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Dystopian young adult literature as waypoints to censorship across time and space

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ABSTRACT


We advocate for the reading of young adult literature (YAL) as a means for justice-oriented education, and we also recognize how the recent surge in challenges to youth-centered texts in the U.S. attempts to limit such work in classrooms. In response, we wondered about the ways in which YAL offers pathways for critically framing and situating global concerns, such as censorship, in time and space as a means of entering public conversations on issues. In this article, we offer waypoints as a critical reading framework for approaching sociopolitical issues in YAL as gateways for shifts in perspectives, orientations, and actions towards justice. We argue that such a framework for approaching YAL can help further unravel the social issues critical literacy aims to name and act on by locating topics in relation to politics and power.

KEYWORDS

Young adult literature; critical literacy; dystopian YAL; censorship

‘Books, as world-encompassing as they are, aren’t the destination’, writes Castillo (2022), ‘they’re a waypoint’ (17). Framing books as waypoints help make clear the possibilities of books to situate readers in time and space rather than endings. In other words, books as waypoints value the dynamic intellectual journeying that happens in the process of reading. With intention in critical pedagogical approaches, books as waypoints offer teachers opportunities to surface issues of power, language, and oppression. In doing so, waypoints also present gateways for shifts in perspectives, orientations, and actions towards justice. In this article, we position waypoints as a critical reading framework for surfacing social issues across time and space. Specifically, we analyse the waypoints offered around censorship in a dystopian young adult text, *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016), by layering a common reading comprehension protocol, text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997), with critical literacy practices (Janks 2014). In doing so, we argue that integrating these frameworks for reading can help further unravel the social issues critical literacy aims to name and act on by situating concerns within time and space.

This scholarship joins a wellspring of research advocating for the reading of young adult literature (YAL) as a means for educating on social issues and imagining a more just world (Boehm et al. 2021; Boyd and Darragh 2019; Durand 2019; Germán 2020; Simmons 2012). Such pedagogical scholarship that positions YAL as teaching tools,

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however, is under attack. Challenges to unique book titles saw a 1,053% increase from 2020 to 2022 (American Library Association 2023). Nearly half of book titles banned in recent years have been YAL titles intended for readers between 13 and 17 years old (PEN America 2022). Many of these challenges to books originate from state laws, which have impelled discussions of what students can and can't read. For example, legislative initiatives in states like Florida and Texas prompted book bans of youth-centred texts in public schools and libraries to surge during the 2022–2023 school year (PEN America 2023). Responding to this politically spurred censorship, Scholastic, a major US retailer and publisher of young adult titles, gave schools the opportunity to opt out of 'diverse books' (i.e. books with socially just framing discussing gender, class, race, and immigration, among other topics) being offered during their 2023–2024 school book fairs (Russell 2023).

Importantly, most books have been challenged by just a handful – eleven people – who opposed titles in public schools (Natanson 2023). To this point, many challenges have been submitted on behalf of a conservative group (e.g. Moms for Liberty) or from those citing news reports about 'controversial' books. Challenges to books discussing social issues, and youth awareness of social issues more broadly, raise questions about the process and effects of censorship, including how knowledge becomes (de)valued through the framing of books as dangerous, controversial, and inappropriate for the public sphere, by and for whom, and what purposes. The relationship between censorship, politics, and power to marginalise identities cannot be ignored (Miller 2023).

Amid challenges to youth-oriented texts, YAL still provides educational possibilities, particularly for 'youth to participate in current national discourse' (Durand 2019, 89). In this manner, books framed as waypoints present an opportunity for educators and students to consider social issues across time and space. We approach this research question as two able-bodied, cishet, white teachers. Shelby is a teacher educator and former secondary English teacher who has included YAL as a vehicle for examining sociopolitical topics across a range of coursework, from tenth grade English to graduate teacher education. Savannah is a secondary English preservice teacher interested in censorship and the ways in which her future classroom can be a space for problematising the suppression of knowledge. We draw on these experiences as a source for our work. As educators, we're also motivated by our investment in framing English language arts classrooms as democratic spaces for building a more just world. We see the reading of YAL as a vehicle for teaching towards such possibilities.

