

Isaac Parrish

Professor Stoneking

Mellon Research Fellowship

## **Censorship in U.S. literature: the ethics of book banning**

### **Introduction**

A recent fluctuation in book banning within United States public school systems is, in certain areas, shifting the learning environment for the younger generation. History is being silenced, marginalized authors are being disproportionately targeted, and our constitutional right to freedom of speech is being threatened. The censorship of literature is a detriment to our intellectual freedom. Removal of books from schools greatly reduces a wider literary spectrum essential for developing minds to form empathy and understanding.

The practice of book banning has become politicized. A rampant push toward censorship stems from a growing hysteria which is driven in large part by misleading information. Parental rights activist groups leading the charge in banning books attack certain titles due to the groups' biased ideas and beliefs, and they do so under the guise that these books are obscene or vulgar. The process is carried out without any consideration of the literary value of banned books.

### **Book banning by the numbers**

Since America's colonial days, literature and historical texts have been censored to some degree (Anderson 67). The written word, subjective by nature, seems forever doomed to the scrutiny of whatever ideologies it may offend. Books have faced bans in general, but the real battle for freedom of expression is waged in America's school systems. Here we have seen a steady push back and forth across the threshold of what we deem appropriate material. Steady, that is, until the turn of the decade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a substantial spike in banned books has fueled the movement in the direction of increasing censorship. Now, in a country where freedom of speech supposedly reigns supreme, book banning has reached unprecedented heights.

Since 2021, more than 23,000 bans have been enforced in America's public school systems<sup>[1]</sup> ("The normalization of book banning"). Though this figure is disquieting, the epidemic does not encompass the entire nation. However, bans have been carried out in the majority of states, with Florida leading the charge for the third year running with 2,304 in the past year. Texas is the runner-up with 1,781 bans and Tennessee a close third with 1,622 in the 2024-2025 school year. The data shows a direct correlation between book banning and political affiliation, with conservative states or conservative counties accounting for the vast majority of bans ("The normalization of book banning").

The increasing numbers show the trend of banning books has reached a point of hysteria; the 2021-2022 school year faced 2,532 bans, 3,362 by the end of 2023, and a staggering total of more than 10,000 during the 2023-2024 school year. The 2024-2025 school year showed a slight decline in instances, with 6,870, but this does not necessarily reflect a decrease in the movement. Teachers, librarians, school systems in general have responded accordingly to the shifting environment. Titles which have been subject to bans elsewhere or which contain typically

challenged themes and context are less likely to be placed on library shelves. Schools now act under district pressure or new state legislation. Moreover, a book cannot be removed twice, and with the abundance of bans already executed, groups lobbying for censorship have already won out in certain areas (Latorre et al).

A look at the most frequently banned titles provides an overview of the type of content which is being challenged. The most banned book of 2025 was Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, whose narrative features instances of rape, murder, and violence ("Banned books list 2025"). To date, the most banned author is Stephen King, whose books often feature violence and sometimes sexual content (Italie). The book ban data from the recent years of censorship mania shows the majority of challenges and bans target content of violence, death, abuse, or sexual abuse ("Cover to cover"). These themes are often challenged without consideration to the surrounding narrative and its literary value. Challenged books often come to attention due to their notoriety. They are critically acclaimed, sometimes works of classic literature. The content which is often deemed inappropriate is essential to the narrative, its realism, and artistic integrity.

Any parent might understand the push to censor what their child may find distressing, however, beyond the initial directive, there is a separate agenda. More than a third of banned books feature characters of color, while roughly a quarter feature LGBTQ+ characters. Often challenges are directed at narratives where protagonists face racism and bigotry, with groups soliciting bans claiming this content to be divisive, usually associating the content with Critical Race Theory. Meanwhile, books with LGBTQ+ characters are scrutinized for sexual content or implied sexual content (Anderson 72).

For those pushing for bans of LGBTQ+ writers and authors of color, these justifications more often than not prove infallible in conservative areas (Anderson 74). However, we have reached a nebulous extent with certain bans; some frequently challenged books are entirely void of the alleged content. Take, for instance, a children's book titled *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry. On its surface, it is an innocent narrative about a Black father helping his Black daughter with her hair, and that is the whole of the story. However this book has inexplicably been the subject of several bans. Similarly, *A Tango Makes Three*, another children's book written by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson, tells the story of two male penguins raising a chick. It too has been banned in various school districts, despite the fact there is no sexual content, but rather the inference that the penguins are a gay couple without the mention of such terminology ("Banned: And Tango Makes Three").

