

“Of Mice and Men (and Rabbits)”

18"x24"

acrylic on canvas

John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men” appears on the ALA’s list of most challenged books of the 21st century. Censors charge the book with ‘offensive language’, allegedly ‘promoting euthanasia’ and being ‘anti-business’.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Of Mice and Men (and Rabbits)”, depicts Lenny (a man of tremendous stature and limited mental abilities) in the moment after he accidentally kills Curley’s wife. Throughout the book, Lenny dreams of the day he can tend to rabbits. He is represented in the painting as ½ man ½ rabbit to allude to this love of rabbits - but also to symbolize the innocence of his simple, childlike brain.

“(Red) Square Dance”

20"x24"

oil on canvas

John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath” appears on the ALA’s list of most challenged books of the 21st century. It was also burned on a number of occasions – including in Kern County CA, which was the endpoint of the Joad family’s migration in the novel. Critics accused Steinbeck of being a socialist and of championing communist beliefs.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “(Red) Square Dance”, stems from the migrants being called “reds” or “communists”. The book depicts the deplorable conditions that the migrants dealt with in the camps. But one night there is a square dance which offers a brief respite from the misery. The composition of “(Red) Square Dance” is meant to evoke a communist propaganda poster.

Girl holding orange: throughout the book, the Joad family dreams of getting to California and finding fields of orange groves and getting jobs picking fruit.

Pig: “communist pig”.

Grape vines: inspired by quote in chapter 25: “...and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.”

Shack: image of the ramshackled home the Joad family left behind in the Dust Bowl before heading out to California with their dreams of a beautiful new life.

“Savior”

20"x24"

acrylic on canvas

Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451” has ironically been the subject of repeated banning attempts. It’s a book about a world without books – a world in which ideas are silenced and books are banned and burned by firemen. Ray Bradbury has said that the ‘dumbing down’ of society was one of the concerns he was trying to raise.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Savior”, is a self portrait of her protecting some of the most banned/challenged books from the match of Montag, the fireman’. Montag stands still and Dana appears to lack some urgency in her escape. Readers learn as the book unfolds that Montag is himself one of the book-keepers (protectors of the books).

“Little Lolita”

10"x20"

acrylic on canvas board

Vladimir Nabokov had trouble finding an American publisher for his book “*Lolita*”. It was eventually published in Paris with no problems and sold out. Author Graham Greene brought it to the attention of the London press by writing “it’s the filthiest book I’ve ever read”. British customs proceeded to seize all copies entering the UK in 1955 and it was banned for 2 years in France (1956-1958). The American edition was published without incident in 1958.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Little Lolita”, depicts a pint-sized temptress – drinking, smoking and flirtatiously posed.

“Catch Her! (In the Rye)”

16"x20"

acrylic on canvas

J.D. Salinger’s “Catcher in the Rye” is perennially banned because Holden Caulfield is said to be an unsuitable role model. Other reasons cited for the banning are excess vulgar language, sex scenes, questionable moral issues.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Catch Her! (In The Rye)”, dresses Holden Caulfield in his signature red hunting cap. He looks on as a half-dressed prostitute tauntingly runs past him in a field of rye. He may or may not follow. Holden is in a struggle between ending his teenage years and entering adulthood.

“All Animals Are Equal, But Some Are More Equal Than Others”

30"x40"

oil on canvas

George Orwell’s “Animal Farm” was completed in 1944 but faced a publishing delay in England. English publishers were afraid of offending their wartime ally, the Soviet Union. *Animal Farm* was banned by Soviet authorities (and in Soviet-controlled regions) due to its political content. The book draws close parallels to the communist revolution. One character in the book, a pig named Napoleon, bears a striking resemblance to Stalin.

The title of *Dana Ellyn’s painting “All Animals Are Equal, But Some are More Equal Than Others”* is quoted directly from the book. She has interpreted this quote from her vegetarian point of view. Many people treasure their cats and dog but don’t think twice about eating cows and pigs or wearing the fur of a rabbit or fox.

“The Last Tango”

36"x24"

acrylic on canvas

“And Tango Makes Three” is a children’s book by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson. It was the most banned book of 2009 and the most challenged book of 2006-2008. It’s based on the true story of two male penguins in the Central Park Zoo who formed a couple and were given an egg to raise. It’s intended to help teach children about same-sex parent families. Parents of school children complain that the book makes ‘homosexuality sound normal’.

Dana Ellyn’s painting “The Last Tango” is inspired by both this book and the banned film “The Last Tango in Paris”. Combining both stories, she’s created an actual ‘inappropriate relationship’ between a human woman and a male penguin. They dance among buttercups as a nod to the infamous ‘butter scene’ in the film.

“Okie Orange Daydream”

14"x18"

acrylic on canvas board

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Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Okie Orange Daydream” shows a little girl in the barren yellow landscape in the dust bowl region of the U.S. She optimistically waters her orange plant while dreaming of oranges so abundant that they rain down from the sky.