In the following article, we describe examples of such teaching using *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) as a waypoint for considering and acting on issues of censorship by using critical literacy practices (Janks 2014) layered with text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997). This teaching approach recognises censorship, and specifically book banning, as a complex issue requiring lenses of 'power and policy' that centre 'who is behind the banning and how they're trying to enact the ban' (Miller 2023). As such, we first begin by contextualising censorship across time and space.

The control of knowledge: past and present

Ink and Bone (Caine 2016) prompts readers to question the control of knowledge in a dystopian version of our world set in the year 2025. The story arc, while fictional,

invokes present day issues of censorship in the United States. Censorship provoked by legislation has dominated the public sphere in recent years. While the challenging and banning of books has increased drastically in the last three years (American Library Association 2023), censorship of books has been around for centuries. Ironically, some books previously banned or challenged are contemporarily considered canonical, or valuable cultural knowledge, instead of dangerous as books are so often framed at the time of being challenged (Freedom to Read 2021). Waters and Unsicker-Durham (2023) describe today's censorship as 'censorship-Hydra, an evolving beast posing an ever-present danger, one that will likely take the courage, collaboration and ingenuity of educators everywhere' (108). The call for strategic interventions by educators echoes young adult author of *Speak* (1999/2009), Laurie Halse Anderson's, discernment that censorship, and specifically challenges to books, has drastically changed in her career as an author; she distinguishes that in prior years, parents were concerned about their individual students' access to certain books; now such complaints remove these books for all students in a school, district, or community (Yorio 2023). By framing censorship through a power analysis, intent in removing certain books from the public sphere can be traced to conservative political agendas (Miller 2023).

Specifically, the banning of books from classroom and community libraries during the 2023–2024 academic year has overwhelmingly removed books written about or by people of colour and queer people (American Library Association 2023). In particular, books being censored or challenged containing 'LGBTQ topics' follow a wave of anti-LGBTQ laws and policies restricting discussions of gender and sexuality in K-12 schools (PEN America 2023). Anti-LGBTQ legislation joins other recent laws censoring conversations on race and racism in public schools for fear of making white students uncomfortable (PEN America 2023). Both aims make clear an intent to ban not just youth-centred texts, but specifically YAL that features characters with marginalised identities or topics with implications for critiquing broader social issues, such as homophobia, transphobia, and racism (PEN America 2023). Urgent and needed actions towards fighting censorship include participation in local and state elections and involvement in local school board meetings. As teachers, we're also committed to pushing back against censorship through education, and we see English curricula as one space for this work.

Dystopian young adult literature, critical readings, and pedagogical opportunities

This article contributes to established scholarship in English education and literacy by discussing pairing YAL with critical literacy as a strategy for teaching for social justice (Boehm et al. 2020; Dodge and Crutcher 2015; Glasgow 2001; Simmons 2012; Worlds and Miller 2019). In this article, we draw on critical literacy as a stance for considering how characters in *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) subvert the status quo by critiquing the control of knowledge in the novel. In doing so, we argue that readers can consider censorship through waypoints of time and space to situate themselves in our current political and social climate and imagine better futures around the accessing and valuing of knowledge.

Critical literacy provides a framework for noticing, questioning, and analysing power within texts (Janks 2014; Janks et al. 2013; Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys 2002; Luke 2012;

Shor 1999; Vasquez 2014). Such critical readings can offer ideas about the historical, social, and political contexts surrounding the text through a focus on language and marginalisation (Norris, Lucas, and Prudhoe 2012). As a stance that prompts the reading of the word and the world (Freire 2018), critical literacy can serve as a lens for interrogating power and justice in relation to time and space, real, or imagined. Scholars have used YAL in conversation with young people to understand unfamiliar cultures (e.g. Drossopoulos and King-Watkins 2018) or to create more just futures (e.g. Toliver 2020). These approaches offer directions for positioning readers in time and space, particularly when situating their reading experience in broader sociopolitical realities. *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) provides one opportunity for considering the novel's fictional reality of controlled knowledge alongside lived experiences of contemporary book banning and other methods of censorship.

Importantly, part of the work of engaging critical literacy prompts students to move from recognising injustice(s) to taking social action informed by critical consciousness (Freire 2018). For example, Simmons (2012) describes the use of YAL in secondary English classrooms as a vehicle for interrogating power imbalances related to food insecurity, then taking action through a student-driven letter writing campaign. Scholars also describe that YAL paired with critical literacy in teacher education offers opportunities for preservice teachers to critically view the world and prepare to practice social justice alongside their future students (Amatucci and Caillouet 2023; Batchelor 2019; Glenn 2012; Strickland 2020). For instance, Boyd and Darragh (2019) discuss how reading YAL as part of teacher preparation coursework informed social action projects around social issues topics, such as mental health, ecojustice, bullying, and police brutality.