The targeting of marginalized groups reflects the Christian nationalist views of some of the major groups leading the book banning charge. A major contributing factor in the recent surge of censorship in public school systems is the outreach of advocacy groups, and one group alone is responsible for more than half of the bans led by advocacy groups. Moms for Liberty, a Florida-based organization was founded in 2021 by two former school board members to empower "parents to advocate effectively for their children at school board meetings and across all levels of government" ("About"). It is the front runner of the approximately 50 groups pushing for bans at the national, state, and local levels. These groups employ effective tactics to put bans into action, such as speaking out at school board meetings, often deeming targeted books as pornography or tools for grooming children. Book challengers often use the public comment period during these school board meetings to read inflammatory excerpts without providing the surrounding context (Dawkins 32). Advocacy groups have also called for new

rating systems in libraries and filed criminal complaints against teachers, librarians, and school officials (“Banned in the USA - the Mid-Terms Will Increase Censorship in American Schools”). In several instances, complaints have led to teacher firings (Anderson 65).

Groups like Moms for Liberty have spread like wildfire, expanding their footprint across the nation through outreach and media presence. Beginning as a local effort, Moms for Liberty has grown to more than 130,000 members within 300 chapters which have spread to 48 states. The group lobbies to push through directives and gains a local foothold politically by endorsing school board candidates. In the past year, Moms for Liberty claimed a majority success rate in local elections, seating 32 endorsed members on school boards across 10 states (“About”).

The rise in book bans has increased in tandem with the surge and expansion of book banning advocacy groups. While these groups, along with enacted legislation and elected officials, account for roughly three fourths of bans, they are not the only driving force. Parents, who may or may not be influenced by these groups or the media which has ensued from the ongoing movement, account for the remainder (“Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools”).

In the United States, the attack against the written word has never been so prevalent than in the past four years. The steady gain in book banning momentum is evident by the numbers, with parents and advocacy groups taking a stand like never before against marginalized authors. But the content under fire – obscenity, sexuality, racial injustice, political ideologies, religion, and history – has faced public scrutiny since it was first put into writing. Censorship in literature spans the globe, even in a nation founded on freedom of speech, and the United States has seen a continuous back and forth battle against literature on social, political, or religious grounds.

### History of book banning: social parallel

Throughout America's history, banned books have reflected a theme in the social climate. Whether it be, religion, politics, or societal authority, literature has pushed against the boundaries of what people find acceptable, and the powers in play have pushed back.

Book banning in America dates back to 1637 when Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* was banned in Quincy, Massachusetts by the Puritan government for its critique of Puritan culture (Anderson 67), thus beginning an American tradition of literary censorship on religious grounds. Ironically, the role of religion in censorship has gone full circle, with the Bible being challenged and even banned in some districts due to vulgarity and violence (Metz).

In fact, many themes of censorship have persisted in some way to present day efforts of suppression. Literature, as an effective platform for spreading awareness, has been an instrument for social justice, and consequently has been met with steady resistance. Narratives of racism and racial injustice have faced opposition since their earliest publications. This is especially true for books which make an influential impact to their devoted cause, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The fictional novel depicts the often horrid treatment of Black slaves in the southern United States. Stowe, an abolitionist, wrote the book as a rallying cry against slavery and her novel was immediately banned in much of the south due to the attention it drew to appalling conditions surrounding the practice of slavery (Blakemore).

The suppression of literature featuring narratives of racism is not limited to fiction alone. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was deliberately withheld from school libraries when it was first published in 1965 because of its open criticism of white supremacy in the United States. Malcolm X, a Civil Rights and Black Power activist, wrote the autobiography with the hope it

would motivate social action, but parents complained that the book's "filthy" and "racist" language and radical rhetoric rendered it inappropriate for high school curriculum. In the 1990s, the book made a resurgence in school curriculum; however it was challenged in certain school districts in Florida with complainants claiming it anti-white racism depicted in the book was "disruptive of racial harmony." It met additional challenges with claims that it "represented white people as racist in their views" (Sova 35).

In 2023, a school teacher was fired in Texas for assigning a passage from *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation*. The unabridged version of the diary has been banned in several school districts because it mentions male and female genitalia (Bella). As well, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* has faced bans in Florida school districts ("More than 1,600 books banned in Escambia County, Florida"). These two works of nonfiction, which depict the plight of Jewish people during the Nazi occupation of Germany and the racial injustice imposed on Black people in the United States, remain controversial as instruments of education in many of today's public school districts.

