. The Council also began to focus more on emphasizing the rights of students. In 1962, *The Students' Right to Read*, published by the NCTE, defends both the rights of teachers and students the freedom to select what to read.

Today, NCTE actively supports teachers facing censorship by offering resources through its online [Anti-Censorship Center](#). To learn more about anti-censorship in NCTE's past, take a look at the featured records below.

Contents:(To enlarge an image, click on it and it will open in a new window)

[Censorship and Controversy](#)

[The Student's Right to Read](#)

[NCTE Defends Teachers: "How to Handle Complaints on Books"](#)

[The Catcher in the Rye Controversy](#)

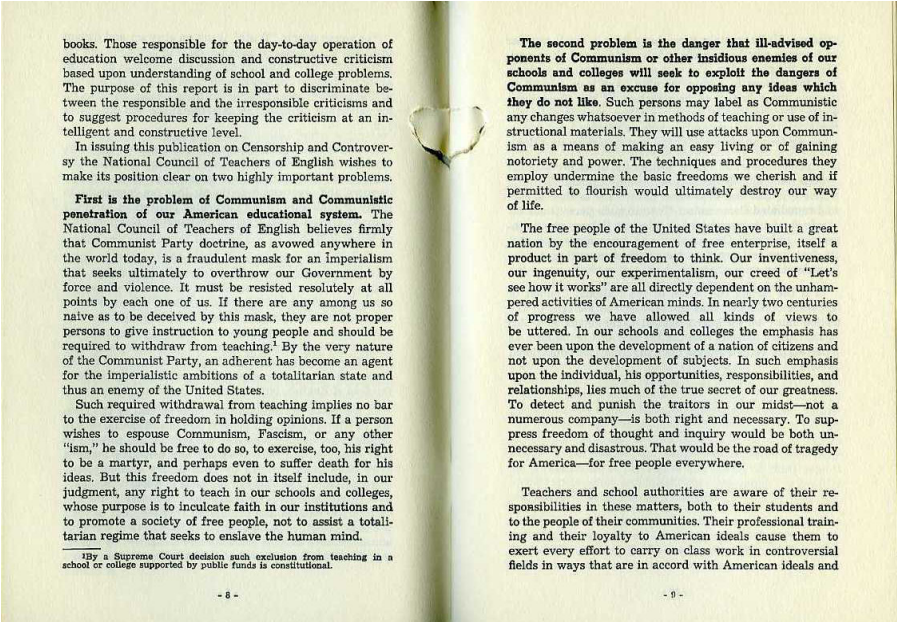
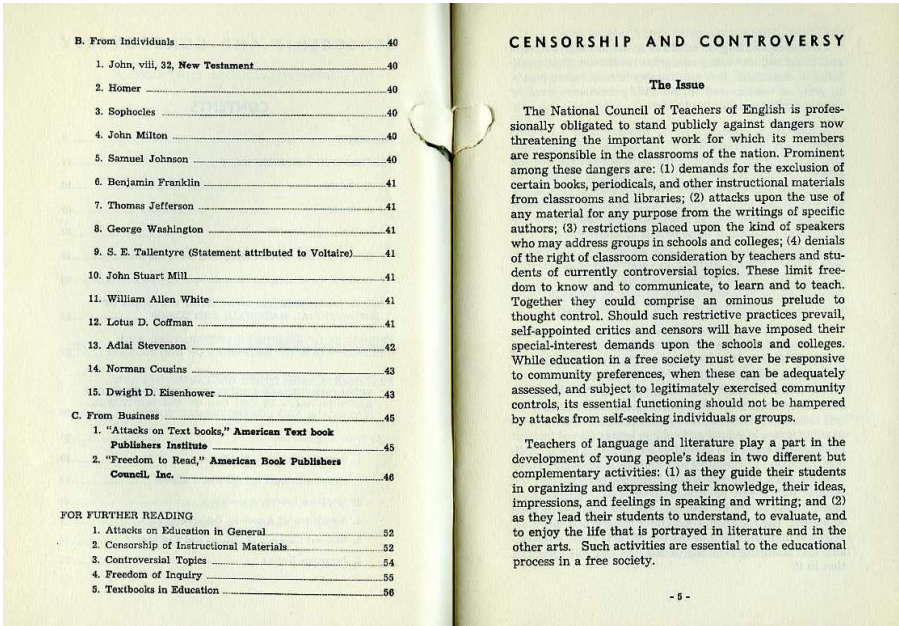
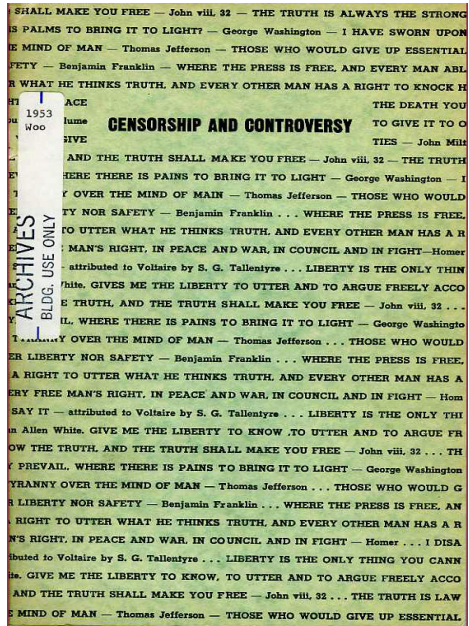
[English Teachers Under Pressure: "Maddox Demands Resignation"](#)