“Princess and the Pup”

16"x20"

oil on canvas

Katherine Paterson’s “Bridge to Terabithia” is number 28 on the ALA’s list of top 100 banned/challenged books of 2000-2009. It’s banned for ‘offensive language’ and ‘promoting ‘Satanism’, ‘secular humanism’ and/or ‘new age religion’.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Princess and the Pup”, is in memory of the dearly departed queen of Terabithia and her dog, Prince Terrien.

“Are You There God? It’s Me, Dana”

10”x30”

acrylic on canvas

A large number of *Judy Blume’s books* have been banned including “*Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*”, “Blubber”, and “Forever” to name a few. It’s a coming of age book that deals with a girl getting her first period, her first bra and trying to figure out her relationship with religion and god.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Are You There God? It’s Me, Dana” is a self portrait. As a young girl, Dana would sometime look up and question whether or not there was a god ‘up there’.

“I Must, I Must, I Must Increase My Bust”

24”x30”

acrylic on canvas

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Dana Ellyn’s painting, “I Must, I Must, I Must Increase My Bust”, shows a preteen girl in first training bra doing an exercise that Margaret and her friends (and many other preteens) did to try and increase their bustline.

“When You Read This Book, You’re Reading with Mao”

30”x40”

acrylic on canvas

George Orwell’s “1984” was banned because of its “immoral” topics and “pro-communist” ideas. The challenges against this book were at their highest during the Cold War. Ironically, it was banned in the USSR due to claims it was anti-Soviet.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “When You Read This Book, You’re Reading with Mao” was inspired by the famous WWII propoganda poster “When You Ride Alone, You Ride with Hitler”. The poster depicted an American business man driving to work with a white outlined image of Hitler in the seat next to him. The poster was supposed to encourage car-pooling and gas conservation for the war effort.

“The World Said Nothing”

18"x24"

acrylic on canvas

Complaints against *Robert Cormier’s “The Chocolate War”* were primarily the 200+ swear words and scenes that depicted violence and masturbation. It’s the story of a boy in Catholic school who stands up against a cruel mob of bullies and the school system itself.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “The World Said Nothing”, was inspired by one particular scene in the book where Brother Leon (a teacher) brings a boy in front of the class and accuses him of cheating. When the class fails to defend their fellow student, Leon says “You turned this classroom into Nazi Germany for a few moments”. The image in Dana’s painting was inspired by an infamous photo taken in 1943 of a Jewish boy in the Warsaw ghetto being threatened at gunpoint by a Nazi officer.

“The Books”

14"x18"

acrylic on canvas board

This painting is not inspired by any particular book. Dana Ellyn has taken the iconic image from Alfred Hitchcock’s “The Birds” and transformed it in to “The Books”. During the course of researching and reading for her “Banned” exhibit, Dana was amazed at how many books are banned and challenged under the guise of protecting children.

“Buttons”

20"x24"

acrylic on canvas

Alice Walker’s Pulitzer prize winning *book, “A Color Purple”*, has been censored and banned for sexual content, violence and racism.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Buttons”, was inspired by a moment in the book where Shug helps Celie discover her sexuality. She encourages Celie to familiarize herself with her body and learn how to push her own ‘buttons’. The red and purple color scheme of the painting is also symbolic. Shug tells Celie that “God does little things for people, like creating the color purple, just to make people happy and give them pleasure in their lives”. The flowers on the wallpaper are a reminder to take time to smell the roses.

“Devotchka at the Moloka Bar”

20”x24”

acrylic on canvas

Anthony Burgess’ “A Clockwork Orange” was banned from schools for objectionable language – and the movie adaptation also faced bans in several countries for the strong language and excessive violence.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Devotchka at the Moloko Bar”, pulls from several concepts in the book. First, the title of the painting is written in the slang language (called Nadsat) that Burgess created for the book. In the painting, the protagonist (Alex) sits next to a devotchka (girl) at a moloko (milk) bar.

Alex and his violent gang would drink drugged milk to hype themselves up for a night of mayhem. Alex is arrested and subject to an experimental aversion therapy program (the Ludovico technique) which turns him in to something other than a human being – he loses his power to make choices.

In Dana’s painting, she adorns Alex in the hat worn by Caspar Milquetoast – a 1924 character from the comic strip The Timid Soul. The word milquetoast means a weak and ineffectual person. In essence, what Alex becomes after his therapy.

“Soma Holiday”

22”x28”

acrylic on canvas

Aldos Huxleys’ “Brave New World” ranks high on the ALA’s list of most banned/challenged books for its themes of sex, drugs and suicide.

Dana Ellyn’s painting, “Soma Holiday”, shows a woman under the influence of soma – the drug that is used to control the World State’s society.