



FIELD REPORT 2022

**BANNED AND
CHALLENGED BOOKS**

ALA American Library Association
OFFICE FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) tracked the highest level of attempted book bans since it began recording censorship data more than 20 years ago, significantly exceeding the previous record high number of book challenges reported in 2021.

The spike in censorship attempts was driven by nationwide efforts of conservative organizations targeting works about the lives and experiences of those who identify as LGBTQIA+ or Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC).

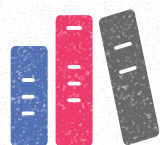
OIF documented 1,269 attempts to censor library, school, and university materials and services (a 68% increase from 2021). These efforts targeted 2,571 unique titles (a 38% increase from 2021).

The information documented was compiled from reports made to OIF, cases which we discovered through news coverage, reports shared by state intellectual freedom chapters, and details from public records, such as minutes from school and library board meetings. Most censorship cases go unreported, so our data represents only a snapshot of what is taking place.

This report covers the 20 most frequently challenged titles from 2022 with synopses of representative challenges to each one. These are listed alphabetically by author.

Find a list of frequently challenged books on the ALA website:

ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks



A challenge to a book may result in its retention or in restriction on access to it. Such restrictions are accomplished by relocating the book, requiring parental permission to check it out, labeling it with a content warning or rating, removing it from open stacks, or withdrawing it entirely. Any act limiting access to expressions or ideas based on the belief that they are objectionable or dangerous is an act of censorship.

OIF provides confidential support to any librarian, teacher, administrator, or board member working to navigate challenges and defend the constitutionally-protected freedom to read. In 2022, 270 schools, 189 public libraries, and 10 special or academic libraries requested and received assistance from OIF.

DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE BOOKS FOR YOUTH TARGETED

Children's and YA books and graphic novels were challenged far more frequently than titles for adults.¹ Collectively, children's and YA materials comprised 84% of the unique titles targeted and accounted for 86% of book challenges. Most challenges (57%) were to books in school libraries, classroom libraries, or school curricula.

The vast majority of the titles challenged were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color. LGBTQIA+ content and objections to content reflecting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) efforts, such as allegations of "Critical Race Theory," were given as reasons for 61% of challenges overall and 72% of challenges involving multiple titles. Nineteen of the 20 most frequently challenged titles explore themes of race, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

In addition to book challenges, OIF documented 57 challenges to Pride Month and LGBTQIA+ history book displays, 37 challenges to LGBTQIA+ library programs, 7 challenges to Black and Latinx history book displays, 4 challenges to EDI programs, 19 challenges to Banned Books Week displays, and 3 challenges to Banned Books Week programs.

These book challenges occurred concurrently with legislative and judicial efforts to roll back civil liberties and impose limits on academic freedom and school curricula.

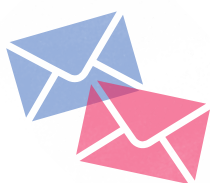
MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES DOMINATED

Starting in 2021, the number of challenges received per title escalated astronomically. In the decade before 2021, the most frequently challenged title received an average of 8 challenges during the year it topped the list. In 2022, 144 titles received 9 or more challenges and the most targeted title received 151 challenges.

Incidents where multiple titles were challenged at one time occurred more frequently than ever before. 32% of cases where books and graphic novels were challenged involved more than one title and 10% involved 10 or more titles. An average of 7 titles were challenged per case. OIF tracked 11 cases last year where more than 100 titles were challenged. We have no record of an instance in which more than 100 books were part of a single challenge prior to 2021.

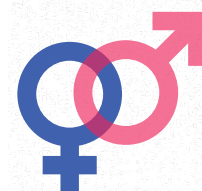
Report censorship

Reach out to the Office for Intellectual Freedom (oif@ala.org) when there's a challenge or ban at your library, school, or university. You don't have to be a librarian or ALA member to get one-on-one help. Find more ways to reach us at ala.org/oif.



THE 5 MOST COMMON COMPLAINTS CITED

in challenges against books and graphic novels



LGBTQIA+ Content: 521 cases

Sexually Explicit: 428 cases
(often used to challenge non-explicit LGBTQIA+ books)

EDI Content: 142 cases

Sex Education: 83 cases
(typically targeting materials with LGBTQIA+ representation)

Profanity: 70 cases

Multi-title challenges accounted for 90% of the overall volume of books and graphic novels challenged. While this is in keeping with what OIF tracked in 2021, it is a significant change from how book challenges occurred previously. From 2011–2020, only 15% of the total volume of books and graphic novels challenged were part of multi-title challenges.²

PRESSURE GROUPS PUSHING CENSORSHIP

Organized efforts to restrict access to reading materials are the most significant contributing factor to these trends. Use of lists developed by conservative critics and organizations is increasingly commonplace by local groups seeking to remove books from libraries. These lists, furnished with excerpts and talking points, are shared online through social media platforms maintained by national far-right groups, including Moms for Liberty, No Left Turn in Education, and MassResistance.