Modern day challenges against books featuring instances of racism are frequently tied to Critical Race Theory (CRT). An in-depth analysis of book bans intertwining with CRT can be seen in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The book, published in 1987, has been challenged as early as 1996, and has faced steady opposition leading up to the present. It was featured in former Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin's campaign ads in which he spoke with a concerned parent about how the graphic scenes of sexual violence in the book were troubling her son, who was reading the book as part of his high school curriculum. These campaign ads effectively lobbied for parental control over literature in school curriculum. Morrison has stated that such scenes are necessary for a historically accurate depiction of slavery, noting "slavery is a void in the

literature of the United States” (qtd. in Turner). On one hand, the book features the brutality and sexual violence frequently targeted by concerned parents or book banning activist groups. On the other hand, the book, which was written by a Nobel laureate and awarded the Pulitzer prize, represents a very real truth in United States history. The jury which awarded the Pulitzer for *Beloved* noted that “the novel . . . remains precisely grounded in an American reality – the reality of black history as experienced in the wake of the Civil War” (Turner).

Morrison has said her work representing the struggles of Black people throughout the nation’s history “must be political,” and her books feature many of the “inconvenient truths” associated with CRT. Conservative politicians and book banning activist groups often confuse CRT with “woke indoctrination” or toxicity, when the theory merely acknowledges that racism and institutionalized racism still exists in modern society (Turner). Meanwhile, Morrison has become one of the most banned authors in recent years, with her books *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* reaching 8th and 26th, respectively, on PEN America’s most banned books since 2021 (“Top 52 banned books: The most banned books in U.S. schools”).

Since the book banning hysteria began during the 2021-2022 school year, the American Library Association says it has seen an “unprecedented volume of challenges” against books written by or about people of color and books addressing racism and sexual or gender identities. While challenges against Morrison’s books often cite “inappropriate” or “explicit” material, the statistics suggest marginalized authors are disproportionately targeted while weaponizing supposed inappropriate content as a pretext for challenges (Waxman).

However, racism in history has been opposed on both sides of the spectrum, with literary content perceived to portray Black people in an unfavorable light being banned or removed from the shelves of public libraries. Both of Mark Twain’s young adult classics, *The Adventures of*

*Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* were banned by Denver Public Library shortly after their publication, and the former title was also banned by Concord Public Library for being “trash suitable only for the slums.” Nearly a hundred years later, in 1975, many textbook manufacturers censored the book by replacing the N-word with various other terms. Both books continued to meet controversy through the 70s, 80s, and 90s, while *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was challenged more frequently. Several school districts around the country, from Illinois to Texas, challenged the novel as being racist and a few districts removed the book from school shelves or from reading lists (Sova 5).

Yet another theme predating the current boom in book banning is the conservative agenda against LGBTQ+ literature. Forty years before book banning went viral, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* faced challenges for a brief excerpt recounting an instance where Anne Frank kissed another girl and expressed further bicurious desires (Sova 19). The book is still challenged for such content along with a slew of other LGBTQ+ books being produced in abundance today which face heavy resistance. This is reflected in the backlash against *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, a book more widely banned than any other, subjected to bans in 56 school districts by the end of 2022 (“Now the Most Challenged and Banned Book”). Kobabe wrote the book with the intention of helping young people who are grappling with sexual orientation and gender identity, saying, “I think if I had been able to find a book like *Gender Queer* as a teenager, it would have meant the world to me. Because I was just so desperate to figure out who I was and to find the answers to the questions that I had.” (“Now the Most Challenged and Banned Book”) The book, which includes illustrations, is a memoir about Kobabe’s experience with coming out as a queer, bisexual, and nonbinary person when she was a teenager; however, it has been labeled as “obscene,” “pornographic,” and a device for “grooming,” by those who have put forth

challenges. The book features illustrations depicting non-illicit scenes of oral sex and masturbation (Lavietes). But Kobabe has stated that her book is “a lot less explicit than ... many other sources” which high school students are exposed to. “I do think it is appropriate for high school, and I think students that are high school level are seeing very comparable material in other books, in movies, TV shows, and the internet” (Lavietes).

With her statements, Kobabe propounds the opinion reflected in the statistics that LGBTQ+ authors are facing an undue surge of opposition. Historically, books on racial issues and sexual orientation have been met with resistance, and the current state of affairs parallels the history of censorship in literature; however, now, attacks on marginalized writers are carried out under the guise of censoring obscene or violent material.