Because dystopian YAL aims to engage youth readers in persistent global concerns (Basu, Broad, and Hintz 2013), the genre presents literary and social potentials when viewed as waypoints for understanding these issues across time and space. Like previously discussed, critical literacy readings of YAL are meant to invoke action. Taken together, critical readings of dystopian literature that centre waypoints – the situating of time and space – presents a teaching strategy for contextualising social issues and inciting movements towards justice.

Research analysing dystopian YAL has described pedagogical opportunities for situating global concerns within our broader political and social climate. As a genre, 'dystopian fictions serve as forewarnings intended to address underlying fears and reveal cataclysmic consequences of allowing present-day social ills to go unchecked' (Peterman and Lo 2022, 301). Scholes and Ostenson (2013) describe features of dystopian literature, such as excessive measures to police society, pressure to conform, and attempts to erase or revise society's history. In secondary English classroom, dystopian YAL has been generative in helping readers to resist against hegemonic narratives (Peterman 2019; Scholes and Ostenson 2013; Simmons 2012; Toliver 2018). These scholars frame how we envision books as waypoints for critical readings attentive to the time and space they are being discussed in order to inform taking social action.

An ongoing tension and opportunity with implementing critical literacy is the challenge in moving from theory to practice (Behrman 2006; Glazier 2007; Handsfield 2015; Lewison, Leland, and Harste 2014; Sotirovska and Vaughn 2023; Stevens and Bean 2007). In response, scholars like Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2014) and Janks (2014) have

offered frameworks for taking up critical literacy theories within teaching. Even so, Luke (2012) reasons that ‘how educators shape and deploy the tools, attitudes and philosophies of critical literacy is utterly contingent’ (9). Behrman (2006) concurs, finding that teachers were enacting critical literacy by reading supplemental texts and producing countertexts, among a range of other practices. Rogers (2014) also reports teachers designing varying approaches to critical literacy practices, including integrating social justice topics, multiple literacies, and genre studies to their curricula.

Because of its challenge in localised implementation, scholarship offering ‘concrete examples of what critical literacy looks like, feels like, and sounds like’ (Rogers 2014, 257) is needed, particularly for those new to applying critical literacy to their teaching. Scholarship that layers critical literacy practices with other common pedagogical approaches to English language arts could offer practitioners with an entry point for the integration of critical literacy in classrooms. Further, such scholarship would do more to emphasise critical literacy as an ongoing framework, or disposition to teaching, rather than a one-off lesson, or skill (Rogers 2014). This article provides one example of how critical literacy education (Janks 2014) could be integrated with a common reading comprehension skill, text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997). In doing so, this approach to critical literacy layers with text-to-world connections as a move to inform students’ actions through positioning social issues in time and space.

Teaching critical literacy in time and space to challenge censorship

For the purposes of this paper, we focus on Rachel Caine’s (2016) *Ink and Bone*, which describes an imagined world where the Great Library is in charge of ‘provid[ing] works that elevate and educate’ (17). Such an aim seems benevolent until realising that in this story world, the personal ownership of books is forbidden. ‘Without the Library’s steady guidance’, the Library’s propaganda lectures, ‘... the uncontrollable spread of not only knowledge, but folly’ would occur (Caine 2016, 47). *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) is an unnerving look at the intent of extreme censorship, where only a select few get to determine the knowledge appropriate for the rest of society:

Imagine a world in which anyone, anywhere, could create and distribute their own words, however ignorant or flawed! And we have often seen dangerous progress that was only just checked in time to prevent more chaos. (p. 47)

The control of knowledge emboldens nonconformists, such as the Burners and the Ink-Lickers. The former burns books in protest and the latter eat them (literally) in a sort of sanctimonious ritual, because ‘no act of possession [is] more complete than consuming the unique’ (Caine 2016, 39).