Meeting Censorship in the School: A Series of Case Studies**Censorship and Controversy**

The first NCTE publication to decry censorship, *Censorship and Controversy* is a 56-page pamphlet prepared by the Committee on Censorship of Teaching Materials. Education specialist at the United States Office of Education, William R. Wood, chaired this committee, and five past presidents of NCTE served as members. In this pamphlet, they encouraged open-access to educational materials, as well as warned about people who would exploit the dangers of Communism to gain personal power.

Item: Copy of *Censorship and Controversy* (1953)

To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/73/803](#)



The cover and pages from *Censorship and Controversy*. The preface (page five) explains NCTE's rationale for taking a strong stance against censorship. Pages eight and nine highlight the fundamental positions of the Council on both communism and censorship.

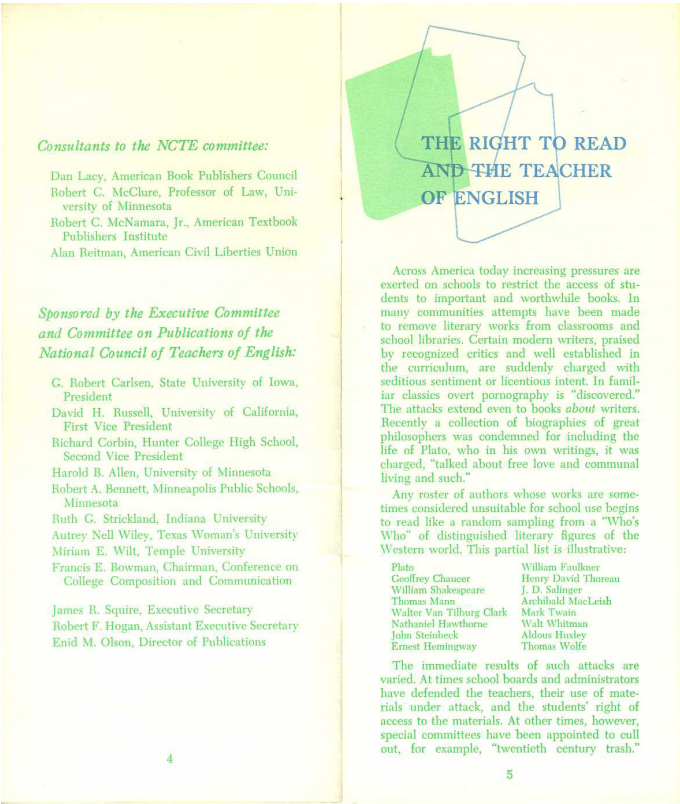
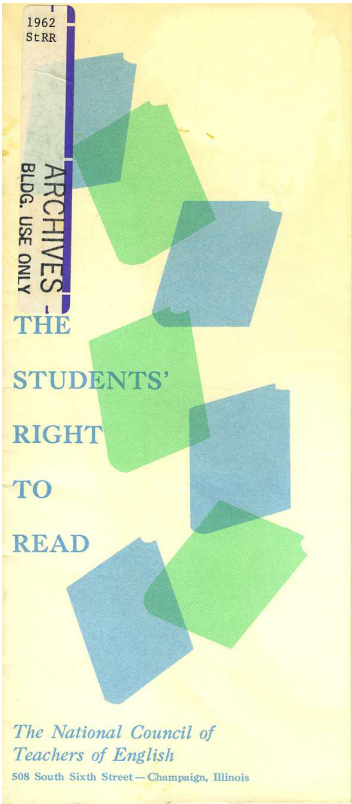
[Back to top](#)

