

## **Banned: Three Poems by Melissa Fite Johnson**

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### **Banned: *The Catcher in the Rye***

Revisiting books means seeing clearly, finally  
the right prescription, every problematic moment,  
Holden calling it his “people-shooting hat,”

the books haven’t changed, we’ve changed,  
Holden understood this concept, it’s why  
he didn’t want to revisit the museum,

Holden the product of a problematic man.  
Students ask about Salinger pursuing Joyce Maynard  
when she was their age—I can’t defend Salinger,

but can I still love Holden? His mourning  
my mourning, his walk in the snow my walk,  
that book with me when my father died.

Holden was joking about his hat, but  
he was serious when he cried watching his sister  
on the carousel, grabbing for the gold ring,

serious when he slid next to Jane on the glider  
to kiss her teary face, serious when  
he said if we knew his dead brother, we’d understand.

**Banned: *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

My student says he watches combat videos,  
says it's funny when real people die.  
Footage grainy but worth it. Rewind,

mist reassembles into a head. This student  
hates Janie, says Joe had no choice  
but to beat her. His classmates stare at him.

My chair beside his, I help him research  
his poet. He's chosen Wilfred Owen, war  
in every poem. *Gas, gas*, that scene

with me forever, I've carried it since college,  
I don't need combat videos. I'm not afraid  
of this student. He hates literature

where God is a woman or a question mark.  
He hates *Their Eyes Were Watching God*  
because the eyes question before they watch.

**Banned: *The Bluest Eye***

Three students, all girls, told me privately  
this book was too much, of course  
I didn't press but their looking down, their hair tuck,

of course I stopped teaching it, but I'd picked it  
for the boys who asked why Pecola didn't fight  
her father's rape, asked why a whole chapter

humanizing her father when only monsters rape,  
never men, I taught it because no one taught  
consent in my conservative hometown,

my old high school, a boy once touched me  
in a bedroom at a party, I didn't fight, I didn't fly,  
I froze like Pecola, whom I didn't meet until college.

**AUTHOR BIO**

Melissa Fite Johnson is the author of three full-length collections, most recently *Midlife Abecedarian* (Riot in Your Throat, 2024). Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Pleiades*, *HAD*, *Whale Road Review*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. Melissa, a high school English teacher, is a poetry editor for *The Weight*, a journal for high school students, and *Porcupine Lit*, a journal by and for teachers. She and her husband live with their dogs in Lawrence, KS, where she co-hosts the Volta reading series at the Replay Lounge.