The institutionalised system of censorship also creates a thriving underground market for the circulation and purchase of books outside of the Library’s sanctions. *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) centres on Jess Brightwell, a young person involved in the illicit family business of ‘running books’ to those with economic and social privilege. Later, Jess is invited (because his father pays for a spot, hoping Jess will become an informant for smuggling books) to join the exclusive organisation who work in service of the Library’s mission of controlling and curating the world’s knowledge. To prove himself worthy, however, he must go through the Library’s training as a student, or Postulant, before

Table 1. Critical Literacy in Practice with Text-to-World Connections.

Critical Literacy in Practice (Janks 2014)	Examples Specific to Censorship in <i>Ink and Bone</i> (Caine 2016)	Sample Prompts to Promote Text-to-world Connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997)
1. Finding and naming issue	The control of knowledge, specifically through privileging, revising, and hiding information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In what ways does the story world of <i>Ink and Bone</i> reflect contemporary conversations on censorship? ● How do institutions uphold systems of oppression through censorship in <i>Ink and Bone</i>? In real life?
2. Connecting the issue to students' lives	Censorship in localised contexts, such as school (e.g. English and social studies curriculum), community (e.g. public libraries), social media (e.g. TikTok)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How are students in <i>Ink and Bone</i> censored? ● How do students' experiences with censorship reflect your own experiences? ● What happens when students are censored in <i>Ink and Bone</i>? In your experiences?
3. Accessing relevant information, including text and textual design	Brief excerpts titled 'Ephemera' (i.e. text that only lasts for a short time) begin each chapter and give further insight into the control of knowledge across time and space, especially since some Ephemeras contain annotations to the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why do you think Caine (2016) chose to present information about censorship in this way? ● How have you encountered censorship? What media have you learned about contemporary censorship through, and does such media offer certain affordances (e.g. accessibility) for educating around censorship?
4. Naming the social effects of the issue	Certain knowledge is deemed valuable and worthy of protection; other knowledge is hidden or removed entirely from society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Who/what does the censoring in <i>Ink and Bone</i> (or our society) and how is censorship enacted? ● When knowledge is censored in <i>Ink and Bone</i> (or our society), what are the impacts?
5. Imagining possibilities for better futures by taking action	The Library trainees, along with their teacher, question the ideologies and push back on the processes of controlling knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How did characters' actions against censorship make a difference in the story? ● What personal and collective actions could we take against censorship?

becoming designated as a Scholar (or another position within the institution of the Library). During training, Jess and his peers are led by Scholar Christopher Wolfe, who facilitates a series of trials for the Postulants meant to surface their unquestioned loyalties to the Library. Along their journey, the control of knowledge by the Library surfaces other forms of control that uphold systems of oppression in the novel.

As English teachers, we're interested in framing *text as power*—the ways in which text can both reflect our society's ills and be a refraction for creating better futures. In particular to this paper, we wondered about how the genre of dystopian YAL supports opportunities for situating global issues within time and space as a lateral step for critical literacy framings. In doing so, we argue that when prioritised alongside critical literacy practices, waypoints for the consideration of time and space help readers to further untangle the social issues critical literacy aims to name and act on. As such, our reading was guided by the following question: What does dystopian YAL, such as *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016), offer to critically frame and situate global concerns, like censorship, in time and space?

To understand what *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) offers for the study of censorship across time and space, we first used Janks' (2014) framework for critical literacy practices

as a foundation for reading. More specifically, we used critical literacy to frame our exploration of censorship as it relates to power in the novel, aiming to problematise how the social issue of controlling knowledge is presented in the text (Janks 2014). Within this framing, we then looked for text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997) that supported the contextualisation of censorship in the novel. This added layer to critical literacy in practice proved generative for embedding waypoints, or spaces for situating readers in time and space, throughout the critical reading process. Consider the following juxtaposition of Janks' (2014) critical literacy in practice and sample prompts to promote text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997) applied to *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016).

Naming, situating, and acting on censorship

The above table (see Table 1) provides readers with opportunities for taking up critical literacy practices (Janks 2014) around censorship and extending such practices through the positioning of censorship in time and space using text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997). In the remainder of this section, we highlight possibilities for three of Janks' (2014) critical literacy practices – accessing relevant information, the social effects of the issue and taking action – in order to exemplify the layering of text-to-world connections as a move to situate readers in time and space.