Pressure groups are known to have initiated 190 of the challenges in 2022, 51 of which were linked to Moms for Liberty members. Lists and resources

created by such groups have also been used by individual parents, community members, local politicians, and board members in efforts to bar access to reading materials.

Of the 20 most frequently challenged titles in 2022, 9 appeared on Texas state Representative Matt Krause's target list, 19 were included in challenges initiated by Moms for Liberty members, and all 20 were targeted on booklooks.org.

These challenges often began during the public comments sections of school and library board meetings, which members of these organizations transform into combative spectacles rife with personal attacks and overt falsehoods in an effort to subvert established processes. In tandem with these efforts, Moms for Liberty endorsed more than 500 candidates for school boards in 2022. This tactic resulted in the takeover of numerous boards by people who embrace unconstitutional and discriminatory censorship.

Many of the challenges to displays of LGBTQIA+ materials followed a template created by CatholicVote in their "Hide the Pride" campaign. The conservative organization called on their adherents to check out all books in Pride displays so that those who wanted to read them would not be able to. CatholicVote also provided a boilerplate letter for objecting to library books with queer characters.

LIBRARIANSHIP UNDER SIEGE

Personal attacks against librarians, teachers, and board members who oppose censorship have grown increasingly common on social media. The attacks share a vocabulary—accusations of grooming, pedophilia, and distribution of pornography—and often originate outside of the school or library's service area.



Join organizations that
defend and promote free
access to information.

A list can be found at
bannedbooksweek.org

OIF documented 34 cases where threats and harassment to library staff occurred and 25 cases where police reports were filed against librarians over books on the shelves. This trend began in 2021 and is rooted in arguments advanced by the anti-LGBTQIA+ hate group MassResistance that falsely claim that the presence of any image relating to sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity renders a work inappropriate for readers. This claim would disqualify countless works of classic and contemporary literature, as well as works pertaining to health, wellbeing, and the sciences from library collections.

Another recent trend is the weaponization of library resources, such as displays, reading lists, subject guides, online catalogs, and ALA's lists of the most frequently banned and challenged titles. Tools designed to increase access to reading materials are now employed in a culture war against the representation of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals in literature. Organizations like Utah Parents United have even created YouTube tutorials on searching library catalogs for books to challenge.

These advocacy groups are also urging elected officials and governing boards to abandon the standards and best practices developed by ALA to assure access to libraries and library materials and oppose partisan censorship of library materials. In one example, the board of the Campbell County Public Library (WY) voted 4-1 on October 24 to change their mission statement and remove all references to ALA and the Wyoming Library Association from their policies. Efforts like these cut staff off from professional development opportunities and professional networks. Removing core ethical documents such as the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement from policies creates a chasm between local practice and professional standards grounded in First Amendment principles.

ADVERSARIAL LEGISLATION ON THE RISE

Legislative efforts targeting Critical Race Theory, EDI, and civil rights increased. Model legislation from conservative think-tanks like the Manhattan Institute and the Heritage Foundation found broader

adoption. Bills targeting library and instructional materials and seeking to revoke legal protections for teachers and librarians were introduced nationwide.

OIF documented 32 multi-title challenges citing legislation such as Missouri S.B. 775 and Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act as justification for censoring materials. Bills like these have a chilling effect on the selection, teaching, and display of materials even when they fail to pass.

A new tactic in 2022 was the use of local ordinances to facilitate censorship. Through ordinances, city councils have sought to override collection development policies and remove trained library professionals from selection and reconsideration processes, replacing them with panels of political appointees. In League City, Texas, the city council's efforts to supplant public library policy with city ordinance were intended to deny access to LGBTQIA+ materials, as evidenced by early drafts of the proposal.

DEFENDING THE FREEDOM TO READ

In response to these growing threats to the freedom to read, the American Library Association launched Unite Against Book Bans (uniteagainstbookbans.org) in 2021. This campaign empowers readers to stand together in the fight against censorship.

Over 65 national partners have joined the UABB campaign, including authors, publishers, and free expression and civil liberties organizations, along with thousands of individuals who want to support their local libraries, their librarians, and the First Amendment right to read. You can join, too. If you sign up, you will receive calls to action when school and public libraries in your community need support. There are also talking points and advocacy tools on UABB's site which were designed to help community members come together to defend the freedom to read by speaking out, attending board meetings, and understanding where candidates stand on book censorship.

When legislation adverse to public and school libraries and the freedom to read is introduced, contact your representatives. If you need talking

HOW CAN YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY UNITE AGAINST BOOK BANS?



