

8. **Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York, London: Harper & brothers, 1945)** and censorship challenges

Black Boy tells the story of Richard Wright's childhood in the south up to his departure for Chicago at the age of 19 (Gibson, 2001; Madigan, 2008, p. 116). It's a story of his triumph over crushing poverty, physical abuse, and engrained racism in part due to the power of the written word (Gibson, 2001; Madigan, 2008, p. 116; Foerstel, 2002, p. 262). Originally intended as the first part of much longer work entitled *American Hunger*, the Harper & Brothers Book-of-the-Month Club only approved the first half, which Wright titled *Black Boy*, to be used as a monthly selection; the second part, covering Wright's experiences with racism in Chicago as an adult, would not be printed until 1977 under the title *American Hunger* (Gibson, 2001; Madigan, 2008). *Black Boy* has repeatedly been challenged as inappropriate for use in high school curricula as recently as 1996 in Texas and 1997 in Florida (Foerstel, 2002, pp. 262-263) as well as more recent challenges related to changing some of its vocabulary to stop the use of the 'n' word (Jones, 2011). Wright's widow eloquently and publicly spoke against the 1997 censorship attempt saying, "That such a record of survival against inhuman odds should be suppressed after fifty years of being fruitfully taught in our nation's schools would be tantamount to an American tragedy" (Foerstel, 2002, p. 263).

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