



## *Keeping Minds Open to Controversial Topics*

### *At library, middle-school group discusses 'challenged' books*

At the first-ever meeting of Takoma Park Maryland Library's "Banned Book Club," librarian Karen MacPherson posed a seemingly difficult question to a group of anxious middle school students.

"Do you dare disturb the universe?"

The question, a quote from the book club's first book, "The Chocolate War" by Robert Cormier, garnered an immediate response from the group of seven young readers at the July 7 meeting, and the "Banned Book Club" was under way.

The club, the idea of 11-year-old Takoma Park resident and Eastern Middle School student Alanna Natanson, will discuss a book on the American Library Association's list of most challenged books every month.

"I really enjoy banned books or the whole idea of a list of censored books," Natanson said. "There are a lot of people in my grade that are very mature for their age. There are people around my neighborhood that really enjoy talking about books."

The combination of those two factors, along with a censorship unit in her middle school English class,

inspired Natanson to pitch the idea to MacPherson, the head children's librarian at the Takoma Park library.

"I liked the idea because a lot of the books are wonderful books," MacPherson said. "These are books that kids would want to read, that many people would want to read."

The club will read Harper Lee's famous novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird," for August's meeting. The Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library purchase copies of the books for the club.

"We were very supportive," said Rebekkah Zanditon, president of the Friends board. "Some people thought it was a particularly good idea. We trust the parent to do what's appropriate."

"The Chocolate War" was the second most challenged book of 2007, according to a report by the ALA, because of its offensive language, sexually explicit overtones and portrayals of violence. It follows the story of Jerry Renault, a high school freshman who challenges a repressive secret society of privileged students who run the school.

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## *Friends Reading Group Always Interesting*

Now in its fourth year, the Friends of the Library Reading Group is always a convivial gathering, and sometimes offers special surprises as well.

### **"The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao"**

September's discussion of this year's Pulitzer Prize winner by Junot Diaz, "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," was enlivened by a surprise visit from Dominican artist Angie del Riego. She invigorated the discussion by sharing insight into the Dominican temperament and the tyranny of the Trujillo regime, which is woven into the fabric of the novel at many levels. Del Riego has done a series of paintings based on the beautiful and legendary Mirabal sisters, who paid for their defiance of Trujillo with their lives, and who also figure in Junot Diaz's novel.

### **"Journey Round My Skull"**

The Reading Group's next discussion on November 13 will also share close ties with an artistic rendering of human experience. "Journey Round My Skull" was written in the 1939 by Hungarian journalist Frigyes Karinthy, and was re-released in paperback this year with a new introduction by Oliver Sacks. It is an intimate first person account of the author's brain tumor and subsequent surgery. Sacks writes: "It is not just an elaborate case history; it depicts the complex impact of a sight-, mind-, and life-threatening illness in a man of extraordinary sensibility and talent, and even something approaching genius, in the prime of life." It has been well-reviewed

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Walk into the Children's Room in the afternoon after school, and you'll see many elementary and middle school students sitting at tables stacked high with library books. The students usually are reading intently, every now and then sharing particularly good passages with friends nearby.

## Manga and Graphic Novels

While we have children and preteens reading all kinds of books at the library (and some actually doing their homework!), many of the kids in the after-school crowd are devotees of graphic novels, particularly manga, graphic novels from Japan. Because manga and other graphic novels often are published in series, kids read through one book and then dive right into the next one.

Thanks to a gift from the Friends last year, the Children's Room now has three beautiful bookcases devoted to graphic novels. As a result of the increased bookshelf space, our collection of graphic novels and manga has grown by leaps and bounds, and our Library is developing a reputation in the area as the place to visit if you're looking for a wide selection of graphic novels for kids.

Our growing graphic novel collection also has helped to markedly decrease after-school discipline problems. Instead of loud socializing, the after-school crowd generally is reading because we've got the books they want to read. Graphic novels are popular with all kinds of kids, both those who love to read and those who approach books with reluctance.

## New "Comics Club" Leads the Way to Reading

Now, we're about to extend this success. Thanks to another gift from the Friends, we are purchasing equipment that will allow us to create a monthly "Comics Club" on Friday afternoons in the Children's Room. With this equipment, we can have fun sharing favorite comic strips or pages from graphic novels. In effect, we'll be able to have instant "book talks," as we talk about what's funny

### Community Circle Time with Puppets

On Tuesday Dec. 2, a special Community Circle Time will feature shadow puppeteer Daniel Barash. Daniel will do programs at both the 10:00 and 11:00 Circle Time Sessions.

### Spanish Circle Time

We are pleased to announce that beginning October 16, the Library will resume its popular 'Spanish Circle Time' programs.

The new series will be held every Wednesday at 11:00, and will feature stories and songs in Spanish by Maria Garcia-Godos. Originally from Peru, Ms. Garcia-Godos is an educator in Montgomery County Schools through the FLES program, which teaches foreign languages to students.

The Takoma Park Library Spanish Circle Time is appropriate for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, accompanied by their grown-ups. It is supported by the Friends of the Library. No pre-registration is necessary.

or interesting about what we're reading on the screen.