Join the **Unite Against Book Bans Campaign** and use the action toolkit at uniteagainstbookbans.org/toolkit to help you get started.

points, seek them from your state library association or from ALA. When school and library board members are on the ballot, ask them to sign the UABB candidate pledge or respond to the UABB candidate questionnaire. Each vote carries greater weight in a local election than it would in a national one, so be sure to register and to vote in every election you are eligible to.

Reporting censorship and challenges is vital for OIF's efforts to develop the best tools to defend library resources. If materials, displays, or programs are challenged where you work or where you live, we encourage you to report it to OIF, regardless of whether or not you need our support: ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report.

NOTES

1. Of the 2,571 unique titles targeted in 2022, 550 of them were children's books and 1,604 of them were young adult works.
2. The 2,571 unique titles that were challenged in 2022 were each targeted between 1 and 151 times, resulting in a total volume of 6,863 title-level challenges to books and graphic novels. 6,170 of these were part of multi-title challenges. In 2021, 3,500 of the 3,916 total volume of titles challenged were included in multi-title challenges—an effort that came to prominence in September of that year and has persisted since. Only 454 of the 2,932 titles that faced challenges from 2011-2020 were part of multi-title challenges.

MOST FREQUENTLY TARGETED BOOKS

ALEXIE, SHERMAN

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007)

- 52 challenges
- ↑ 24 from 2021
- Included in 42 multi-title challenges

Bestselling author Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation who decides to go to a nearly all-White public high school away from the reservation. It won the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the 2008 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and the 2008 American Indian Youth Literature Award.

On October 14, **CRESTWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT'S (MI)** superintendent sent out a mass-email informing the public that *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* was removed

from the 9th grade curriculum due to "vulgar language" and "explicit reference to male or female genitalia of a sexual nature." No formal reconsideration process was followed in the book's removal.

ANDREWS, JESSE

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl (2015)

- 48 challenges
- ↑ 25 from 2021
- Included in 43 multi-title challenges

This coming of age novel tells the story of two outcast high schoolers and would-be filmmakers who befriend a young woman dying of leukemia.

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl was one of 32 titles that a Moms for Liberty member challenged at the **HUMBLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (TX)**. Some of these titles were removed from middle school libraries without review. Some titles now

require parental permission for a student to check them out. The outcome for Andrews's novel is unknown.

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl was one of 21 titles reconsidered at **FLAGLER SCHOOLS (FL)**, where it was withdrawn from all school libraries.

CHBOSKY, STEPHEN

The Perks of Being a Wallflower (1999)

- 55 challenges
- ↑ 44 from 2021
- Included in 52 multi-title challenges

A coming of age story set in the freshman year of a suburban Pittsburgh high school, *Perks* received numerous accolades following its publication. While reviewers characterized it as a latter-day *Catcher in the Rye*, the novel has been challenged for tackling themes of sexual abuse, drug use, suicide, and sexual orientation.

A community member submitted information from booklooks.org (a compilation of arguments for the censorship of library materials that is routinely used by Moms for Liberty members) to challenge 11 titles at **HOUGHTON LAKE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (MI)**, including *Perks*. All 11 titles were retained on the recommendation of the review committee. After the decision was announced, the individual who challenged the books posted the names of the committee members on a Facebook page claiming they were “pornographers” and “pedophiles.”

CURATO, MIKE

Flamer (2020)

- **62** challenges
- **↑ 49** from 2021
- Included in **47** multi-title challenges

Set at a Boy Scout summer camp in 1995, *Flamer* tells the tale of a Filipino American confronted with bullying, navigating body image insecurities, and struggling to reconcile his conservative religious upbringing with his homosexuality. *Flamer* was featured on a litany of best books lists, including ones from *Kirkus Reviews*, NPR, *School Library Journal*, YALSA, and the Cooperative Children’s Book Center.

Starting on September 13, members of the group Let’s Talk Hempfield began reading excerpts from *Flamer* and other titles during the public comments section of

HEMPFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT

board meetings in Landisville, PA. On November 22, they submitted seven police reports against the Hempfield High School claiming that *Flamer*, *Push* by Sapphire, and *Beyond Magenta* by Susan Kuklin were “pornography” and “obscene material.” The district attorney investigated, determined the books were neither pornographic nor obscene, and did not file charges. While nine books were targeted during public comments and through police reports, no formal requests for reconsideration were ever submitted and all remain available.

DAWSON, JUNO

This Book Is Gay (2015)

- **48** challenges
- **↑ 24** from 2021
- Included in **32** multi-title challenges

A funny, pertinent, star reviewed, and award-winning book about being lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, transgender, or just curious, by acclaimed YA author and activist, Juno Dawson.

