

College display celebrates banned books

HOLYOKE — The list includes some of the most revered works in literary history, and some of the most reviled.

Often they are one and the same: books like Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird,” John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men,” Toni Morrison’s “Beloved,” Joseph Heller’s “Catch-22,” J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings,” and Alex Haley’s autobiography of Malcolm X, to name a few.

All of them, more than 200, remain banned in 2022 by one or more school districts in the United States.

“Most of them are classics, which is interesting,” said Sara Avery, manager of the Holyoke Community College bookstore.

Each year, the American Library Association and other anti-censorship groups promote Banned Books Week, which this year was recognized Sept. 18-24. The HCC Bookstore has had a table of banned books prominently displayed since the beginning of the fall semester, right next to the checkout counter.

“It’s been really successful,” Avery said. “It’s been a topic of conversation for a lot of people.



A display at the Holyoke Community College bookstore shows books that have been banned at United States schools.

(SUBMITTED / HCC)

Some of the books we even pulled off the shelves for our display because they’re used in classes here at HCC.”

Not only have people been buying the books, she said, the display itself has generated a lot of questions from students about why they are banned and by whom.

The answers can be found on a spreadsheet list that complements the display — seven

pages of book titles, along with the authors’ names, the states where they are banned, and the reasons, including:

- “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,” by Maya Angelou (Maryland, “likely to corrupt minors”).

- “The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates,” by Wes Moore (Springfield, Massachusetts, “drug and alcohol use”).

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- “Romeo and Juliet,” by William Shakespeare (Washington, “vulgar language and sexual innuendo”).

- “The Complete Maus: A Survivor’s Tale,” by Art Spiegelman (Tennessee, “swear words and nude figures”).

Avery said she does not intend to remove the display any time soon.

“We’ve had it up for the whole month, and as long as people are still interested in it, we’ll keep it up,” she said.