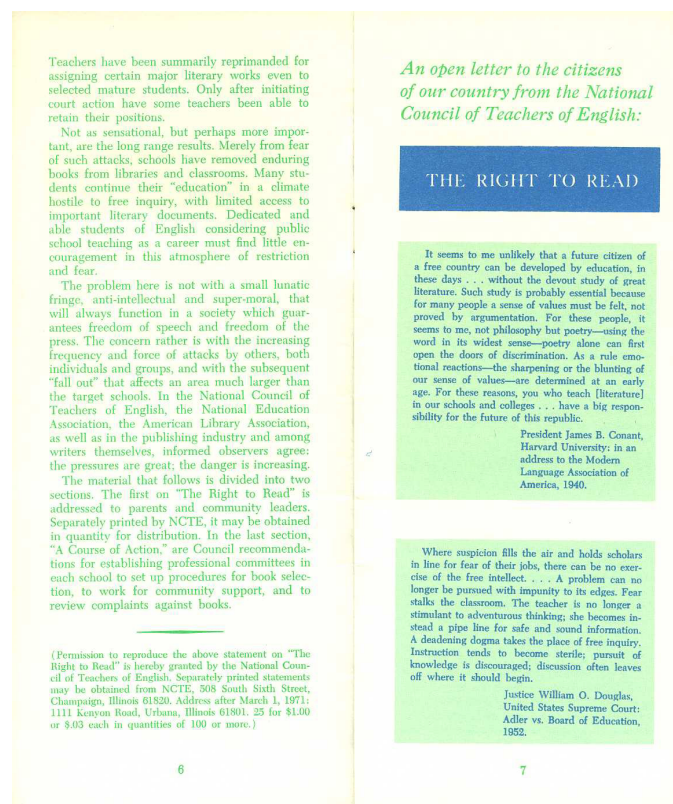
The Student's Right to Read

In 1962, the NCTE published *The Student's Right to Read* to offer guidance to teachers on what to do if they faced potential censorship and to affirm the right of students and teachers to choose what to read. It sold over 150,000 copies, and NCTE continued to reprint and update the *The Student's Right to Read* over the years, including printing a 1972 edition and a 1996 edition. It also serves as the basis for NCTE's policy against censorship.

Item: First printing of *The Student's Right to Read* (1962)

To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/71/824](#)





The cover and pages from the brochure *The Student's Right to Read*. Page five introduces the Council's argument for open access to books, while page seven includes quotes from national figures supporting the right to read.