Following a protracted period of attacks on *This Book Is Gay* made during public comments at **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (FL)** board meetings, a formal request for its reconsideration was submitted on October 7, 2022. After reviewing the request alongside the district’s collection policies, professional reviews, and the



“Challenges” are not just complaints about books,

but rather willful attempts to remove or restrict access to library resources or programming. Challenges can be a written complaint, a form submitted to a library, or a call to action on social media.

full text of the book, the review committee voted unanimously to retain it without restriction. In response, a group paid to park a truck in front of the school with a digital display featuring the cover of Dawson’s book and the text “Why would your school board think any child needs access to an adult sex app?”

EVISON, JONATHAN

Lawn Boy (2018)

- **54** challenges
- **↓ 14** from 2021
- Included in **49** multi-title challenges

“Jonathan Evison takes a battering ram to stereotypes about race and class in his fifth novel, *Lawn Boy* [. . .]

full of humor and lots of hope [...] Evison has written an effervescent novel of hope that can enlighten everyone.”
— *Washington Post*

An August LGBTQIA+ Pride display in the **HUNTSVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY (TX)** prompted calls from members of a pressure group to remove LGBTQIA+ titles or place them in a restricted area of the library. In September, the city manager announced the public library would cease all book displays. In October, the Huntsville Police Department responded to a report that 85 books in the public library’s collection, including *Lawn Boy*, violated state obscenity laws. Most titles

that were publicly disclosed prominently feature LGBTQIA+ themes and characters and had been included in the display. None of them were determined to be obscene. On December 20, the city council voted to turn management of the library over to a company owned by a private equity firm. The new management invited staff to reapply for their jobs.

GINO, ALEX

Melissa

Previously published as *George* (2015)

- 39 challenges
- ↑ 21 from 2021
- Included in 33 multi-title challenges

Gino’s debut children’s novel tells the story of a fourth-grade girl who is struggling to be herself to the rest of the world. Alex Gino’s simply told and tenderly written story helps kids and adults understand what it feels like to be transgender. *Melissa* received four starred reviews, a Lambda Literary Award, and a Stonewall Award.

In January, a **PUBLIC LIBRARY IN IDAHO** received a request to reconsider *Melissa* from a patron who claimed it led to the “normalization of gender dysphoria.” The book was retained without restriction.

On February 21, **OKLAHOMA ATTORNEY GENERAL** John O’Connor announced his department would review 51 titles found in public school libraries to determine if they

violate state obscenity laws. Complaints from the Tulsa County Moms for Liberty chapter and from Reclaiming Oklahoma Parent Empowerment spurred O’Connor’s investigation. It concluded two days later without finding any of the books met the statutory definition of obscenity.

GREEN, JOHN

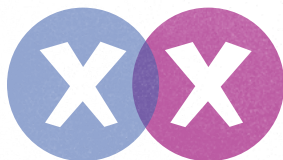
Looking for Alaska (2005)

- 55 challenges
- ↑ 31 from 2021
- Included in 50 multi-title challenges

Green’s debut novel interweaves themes of grief and hope in a coming-of-age story set at a boarding school. *Looking for Alaska* won the 2006 Michael L. Printz Award and was noted by numerous publications as the best book of the year, including *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews*.

A formal request for the reconsideration of *Looking for Alaska* was submitted to a **VIRGINIA SCHOOL DISTRICT**, alleging the book was pornographic. The review committee recommended retaining the book in the school library, however the principal overrode their decision and had the title withdrawn.

Looking for Alaska was one of 76 titles challenged at the **DAVIS SCHOOL DISTRICT (UT)** by the pressure group Utah Parents United. While 33 of the challenged titles were withdrawn, *Looking for Alaska*



A “ban” is a removal of materials.

Sometimes the ban is a decision made by a committee, and other times an administrator or staff member removes resources without following a library’s policy. A ban can also be the cancellation of a program or display.

remains under review at the time of this writing.

HARRIS, ROBIE

It's Perfectly Normal (1994)

- 44 challenges
- ↑ 26 from 2021
- Included in 27 multi-title challenges

This “caring, conscientious, and well-crafted book will be a fine library resource as well as a marvelous adjunct to the middle-school sex-education curriculum.” —*Booklist*

On August 17, members of the groups Idaho Liberty Dogs and Concerned Citizens of Meridian spoke out against *It's Perfectly Normal* and *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg during the public comments of the **MERIDIAN DISTRICT LIBRARY's** board meeting. They referred to the developmentally-appropriate sex education materials as “smut-filled pornography” and claimed it was “time to defund the Meridian Library Tax District.” Both titles remain available throughout the library system.

It's Perfectly Normal was one of 58 titles withdrawn from libraries throughout the **WALTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

(**FL**). The list of titles was created by the Florida Citizens Alliance and given to the head of curriculum and instruction by a teacher who is a Moms for Liberty member. As no review committee was involved in the decision-making process, the district's policies were not followed.