### **Legality of book banning**

Is the practice of book banning a violation of the United States Constitution? The answer may depend on which side of the argument one stands. The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech.” Whether or not this founding document obstructs parental rights concerning education or a school board’s ability to remove books from school libraries and curriculum has been an ongoing debate surrounding the quandary of book banning.

The Comstock Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1873 prohibited the distribution of any “obscene, lewd, lascivious, indecent, filthy or vile article, matter, thing, device, or substance” (“Comstock Act”). This included items of literature pertaining to sexuality or devices and substances used for contraception or abortion. The federal statute is an example of legislation influenced by dated ideologies and beliefs; however, the act set a precedent for the banning of

obscene material and is still in effect today. In the recent mania of book banning, the term “obscene” is often weaponized to target certain books.

Beyond the Constitution, there is little legislation protecting the freedom of literature in U.S. public schools. The issue has been addressed only once by the United States Supreme Court and the outcome was less than concrete. *Island Trees School District v. Pico* (1982) was a landmark case in the fight against book banning resulting in a split decision from court justices on the First Amendment issue of a school board’s authority to remove books from high school and junior high school libraries. The Island Trees Board of Education removed nine books from the district's public school libraries after receiving a list from a concerned group of parents. The books removed were deemed “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-[Semitic] or just plain filthy.” (“*Island Trees Sch. Dist. v. Pico by Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982).”) Out of the nine books removed for review, only two were returned. Subsequently, five students filed a lawsuit against the school board claiming a violation of First Amendment rights. The court decided that “First Amendment rights of students may be directly and sharply implicated by the removal of books from the shelves of a school library” (Brennan).

This case set a precedent for the illegality of the removal of books from school libraries merely because of the ideas within them. The United States Supreme Court upheld the opinion that the First Amendment includes the right of a student to receive ideas which in turn informs their right to the freedom of speech and expression (Brennan). Books cannot be banned based on ideologies or beliefs, but instead only on the grounds of vulgarity and obscenity. However, the plurality decision of the Supreme Court left no enforceable federal guidelines. The supervision of banned books still falls to state governments, and, as seen in recent years, ideologies and beliefs have had a heavy influence on book removals in instances where books have been banned due to

their supposed association with Critical Race Theory or due to their LGBTQ+ characters or references.

With the authority falling to the state or district level, some states have enacted legislation to protect literature while others have leaned toward promoting parental rights and censorship in public school libraries and curriculum. Laws put in place reflect a state's political leanings and some left-leaning states are pioneering a movement against book banning by protecting against bans. In 2023, California passed a bill which bans school boards from rejecting textbooks based on the teachings of historical content about people from different races, gender identities, and sexual orientations. The legislation effectively blocks public schools from whitewashing history (Austin).

Similarly, Illinois passed a law in 2023 which outlaws book banning. Public libraries that restrict or remove materials based on "partisan or doctrinal" disapproval will be ineligible for state funding. The bill protects marginalized voices in literature, requiring public libraries to adopt the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, which states that "materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation" (Savage).

While progressive states are making unprecedented moves to protect real history and diversity in literature, the juggernauts of book banning - Florida and Texas - have been moving in the other direction, enacting legislation which threatens teacher jobs and politicalizes the practice of book banning. Federally, the issue has also taken a swing to the side of increasing censorship, with the Department of Education ending an effort started by the Biden administration to investigate the legality of book banning (Italie).

In 2023, Florida House Bill 1467 required public schools to be more transparent about material taught in classrooms and required elementary schools to display the material on its website. However, the legislation functions in accordance with another Florida statute which constitutes a third degree felony for distributing pornographic or inappropriate material to a minor. The uncertainty ensuing from Florida's enacted statutes caused many public school teachers to cover up books in classrooms or libraries or remove all the books until they were vetted by the district (Negussie et al).

Also in 2023, Texas passed a house bill requiring vendors to rate material before selling it to public schools. This leaves the discretion to the vendors, who must rate books based on the explicitness of the sexual conduct within the material, the frequency, and whether or not "a reasonable person" would find the material titillating or shocking to the reader. If the material is deemed inappropriate, the vendor is forbidden to sell it to a public school library ("HB 900 implementation"). However, with the judgment left to the discretion of the supplier, vendors might be exceedingly wary of what they deem inappropriate since the sale of inappropriate material has legal ramifications. The Texas statute also falls into a gray area with its terminology of a "reasonable person," resulting in an ambiguity similar to *Pico*.