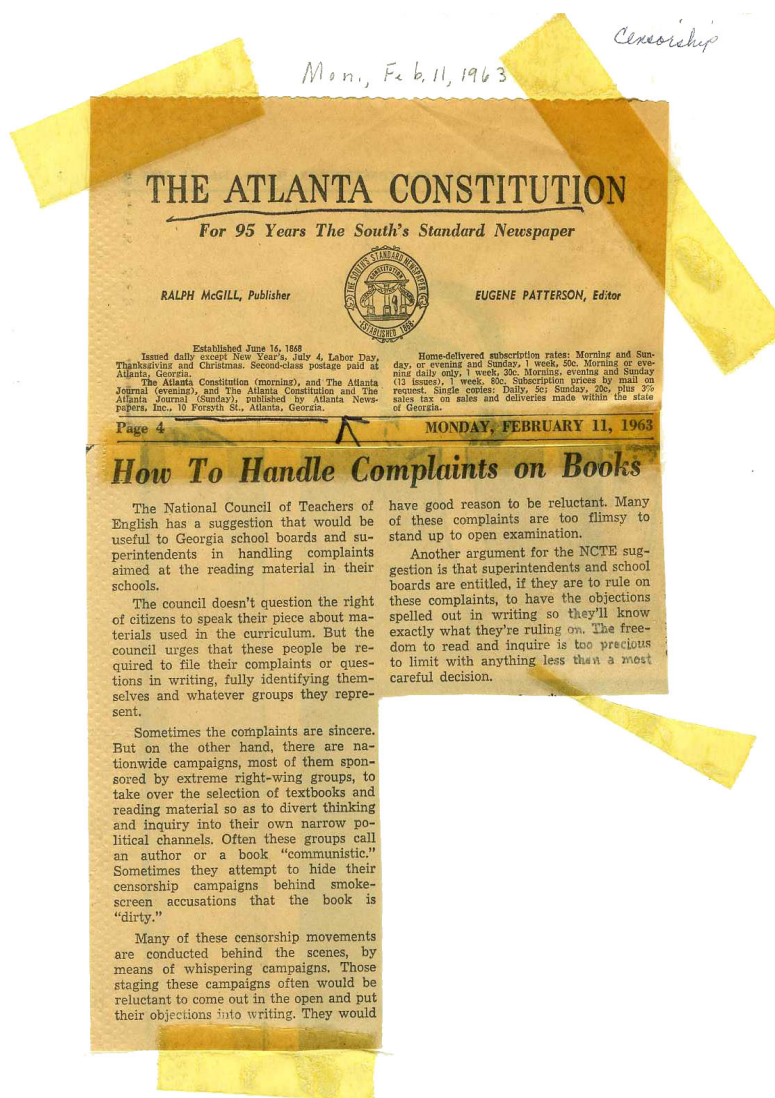
[Back to top](#)

NCTE Defends Teachers: "How to Handle Complaints on Books"

The NCTE reached out to teachers through newspapers, informing educators on how to handle complaints. In an article in *The Atlanta Constitution*, the NCTE suggests: "The Council doesn't question the right of citizens to speak their piece about materials used in the curriculum. But the Council urges that these people be required to file their complaints or questions in writing, fully identifying themselves and whatever groups they represent." Many of the arguments NCTE presents here are based on the pamphlet, *The Student's Right to Read* (see above).

Item: "How to Handle Complaints on Books," *The Atlanta Constitution* (February 11. 1963)

To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/73/009](#)



The newspaper clipping from *The Atlanta Constitution* about NCTE's advice on how to handle challenges to class books.

[Back to top](#)

The Catcher in the Rye Controversy

The NCTE would also directly aid teachers facing potential censorship. Unfortunately, the Council was not always successful. In this series of correspondence, the NCTE offers advice to a headmaster whose high school's curriculum for juniors included the book, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Running into "rumbling" at the school, the headmaster asks for supporting documentation justifying the book's intellectual value for an upcoming

executive board meeting. In the end, however, the executive committee determined that "such a book as this has no place in the curriculum."

Item: Letters on *Catcher in the Rye* (1963)

To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/73/009](#)

THE HINKLEY SCHOOL
HINKLEY, MAINE

Allen G. Vickers
HEADMASTER

March 13, 1963

Mr Robert F. Hogan, Asst. Exec. Secretary
The National Council of Teachers of English
508 South 6th Street
Champaign, Illinois

Dear Mr Hogan

Your name is used in the letter in that it was obtained from Miss Casgood of the NAIS, if per chance this letter should have been directed to another member of your organization I would request that you forward it.

This is my first year at Hinkley and attempts have been made to up-grade the academic atmosphere. The curriculum has been revised, I have a new faculty and the student body has been somewhat weeded-out. In connection with this whole process the assigned-reading in the English department has been changed and "Catcher in the rye" is being used by our Juniors.