HOPKINS, ELLEN

Crank (2004)

- 48 challenges
- ↑ 36 from 2021
- Included in 47 multi-title challenges

Tricks (2009)

- 43 challenges
- ↑ 38 from 2021
- Included in 43 multi-title challenges

Nevada Writers Hall of Fame inductee Ellen Hopkins authors YA novels in verse that explore teenagers' experiences with drug addiction, mental illness, violence, and prostitution. The multi-award-winning *Crank* was inspired by her eldest daughter's addiction to crystal methamphetamine.

Both *Tricks* and *Crank* were removed from libraries in the **ROCKWALL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (TX)** along

with 19 other titles. No formal request for reconsideration was submitted for any of them and no review process was followed. Prior to their removal, Hopkins' books were included on a list of titles state senator Bob Hall characterized as “obscene,” which was shared with district administrators by a local parents group.

Crank and *Tricks* were among seven titles removed from a **HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY IN MICHIGAN** after a parent supported claims the books included “pornographic content” with arguments from booklooks.org. Following the removal of the initial seven, she submitted a list of 55 additional titles.

HOSSEINI, KHALED

The Kite Runner (2014)

- 37 challenges
- ↑ 30 from 2021
- Included in 34 multi-title challenges

Hosseini's best-selling father-son novel spans four decades of the recent history of Afghanistan and the diaspora of its people. Among the numerous awards it garnered are the 2004 Alex Award, given to books written for adults that have special appeal to youth ages 12 through 18.

In response to one parent's formal complaint, the **CEDARBURG HIGH SCHOOL (WI)** removed *The Kite Runner* from the 10th grade curriculum while it was being used by two teachers. Though their

When a challenge occurs

in your community, attend a local board meeting and explain why you think the resource should remain in the library.



child had been provided an alternate text to read, the parent believed the novel's depictions of sexual assault, depression, and attempted suicide were inappropriate, and requested that teaching of the novel be suspended for all current and future students.

JOHNSON, GEORGE M.

All Boys Aren't Blue (2021)

- 86 challenges
- ↑ 22 from 2021
- Included in 63 multi-title challenges

Johnson's series of autobiographical essays about growing up gay and Black deals frankly with sexual abuse. This award-winning memoir has appeared on numerous best book lists and was a Kids' Book Choice Award finalist.

The **FRISCO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (TX)** received requests for the recon-

sideration of 28 titles from state representative Jared Patterson. When 23 of them were retained on recommendation from review committees, Patterson appealed the decision. *All Boys Aren't Blue* was among the titles removed on appeal.

KOBABE, MAIA

Gender Queer: A Memoir (2019)

- 151 challenges
- ↑ 30 from 2021
- Included in 78 multi-title challenges

This illustrated autobiography is a tender, visually complex exploration of gender and family that shows the gifts and challenges of non-binary and asexual identity. As a result of organized efforts targeting *Gender Queer* for removal from schools and libraries, OIF has documented more challenges to it than to any other title. There were only two known challenges to it prior to 2021.

Gender Queer and *It's Perfectly Normal* were challenged at **MAINE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT #6**.

Both were retained without restriction.

A request for the reconsideration of *Gender Queer* was submitted to the **LIBERTY LAKE MUNICIPAL LIBRARY (WA)**, claiming the title was pornographic. The title was retained, but the outcome was appealed to the library board. The board upheld the decision by a vote of 4-2. A community member who advocated for banning *Gender Queer* was then appointed to the City Council. In December, the council proposed an ordinance changing the library's reconsideration process so the council would adjudicate challenge appeals instead of the library board.

KUKLIN, SUSAN

Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out (2014)

- 47 challenges
- ↑ 25 from 2021
- Included in 41 multi-title challenges

The award-winning *Beyond Magenta* garnered starred reviews upon publication. It contains Susan Kuklin's interviews with transgender and non-binary young adults. Their



If there's a local challenge reported in the news, write a powerful letter to the editor in your newspaper.

The letter could touch on the benefits of unrestricted reading, a defense of the First Amendment freedom to read, or your personal experience with reading the book.

words and photographs reveal the varied emotional and physical journeys they've taken.

In December, **CENTRAL BUCKS SCHOOL DISTRICT (PA)** received challenges to five titles with LGBTQIA+ characters, including *Beyond Magenta*. All challenged titles were withdrawn from circulation.

Concerned Parents for Nixa (MO) held a rally where Andy Wells from No Left Turn in Education called for the removal of books he characterized as illegal pornography. This culminated in challenges to 18 titles at **NIXA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, 12 of which were withdrawn from district libraries, including *Beyond Magenta*.

MAAS, SARAH J.

A Court of Mist and Fury (2016)

- **48** challenges
- **↑ 45** from 2021
- Included in **42** multi-title challenges

The second volume in a bestselling and award-winning fantasy series chronicling an epic saga of intrigue, murder, and romance amongst human and faerie realms.