The club is the brainchild of Dave Burbank, library assistant and SummerQuest creator. Here's how Dave envisions the Comics Club will work: "In a way what we hope to do is to lead kids from 'screen time' towards book time. Projecting an image on the screen from an actual physical book makes the book the object of interest. Kids get a ton of screen time, it's familiar and comfortable, if passive. If you put something on a screen, kids will stop and look (and with the dimmed lights may be somewhat quieter). We hope that this can act as a 'breadcrumb trail' back to actual paper and ink. You hear the pages turning and make the immediate connection between the content and the book."

### Crafts Club Activities

In addition to the Comics Club, we'll be offering another monthly event, the Crafts Club. In October, we'll be making masks, in November, we'll be creating Thanksgiving table decorations, and in December, we'll craft simple holiday gifts. The crafts will be based on ideas found in the numerous craft books on our Children's Room shelves. We've found that craft-making is popular with both boys and girls, and with kids of all ages, so we expect a very positive response to this club as well as the Comics Club.

Thanks to the Friends for making these new clubs possible!

# Become a Friend...

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The Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library supports library programs for every age group as well as the *Spring for Poetry* outdoor displays and the Takoma Film Festival. Support of these programs is possible through membership fees and the Friends' book sales. The more "friends", the better the library programs! Please join us.

*To become a Friend for one year please fill out this form and send it with your fee to:*

**FTPML**  
**101 Philadelphia Avenue**  
**Takoma Park, MD 20912**

Name/s  \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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Please circle (above) where you prefer to be contacted, and indicate any restrictions on the day or time here: \_\_\_\_\_

Join e-mail list?  Yes  No

The e-mail list is for announcements only, and you can unsubscribe at any time.  
You will receive approximately 1-2 messages per month.

Please mark the membership category to which you wish to belong.

- |   |         |                                     |          |                                   |          |
|---|---------|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student/Senior | \$5.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter  | \$25.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> Champion | \$250.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual     | \$10.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer  | \$50.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron   | \$500.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family         | \$15.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$100.00 |                                   |          |

Make your payment out to **Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library, Inc.**  
FTPML is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your gift is greatly appreciated and fully deductible as a charitable contribution.

If you're interested in donating time and/or expertise, please let us know:

- Book Sales (semi-annual or mini-sales at Farmers' Market)
- Publicity Committee (newsletter, flyers, printing, mailings, list serve liaison, etc.)
- Table Staffing (staffing a table at the Farmers' Market or other event)
- Board of Directors or Committee Chair

May we include your name if we exchange our list of members with other Takoma Park community not-for-profit organizations?  Yes  No

To find out more about our activities, visit our website at [www.ftpml.org](http://www.ftpml.org).

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## Keeping Minds Open

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Annemarie Stroud, mother of book club member Ripley Stroud and a Takoma Park resident, said there was no hesitation when it came to allowing Ripley to take part in the group.

“When I was growing up, I was allowed to read anything I could carry home from the library,” Stroud said. “I truly believe with language, you’ll take in what you’re ready to take in. I don’t understand the need to censor the language material.”

School and public libraries nationwide receive between 450 and 700 official challenges per year from concerned adults who want books with mature themes taken off the shelves, according to Deborah Caldwell-Stone, deputy director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, a division of the ALA.

In the inaugural meeting, MacPherson led an hourlong discussion about what the readers would have done if they were put in Renault’s situation and how the fictional school in the book compares to their schools.

They also debated a broader topic: what subject matter is appropriate for children of their age.

Some talked about how they were happy their parents allowed them to read and openly discuss “The Chocolate War” and other books with mature themes. But all agreed that they could understand why some parents might want to protect their children from some of the topics.

“Most likely, it’s going to be uncomfortable,” Natanson said of subjects that might come up in future discussions. “It’s the equivalent to health [class]. It just takes some maturity to handle that.”

MacPherson agreed, and afterward said she was happy with the serious conversation at the meeting. Caldwell-Stone also approved of the idea of the group.

“Book clubs are one way to address the topics in a book like that,” Caldwell-Stone said. “It’s far better for kids to grapple with these complex issues in literature than in real life.”

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## Friends Reading Group

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both here and abroad. “Time” and the “Times Literary Supplement” both called it “remarkable”. “John O’London’s Weekly” called it “a terrible and marvelous book...it will be treasured by the courageous reader for its beauty, its poetry and its revelation of an experience that happily comes to few men.”

The book was selected for the November discussion in conjunction with an exhibit entitled “The Cranial Vault: Artifacts and Impressions” to be held at the Takoma Park Community Center, November 3rd through December 31. A collaborative show developed and curated by Tom Roberts and Amy Kincaid, it is composed of souvenirs, enhanced and altered medical imagery, commissioned artwork, and interaction. It reflects one man’s journey from a middle-of-the-night grand mal seizure through cancer treatment and brain surgery to a survivor’s new normal. Part curiosity shop, part medical illustration, and part

memoir, the exhibit serves as an experiential travelogue of a trip, nine years and continuing.

All are invited to attend the Reading Group discussion at 7:30 PM in the Community Center, and to join us for a special preview of the exhibit at 7:00. Copies of “Journey Round My Skull” are available, through the Friends, at the Takoma Park Maryland Library.

***Our Takoma Park Maryland Library is a rich resource for our community.***

***The Friends are able to support the special programs of the library because of you, our members.***

***Please share this newsletter with your neighbors who might like to join the Friends in support of our library.***



Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library

101 Philadelphia Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912

www.ftpml.org