Accessing relevant information

In *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016), each chapter begins with an excerpt titled 'Ephemera'. As the title suggests, such passages are temporary in nature, perhaps because the excerpts provide details about the Library's control of knowledge, particularly in overtly oppressive ways. For example, one ephemera describes Gutenberg's creation of a printing press, which the Library deems as dangerous and disloyal to the Library. Later in the story, an ephemera by Scholar Wolfe and another by a Library trainee, Thomas, depicts the innovation of a printing press again. Like previously, the Library removes knowledge of the printing press from the public sphere, 'an idea that they've been systematically destroying since 1455' because of its threat to the Library's control of knowledge (Caine 2016, 466). In this case, the Library's control of knowledge of the printing press also results in the imprisonment of Gutenberg and the death of Thomas. Speaking of Thomas' death, Jess draws similarities between the control of knowledge and text as a form of power: 'He had everything the Library wanted. But he had one thing they didn't want: imagination' (Caine 2016, 460). In this case, the idea of the printing press proved too revolutionary for the Library's intent to regulate thinking.

Another ephemera written by political activist Thomas Paine frames the Library's control of knowledge as dangerous. His critiques, which in the ephemera are marked as 'access strictly controlled . . . seditious content' (Caine 2016, 78), offer the first flames of the Burners' philosophy to burn books in protest as a statement against the Library's control of knowledge. Later, a Library trainee is killed during a trial, and an ephemera describes the killing as deliberate in order to kill a 'Burner spy' (Caine 2016, 253). Again, the control of knowledge by the Library illustrates text as power, both in the valuing of

certain information and the framing of certain information as dangerous for society; so dangerous that the Library is willing to kill.

To situate ideas on text and textual design in time and space, readers can contextualise the ephemera and their function in *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) in contemporary conversations of censorship. Considering why Caine (2016) chose to present such information around censorship in the form of ephemera provides inroads for discussing how censorship is discussed and employed today. For example, censorship functioning as the control of knowledge can be seen in book bans which impact public schools and public libraries and in particular, young people. Oftentimes, such bans are decided at school board meetings, during administrator or parent conversations, or by district or state level policies, all of which traditionally limit possibilities for young people to voice their perspectives. The media's discussion of issues of censorship also offers consideration as ephemera, where readers could consider how the control of knowledge is presented. For example, whose voices are included or left out along with how censorship is framed could offer readers of *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) opportunities for situating their reading in time and space of today's censorship.

Social effects of the issue

The Library controls all knowledge within the society of *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016), and as such, individuals who work for the Library are tasked with valuing certain knowledge. In the process of ascribing value to knowledge for society, certain knowledge is hidden or removed entirely. As discussed previously, the invention of the printing press was systematically removed from public discourse because its creation impacted the Library's ability to control the circulation of text and therefore knowledge. Any ideas in opposition to the Library's beliefs and mission, such as the Burners' philosophy that books should be able to be personally owned and unfettered by the Library, are also targeted to stop the possibility of indoctrination.

In *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016), knowledge deemed inappropriate for public circulation is removed from broader society. In some cases, knowledge is labelled 'heretical' and sent to the Black Archives which only those with privileges from the Library can access. Other knowledge is circulated with the intent of impermanence, particularly when the knowledge would portray the Library's function as less than humane. For example, in order to catalogue the society's knowledge, the Library relies on Obscurists who are able to magically manipulate books into formula that can then be transmitted to a Codex (functions like a tablet; a personal blank 'book' that everyone possesses and uses to receive information from the Library). Obscurists are rare among the society, and therefore, the Library confines them to process and manipulate books into formula approved by the Library. Beyond confinement in a metaphoric sense (i.e. restrictions on knowledge), the control of knowledge functions as literal confinement for Obscurists.

Readers can make text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997) between the realities of censorship in *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) and the effects of suppression of knowledge in today's world. First, readers can surface that the control of knowledge furthers social inequities in the novel, such as the privileging of certain social classes. Readers can then make connections to the impacts of knowledge being censored

in our society. For example, book bans targeting LGBTQ texts through state policy illustrate how identities are ostracised and connected to movements of historical oppression (Miller 2023). The same is true of when such books are framed as controversial or dangerous for young people, which functions as a method of assigning value to certain knowledges in a way reminiscent of the Library's processes in *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016). Identifying the censoring of knowledge, both in reality and the story world of *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016) offers possibilities for putting critical literacy into practice within framings of time and space that centre who is doing the censoring and how censorship is enacted (Miller 2023).