A Court of Mist and Fury was removed from **VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL (VA)** libraries after a school board member challenged it. Following its removal from the school district, petitions seeking to bar the sale of it and *Gender Queer* on grounds they were obscene

Want to let a banned author know you have their back?

Send them a handwritten letter. Find postcards and addresses at ala.org/bbooks/dear-banned-author.



progressed to the Circuit Court for the City of Virginia Beach. The petitions were challenged by the ACLU of Virginia. The American Library Association and Freedom to Read Foundation were amici curiae. The Circuit Court rejected the petitions and vacated a lower court finding of probable cause for obscenity.

MCCORMICK, PATRICIA

Sold (2006)

- **40** challenges
- **↑ 39** from 2021
- Included in **39** multi-title challenges

In *Sold*, McCormick tells the story of a 13-year old Nepalese girl sold into sexual slavery by her stepfather to pay off family debt. *Sold* was a National Book Award finalist and received the Gustav-Heinemann Peace Prize, the Quill Award, a California Young Reader Medal, and the Eliot Rosewater Award.

Sold was one of 35 titles challenged by a parent in the **COUNCIL ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT (PA)** for "sexual

content." While McCormick's novel was retained, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* was removed from high school libraries despite the review committee's recommendation of retaining it.

MORRISON, TONI

The Bluest Eye (1994)

- **73** challenges
- **↑ 48** from 2021
- Included in **65** multi-title challenges

The first novel from Toni Morrison, who later won a Nobel Prize in literature, *The Bluest Eye* examines society's obsession with beauty and conformity, and raises questions about race, class, and gender.

On October 25, the Chief Academic Officer for **BROWARD COUNTY SCHOOLS (FL)** instructed all principals in the district to remove 11 titles from their school libraries due to claims they included sexually explicit or LGBTQIA+ content. The action was taken



Suggest an enlightening banned or challenged book as your next book club read.

in response to a complaint from Moms for Liberty members that the books violated the state's Parental Rights in Education law. Titles removed included picture books, sex education materials, and A.P. English novels.

After an unsuccessful campaign for a seat on the board of **ROCKY RIVER CITY SCHOOLS (OH)** on a platform advocating banning Critical Race Theory, Chuck Bartsche began efforts to have *The Bluest Eye* removed from district classrooms and libraries. The district retained Morrison's novel and it continues to be taught there as part of the A.P. English curriculum.

PÉREZ, ASHLEY HOPE

Out of Darkness (2015)

- **50** challenges
- **↑ 14** from 2021
- Included in **50** multi-title challenges

This layered love story set in 1937 Texas is centered around Mexican American and Black American characters striving for dignity during a time when segregation was a matter of life and death. *Out of Darkness* received numerous awards and is a Michael L. Printz award honor book.

The parents of a **MCKINNEY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (TX)** student filed requests for the reconsideration of 280 titles they believed to be obscene owing to their inclusion on a target list compiled by state representative Matt Krause. When state representative Jared Patterson publicly advocated for the books' removal, school superintendent Rick McDaniel responded that, "the school library book debate has been largely fueled by political agendas, sensationalism, and exaggeration." McKinney mayor George Fuller echoed McDaniel's sentiments and referred to the book banning efforts as "partisan pandering." All 280 titles were retained in district school libraries.

THOMAS, ANGIE

The Hate U Give (2017)

- **36** challenges
- **↑ 4** from 2021
- Included in **29** multi-title challenges

The Hate U Give received 8 starred reviews and numerous awards including the Goodreads Choice Awards Best of the Best. This powerful YA novel has transformed teen and adult readers with its story of how

witnessing a White police officer shoot and kill an unarmed Black man during a traffic stop changed everything in the life of a sixteen-year old Black girl.

In response to the passage of Missouri S.B. 775, the **ST. CLAIR R-XIII SCHOOL DISTRICT** removed *The Hate U Give* from school libraries, fearing potential criminal penalties for school staff.

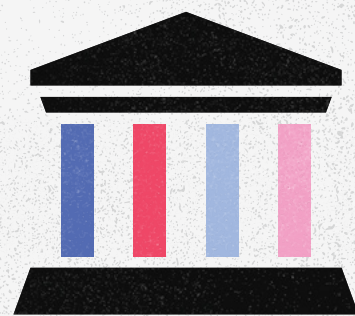
Parents challenged 5 titles in **SHAWNEE HEIGHTS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 450 (KS)** libraries, including *The Hate U Give*, *Gender Queer*, and *All Boys Aren't Blue*. State senator Rick Kloos publicly stated that he supported efforts to remove *Gender Queer* and held a meeting with school superintendent Tim Hallacy to discuss the matter. All five titles were retained.



Stay updated on censorship attempts

by following the Office for Intellectual Freedom on Twitter (**@OIF**) and Facebook (**@ALAOIF**), and subscribing to Intellectual Freedom News (**oif.ala.org**).