There has been some rumbling concerning this book and I know that this is not the first time that such a reaction has been experienced. I have attempted to establish a file of information to combat the opposition and am writing to inquire about any information that might be obtained from your office about this book.

It would seem that most of the independent schools in New England use the book, but I wonder whether any information is available concerning actual numbers of schools using it? Would your office know whether any survey has ever been made that would include this type of information?

The reviews of the book are mostly favorable but few, if any, indicate that it would be good pre-college reading. Do you know of any opinions on this point?

Time is a factor and to facilitate matters I am enclosing a stamped envelope for your use. I am to meet with my board on the 20th of this month, if your reply could be received by then I would be most grateful. Any information of any sort will be most welcome.

Sincerely yours
Allen G. Vickers

*Encl
Please answer
as you best
can*

Air Mail
Special Delivery

March 18, 1963

Mr. Allen G. Vickers
Headmaster
The Hinkley School
Hinkley, Maine

Dear Mr. Vickers:

Mr. Hogan has given me your letter of March 13 to answer. I am enclosing copies of materials which we have sent to other schools when they have requested evaluation of CATCHER IN THE RYE. *These* materials include annotations from book lists which we produce and/or distribute, quotes from articles about the book, a statement by James R. Squire, and material from the American Library Association, which we have sent in similar circumstances. Among these materials you will also find a copy of our 1960 Resolution on Censorship and a copy of our newest statement, THE STUDENTS' RIGHT TO READ. I've included also copies of two editorials on a similar recent incident in Edgerton, Wisconsin.

The following articles on Salinger and his writings from our journals may prove useful in this instance:

Broune, Robert M., "Rebuttal: In Defense of Esme," COLLEGE ENGLISH, May, 1961, pp. 584-585.

Carpenter, Frederic I., "The Adolescent in American Fiction," ENGLISH JOURNAL, September, 1957, pp. 315-316.

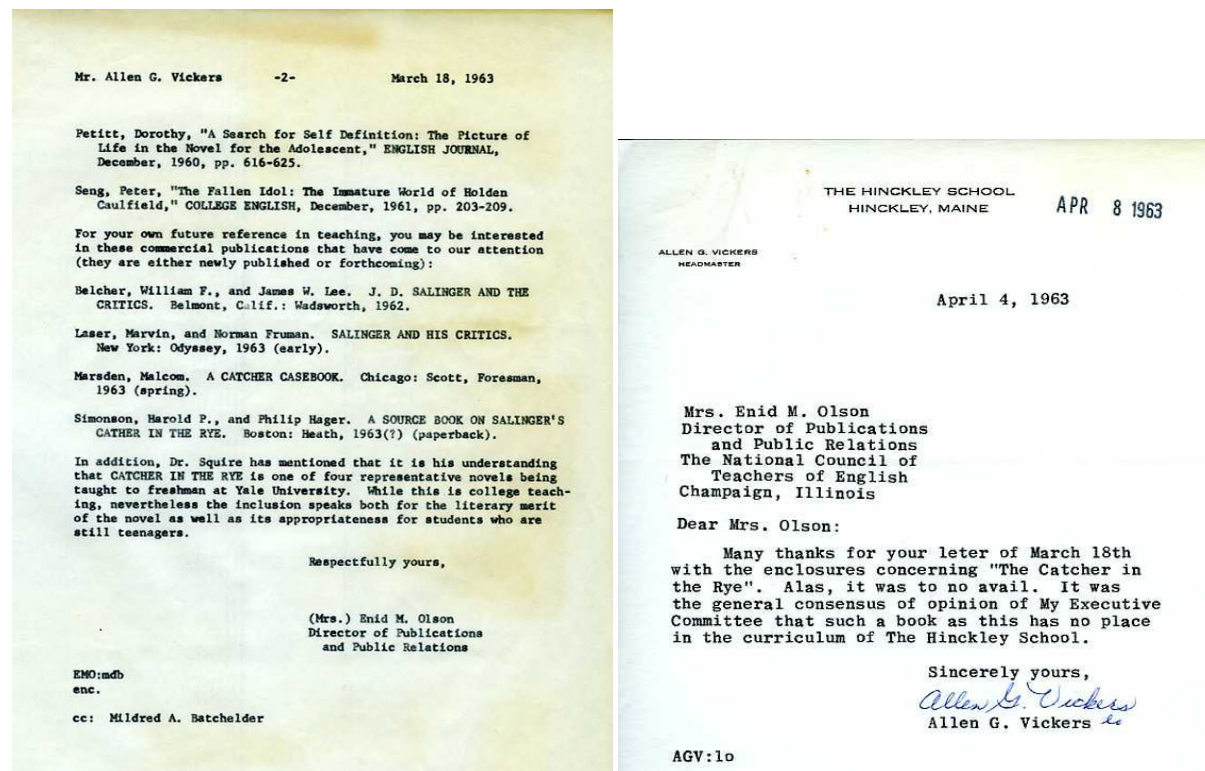
Hermann, John, "J. D. Salinger: Hello Hello Hello," COLLEGE ENGLISH, January, 1961, pp. 262-264.

