



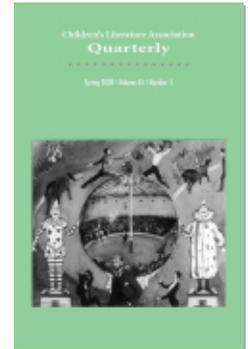
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Harry Potter and the Cedarville Censors by Brian Meadors
(review)

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dren become aware of and understand their own bodies.

Immense in both scope and scholarship, Harde and Kokkola's text is a much-needed addition to the fields of material theories and children's and young adult literature. Each thoroughly researched section, coupled with the contributors' and editors' diverse perspectives, is certain to enhance readers' understandings of what (all) embodiment might entail, especially with regard to the child's body and the ideologies of the cultures that shape it.

Tharini Viswanath is a PhD candidate in English studies at Illinois State University, with a specialization in children's literature. Her articles on feminine agency in adolescent and young adult literature with regard to voice, embodiment, and female friendships have appeared in the journals Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature and Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures.

***Harry Potter and the Cedarville Censors.* By Brian Meadors. McFarland, 2019.**

Reviewed by Michele Daniele Castleman

In *Harry Potter and the Cedarville Censors*, attorney Brian Meadors has composed a memoir about bringing a civil suit against the Cedarville School District when its board required the school library to take J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books out of general circulation. Meadors contextualizes his experience in Arkansas by tracing the court cases that have impacted upon students' constitutional rights within public schools. Some of the situations he explores include the Jehovah's Witnesses' court battles not to

salute the American flag at school and students' First Amendment right to publish an underground newspaper. Throughout these reaccountings, he cites other censorship cases involving *Daddy's Roommate*, *Heather Has Two Mommies*, and *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*. Meadors also provides details of a case in which the school board removed books from the school library in Levittown, Long Island. He describes how the situation pits two values against each other just as occurs in the Cedarville case: the students' First Amendment right "to freely read and receive material" and "the right of the school boards to set their own curriculum molded in the community's values and mores" (49).

Meadors further chronicles his own encounters with censorship. As a teen, he graduated from a high school in which the Confederate flag was a part of the school's mascot, then became an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, which had developed a policy banning the flag's presence. Meadors asserts his conviction that "the power to censor is a bad power indeed—it will be used to enforce the prevailing notions, whatever they may be, or the people who happen to hold that censoring power" (39). This frames his motives for pursuing the Cedarville suit.

At times Meadors speaks of the participants' intentions and thoughts. In the chapter notes, he describes obtaining these insights through interviews. With touches of humor and characterization, he represents perspectives from both sides of the suit, including the voice of Angie Haney, who filed the complaint that initiated

the Cedarville school library committee's review of the Harry Potter novels. Meadors also features the experiences of Estella Roberts, the school librarian who fought to retain the books in circulation and who assembled a committee to evaluate *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Although Roberts's committee voted to keep Rowling's novels in circulation, the school board overturned this decision and required the books to be shelved separately and that parents provide written permission for students to check them out. This sparked dissent and led Meadors to his clients Bill Counts and his daughter, Dakota, a fourth-grade Cedarville Elementary student who served on the library committee.

Throughout his memoir, Meadors provides advice about filing and arguing a civil suit. For readers less familiar with the American civil court system, he presents clear definitions of concepts and gives suggestions for finding a client with standing or a personal stake in the case. He also provides advice on deposing experts and people involved in the case as well as on assembling a strong legal argument.

Meadors directly quotes from his depositions about why members of the school board wanted to restrict access and why Dakota Counts wanted to ensure access to Rowling's series. Based on previous censorship court cases, Meadors focused his arguments to demonstrate that the Harry Potter books were not obscene, libelous, or vulgar; did not promote illegal activity; and did not cause a disruption within the school. He also dis-

cusses how he received support from the American Library Association through "amici curiae" or "friends of the court" briefs that included a letter from author Judy Blume. To conclude both his argument and his memoir, Meadors asserts the special role of school libraries, noting that while the school board may control the curriculum, "their power wanes in the school library," a place for students to explore "different viewpoints and different messages" (160).

Although I am not inclined to assign passages from *Harry Potter and the Cedarville Censors* as required reading within my Harry Potter course, I would suggest it as recommended reading for students interested in issues surrounding censorship or civil law in general. The memoir provides detailed insights into one of the many First Amendment battles Rowling's series has faced in the two decades since its initial publication.

Michele D. Castleman is an Associate Professor of Education at Heidelberg University, where she teaches courses on English methods, the teaching of writing, and young adult and children's literature. She has published a chapter on Scott Westerfeld's The Afterworlds in Young Adult Literature in the Composition Classroom: Essays on Practical Application (McFarland, 2018) and on agency in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series in Walking in Other Worlds: Fantastical Journeys of Children's Agency (Lexington, forthcoming), and has co-written the article "Complicating Killing in Young Adult Fiction" (2013) with Erin Reilly-Sanders in ALAN Review. She also writes YA novels and is represented by Kristy Hunter at The Knight Agency.