FORGETTING OUR HISTORY



THE REPETITION OF HATE AND INTOLERANCE FUELING THE ONSLAUGHT OF CENSORSHIP

BY PETER COYL

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There is not one playbook demagogues use to come to power and suppress others, but there are a myriad of tactics that have been used by others in the past in attempts to accomplish that goal. Many of these tactics are rooted in false information. Today, many use the internet, social media, and traditional media channels to spread falsehoods and disinformation to perpetuate hate and oppression. By comparing these tactics and how they were used throughout history to suppress thoughts and ideas we can understand today's censorship landscape.

OTHERING AND BLAMING

In the 19th Century the "White slave panic" was fueled by the false narrative that immigrants were enticing women into sexual slavery. This was both xenophobia and a response to women making the choice to be sex workers. While some of the laws passed in response to this ideology still exist, the portions passed that had racist and xenophobic overtones have consistently been repealed or declared unconstitutional.

Today, librarians in New Jersey, Virginia, and Louisiana (to name only a few) through vandalism, social media, and in public meetings have been accused of being "groomers." The implication is that librarians are building relationships with children to entice them into illegal and immoral sexual activities and relationships. This moral panic is a direct response to young people discovering their sexual

and gender identities—identities which conflict with the moral beliefs of the accusers. Librarians are doing their professional duty to provide access to information on human sexuality and gender identity. No librarian has been accused by any victim or charged with a sexual crime, though the specter continues to loom.

DRESS CODES

The passage of laws regulating clothing for specific genders started in the 1860's as an effort to curtail prostitution and to segregate immigrants who were seen as a threat to White Americans, especially in San Francisco. While there were instances where cross-dressing was allowed (such as vaudeville performances) these laws were meant to ensure conformity and had their roots in racist and classist rationales. Similar laws were passed in over 40

cities which shaped modern definitions of gender norms. These laws were used as a way to criminalize the activities of sexual minorities in an effort to suppress behavior and expression. Most of these laws were overturned within the last 30 years.

In the last few years there has been a resurgence of efforts to control how adults dress and act, with at least 14 state legislatures proposing legislation under consideration. While each piece of legislation is different, many seek to classify drag shows as an adult-oriented business, much as how a strip club is regulated. However, some of the bills make no mention of any sexual act but would merely ban singing and dancing while wearing clothes of the opposite gender in front of someone under 18. Legislators have claimed this action is to protect children, but there has been no evidence presented that an adult dressing in a costume while singing and dancing is harmful to children. There are, ironically, examples of lawmakers (including the Governor of Tennessee) having dressed in drag at events in their youth.

OBSCENITY AND VETTED BOOK LISTS

In 1873 the Comstock Act was passed at Anthony Comstock's urging to prevent the corruption of children through illustrations he considered obscene. The law prohibited many things, including the selling or possession of something obscene, but neglected to define what constituted obscenity. A number of books were banned under this law including *Ulysses*, *Moll Flanders*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and *The Naked Lunch*. Court rulings later required a work to

be assessed in its entirety for literary merit to determine obscenity and not merely on passages or excerpts and its appeal to the prurient interest.

The concept of having a list of books that are appropriate has resurfaced, as well as using only select passages and not the work as a whole. In 2021, Texas state representative Matt Krause circulated a list of 850 books that he felt might make students uncomfortable due to their race or gender. He asked school districts to report if they had these titles. In 2022 Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida, held a news conference showing select images from a number of books to demonstrate their alleged lack of merit. This led to House Bill 1467 being signed into law requiring books in school classrooms to be vetted ensuring they are not only free from pornography but suited for the age group. Violations can result in a third-degree felony. Similar legislation (House Bill 2154 "the Age-Appropriate Materials Act of 2022") was passed and signed into law in Tennessee in 2022.

THE LAVENDER SCARE AND EMPLOYMENT

In the 1950's the fear of homosexuals influencing government led to the "Lavender Scare," which ran in tandem with the more infamous "Red Scare" and the eponymous concept of McCarthyism. During this time the rhetoric espoused was that homosexuals were morally inferior, godless, a threat to traditional families, as well as psychologically disturbed. This led to a loyalty program for government employees and a list of reasons why one could not work for the government including "sexual perversion." If one was suspected they were in many cases followed and assumed guilty by association. This led to thousands of workers being required to sign loyalty oaths and live in constant fear of job loss. Over time, these government loyalty tests were removed, repealed, or shown to be unnecessary and ceased to exist.

In 2022, during a public meeting regarding library books being banned in Michigan, one member of the public questioned the religiosity and the sexuality of the library director and called her a pedophile. Members of the public stated it was not



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of materials on an array
of perspectives, attend
programs, and take
advantage of the library's
many resources!

a political issue, but a biblical one. A few weeks later, in that same county, a famous, well-regarded artist was asked by the school board to not provide a workshop to students simply because she was gay.