Kaplan, Charles, "Holden and Huck: The Odysseys of Youth," COLLEGE ENGLISH, November, 1956, pp. 76-80.

Marcus, Fred M., "The Catcher in the Rye: A live Circuit," ENGLISH JOURNAL, January, 1963, pp. 1-8.

McLean, Hugh, "Conservatism in Modern American Fiction," COLLEGE ENGLISH, March, 1954, pp. 315-325.

Oldsey, Bernard S., "The Movies and the Rye," COLLEGE ENGLISH, December, 1961, pp. 209-215.



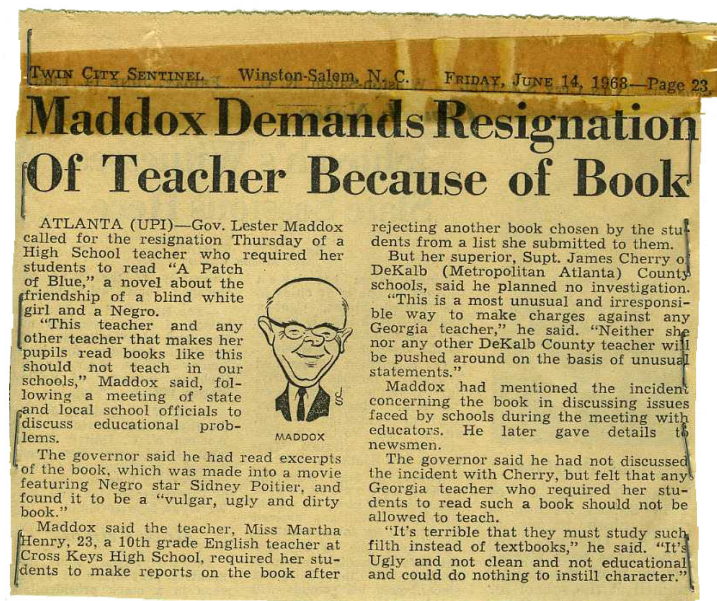
Chronological from left to right, the series of letters exchanged between NCTE and a teacher facing censorship of *The Catcher in the Rye* at his school.

[Back to top](#)

English Teachers Under Pressure: "Maddox Demands Resignation"

The Council also collected newspaper clippings spanning decades, documenting cases of censorship against teachers. In this particular case, the governor of Georgia demanded the resignation of Martha Henry, a 23-year-old English teacher, for assigning *A Patch of Blue* to read. The governor charged that it was a "vulgar, ugly, and dirty book." Fortunately, Henry had the support of her superintendent, who stated: "Neither she nor any other DeKalb County teacher will be pushed around on the basis of unusual statements."

Item: "Maddox Demands Resignation of Teacher Because of Book," *Twin City Sentinel* (June 14, 1968)
To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/73/009](#)



The *Twin City Sentinel* newspaper clipping about the governor of Georgia demanding the resignation of an English teacher.