Taking action

An important step of critical literacy involves taking action, and thus centring time and space in critical readings can provide pathways for contextualised next steps. Because we recognise that action steps should be situated in contexts and driven by students' interests and priorities, we provide examples of action steps we've found to be successful when taking up critical literacy practices in our classrooms.

Power analyses and critical annotations

Following Miller's (2023) recommendation to frame book bans alongside politics and power, we suggest facilitating conversations around social issues, such as censorship, by considering the stakeholders and other relevant dynamics at play. As a move to make text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997), students could investigate the issue of censorship with regard to local, state, and national information and impacts.

Once students have an idea of the impacts of censorship in terms of who is calling for censorship and how censorship is being enacted, students could identify texts (e.g. legislation, news article, podcasts and commercials) where censorship related to young people is being discussed, then use these texts as foundations for critical annotations. After identifying whose perspective is included (and whose are missing), students could annotate their viewpoints on legislation resulting in school-based censorship, for example. In this manner, critical annotations could function as powerful additions to youth-targeted censorship narratives.

Persuasive Writing

By acting on censorship, students can use multiple persuasive writing techniques through genres like Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and letters (Early 2022). These two writing genres are powerful tools for teachers and students to use in their work against the powers of censorship. With the PSA, students can inform others about censorship by having the document include the answers to some big questions like: What is censorship? What are the effects of censorship, and What can we do to fight against censorship? These questions play into the importance of students knowing who their audience is when writing. Additionally, such genre writing provides opportunities for engagement with an authentic audience.

Similar to PSAs, students should also write towards an authentic audience when crafting persuasive letters, as the writing will not carry a lot of weight if the audience does not understand the topic or is not directly affected by the topic. To write

a persuasive letter for censorship, some authentic audiences might be teachers, school administrators, the school board, or local/state government officials. For any persuasive writing, students should be informed on the topic they are writing about. When writing about censorship, students could research local and state policies as well as current events to use as rationales for their reasons and examples. In this manner, audiences of both persuasive letters and PSAs will have access to factual information to bolster other important common persuasive writing moves, such as opinions or personal impacts.

Conclusion

In considering the contextualising of global issues in time and space, it's important to recognise that 'explanations are not excuses – they are the illumination that builds the future' (Schulman 2023). As such, YAL can help readers to situate our current political and social climate in history as a teaching move towards imagining better futures. Regarding the control of knowledge in *Ink and Bone* (Caine 2016), this harmful dystopia may be more realistic than it initially seems; beginning in 2021, more books were banned than ever before (Natanson 2022). This trend of censorship has only continued. In 2023, Florida surpassed Texas for most books banned in US public schools, and the majority (75%) of books banned were young adult books and other titles written specifically for youth (PEN America 2023).

This surge in censorship, particularly through book bans spurred by state legislation, has led to a growth in youth resistance in defending access to books (PEN America 2023). In fact, a number of teen activists have shared how the reading of certain books – particularly those now banned in educational spaces – made a deep impact on their lives, inspiring their commitment to fighting censorship (Jeunesse 2023). Critical literacy practices that centre analyses in time and space provide a framework for teachers to supporting such intellectual work and applied actions in classrooms and other education-based contexts. Approached through critical literacy, the study of YAL can facilitate timely discussions that move students towards action. Specifically around discussions of censorship, critical literacy practices (Janks 2014) paired with text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997) can support young people in fighting curriculum censorship. Resistance to censorship works; after outrage from authors, teachers, librarians, and other community members, Scholastic reversed their decision to allow schools to opt out of diverse texts in their book fairs during the 2023–2024 school year (Picchi 2023).

The above suggestions for approaching a study of controlled knowledge in Caine's (2016) *Ink and Bone* through critical literacy practices (Janks 2014) and text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann 1997) are suggestions. We recognise teachers as experts who make pedagogical decisions informed by their contexts. *Ink and Bone* by Rachel Caine (2016) allows for a conversation on knowledge both nuanced and urgent. It is not enough to simply 'read your history' (Caine 2016, 272); rather, we must critically question, situate, and take action against social issues. 'If we don't figure out a different way to read our world' Castillo (2022) contends, 'we'll be doomed to keep living in it' (25).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

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Savannah Bean is a preservice teacher studying English education at Illinois State University. She is interested in understanding and challenging social hierarchies through her teaching and scholarship.

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