While overt denial of employment for certain protected classes has been made illegal, the tactics used by members of the public to question library staff members' suitability for a position based on their religion or sexuality is an echo of the Lavender Scare. If one can have their sexuality publicly questioned and used as a reason to deny or end employment, we have learned nothing from the mass-hysteria and panic of the 1950's.

BOOK BURNING AND BANNING

While it did not take place in the United States, one of the most prescient examples comes from an infamous case during the lead up to World War II. On May 6, 1933, a group of students from the German Student Union, accompanied by a brass band, broke into the Institute for Sex Research (Institut für Sexualwissenschaft). Their mission was to destroy thousands of books not only because of their content but also their creators. The institute was singled out because it was at the forefront of studying human sexuality including homosexuality, intersex, and transgender issues. It sought to understand and educate on the variety of sexual diversity that exists in humanity. This was, however, the antithesis of Nazi thought.

Today there have been no organized book burnings of the size and scope of those in Germany, but it is not lost on students of history that the same topics of the books destroyed are being contested, challenged, and banned in today's America, which underscores the motivations as being more about a homogeneous viewpoint than homosexuality.¹ Books on sexuality, specifically those on sexual minorities are firmly in the cross-hairs under the guise of protecting children. When in reality the only things censors seek to protect are their viewpoints firmly rooted in their religious beliefs.

A study of American history shows religious intolerance has been a thread woven throughout

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the fabric of America from the start. The first colonizers, the Puritans, came to this land in an effort to establish a theocracy where they did not have to tolerate other religious ideas. Years later, understanding that freedom of religion is just as important as the freedom from religion, those who wrote the Constitution enshrined the prohibition of a national religion in that document.

Despite the clamoring about sexual perversion and the derision of librarians as pedophiles and groomers, there has yet to be one case brought or legal challenge where that is evident. No child has been harmed by watching a drag performance or reading a book about human sexuality.

Librarians don't defend a particular book or concept, we defend the right to have books and the right of those who choose to read. We don't argue for one viewpoint over another, but we do argue for fact and truth. Libraries are not neutral, but principled. Those principles are enshrined firmly in the First Amendment. Propagating false information, othering and blaming, dress codes, vetted book lists, the Lavender Scare, and book bans—these tactics to censor and silence have been deployed at varying times but never all at once as we're seeing now.

Our work to protect the right to read continues and is more important than ever. We invite all to join our cause by visiting uniteagainstbookbans.org to learn how you can join our coalition of like-minded partners dedicated to preserving the right of free people to read freely, to persist and resist efforts to remove, censor, and ban.

NOTE

¹ Further underscoring the repetition of history, the German Freedom Library was founded in 1934 in response to the Nazi book burnings to collect copies of the destroyed books, and a similar act was started in the United States with Chicago Public Library beginning a "book sanctuary" in 2022.

TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2022

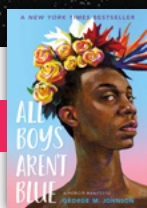
The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 1,269 challenges to library, school, and university materials and services in 2022. Of the 2,571 unique titles that were targeted, here are the most challenged, along with the reasons cited for censoring the books.



1

Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe
#1 in 2021

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit



2

All Boys Aren't Blue by George M. Johnson
#3 in 2021

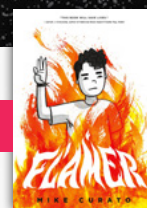
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit



3

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
#7 in 2021

REASONS: rape, incest, claimed to be sexually explicit, EDI content



4

Flamer by Mike Curato
#21 in 2021

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit



5

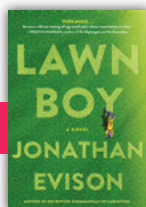
Looking for Alaska by John Green
#8 in 2021

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content



The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky
#29 in 2021

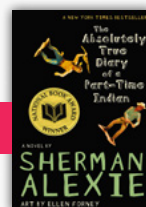
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content, rape, drugs, profanity



7

Lawn Boy by Jonathan Evison
#2 in 2021

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit



8

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie
#6 in 2021

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, profanity



9

Out of Darkness by Ashley Hope Perez
#4 in 2021

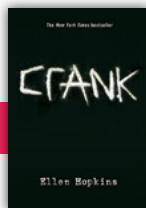
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit



10

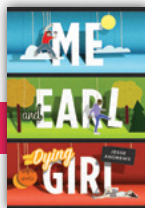
A Court of Mist and Fury by Sarah J. Maas
Outside of the top 100 in 2021

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit



Crank by Ellen Hopkins
#24 in 2021

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, drugs



Me and Earl and the Dying Girl by Jesse Andrews
#10 in 2021

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, profanity



This Book Is Gay by Juno Dawson
#9 in 2021

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, sex education, claimed to be sexually explicit



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