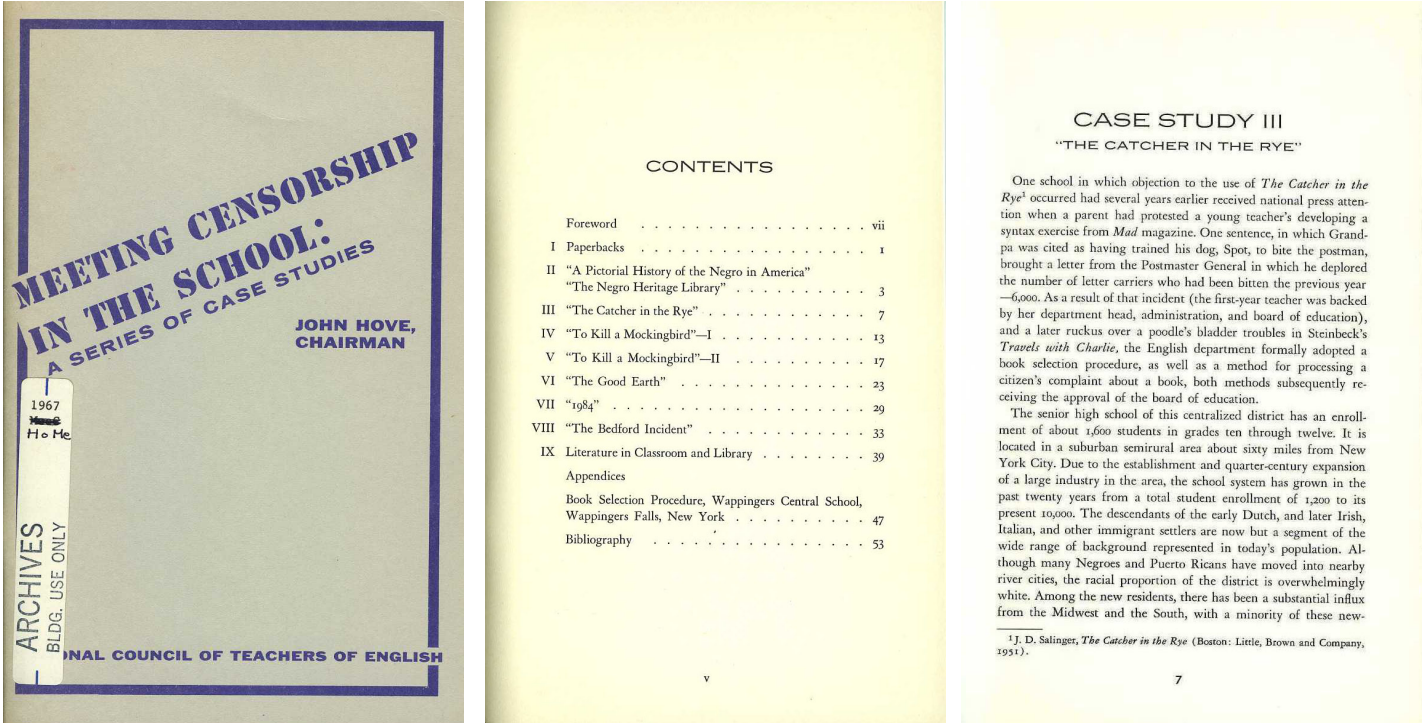
[Back to top](#)

Meeting Censorship in the School: A Series of Case Studies

In 1966, NCTE published *Meeting Censorship in the School: A Series of Case Studies*. The book was written by the Committee to Report Case Studies on Censorship, chaired by John Hove. The book examines nine case studies of schools that banned books, including *The Catcher in the Rye*. By analyzing the process through which books are banned - what was objectionable? why did this particular school district object to it? what is the surrounding community like? - the Council hoped it could better combat challenges to books.

Item: Copy of *Meeting Censorship in the School: A Series of Case Studies*(1966)

To learn about related material, see the following record series: **15/73/803**



The cover and pages from *Meeting Censorship in the School*. The table of contents show case studies on specific books. *The Catcher in the Rye* is one such case study.

[Back to top](#)



University Archives
Room 19 Library, 1408 W. Gregory Dr., Urbana, IL, 61801
Copyright © 2009 University of Illinois. All Rights Reserved