As state-enacted statutes in Texas and Florida push the needle in one direction, lawsuits against the practice of banning books push back. PEN America is one organization that has taken its fight for freedom of speech to the courtroom, suing Escambia County, Florida for its abundance of bans. PEN America, in conjunction with Penguin Random House and a group of diverse authors, claims that Escambia County banned books "based on ideological objections to their contents or disagreement with their messages or themes." The case draws attention to the

disproportionate targeting of books that include themes and messages related to LGBTQ+ and race (“We’re suing to fight book bans!”).

This lawsuit, still ongoing, stands as an example of one method of fighting against book bans in the recent surge of censorship. Enacted legislation and lawsuits are at the forefront of the campaign, and the polarizing actions from states on both ends of the spectrum reflect a division of opinions in literature.

### **Virginia: A case study**

Though Virginia pales in comparison to the book-banning juggernaut that is Florida, the commonwealth is still among the top ten states when it comes to removals. From 2021 to 2025, Virginia saw 344 book bans targeting 223 unique titles. However, reflecting nationwide trends, certain localities account for the bulk of bans. Five counties make up for nearly two thirds of books removed, including Rockingham, Goochland, Madison, and Spotsylvania, while Hanover County is responsible for 36 percent of Virginia bans, removing 125 titles from school libraries (“School Library Book Removals in Virginia”).

*Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe was the most removed book in Virginia’s public schools with bans in seven districts. Other removals include several titles by Toni Morrison and a few other classic titles, including Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (“School Library Book Removals in Virginia”).

This data was collected from a survey conducted by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, in which 88 percent of Virginia’s school districts responded. When a book is challenged, more often than not it is reviewed by a school library book removal committee before a decision is made; however, 27 percent of Virginia’s school division reportedly are

without such committees. Sexually explicit content was the most cited reason for removals, however, schools also cited “determination of developmental inappropriateness,” “anti-religious,” “vulgar language,” or “recommended for removal by school board member” as criteria for bans (“School Library Book Removals in Virginia”).

Another frequently cited reason for removal was a 2022 statute signed into law by former Virginia Governor Glenn Younkin. The policy requires school districts to notify parents when instructional material will contain sexually explicit content. The statute does not, however, mention removals or libraries in its language. In fact, the final bill includes a precautionary clause indicating that the General Assembly does intend the law to apply to book removals, and the influence the bill has had on book removals is merely an indirect effect of a misinterpretation. The law itself does not apply to school libraries, but rather only the material being taught in classrooms (“School Library Book Removals in Virginia”).

This is one more scenario of state statutes confusing school districts while a subsequent gray area in censorship arises, such as in Florida, when schools cleared out entire libraries or covered up every title until each book was vetted. In reality, the Virginia Board of Education has language in place which could be read as promoting diversity in the literature of school libraries. The Board of Education requires districts to maintain materials adequate to meet research, inquiry, and reading requirements of both instruction and general student interest. The libraries are stocked by a library staff required by the state to hold certain educational qualifications (“School Library Book Removals in Virginia”).

### **Impact of book bans**

The written word is the primary tool for human progress. Whether it be fiction or nonfiction, literature provides a deeper understanding of humanity. Denying young readers a broader lens into the diversity of human life can have a limiting effect.

For young students, reading not only has been proven to boost cognitive function and have a positive effect on mental health, but it also helps build empathy within young readers. At the earliest stages of reading, children identify with characters dissimilar to themselves. This effect of storybooks is seen as the most valuable contribution when instilling cognitive empathy in our youth (Kucirkova). When innocent children's books depicting people of color or LGBTQ+ characters are banned from the classroom, this essential method for building empathy is restricted. Furthermore, when these books are removed from a classroom, children may associate the prohibition with the content involved. Young children of color or children with LGBTQ+ relatives are left unrepresented in the curricular literature.

The recent spike in book bans has also further polarized the political dissonance in the United States. A ban in one state leads to a spike in circulation in another state with opposite political leanings, while bans surrounding political issues have resulted in increased donations to Republican candidates ("Book bans may have unintended consequences") Moreover, parental rights over material taught in public schools has been an increasing issue in political campaigns. The politicalization of censorship in literature has widened the political divide in our country.

Another inadvertent effect of book banning is the publicity it gives to banned books. A book's supposed or actual inappropriate or illicit content is a selling point. Most books stores have a section designated for banned books. Research indicates an approximate 12% increase in circulation for banned books when compared to non-banned books of a similar content ("Book bans may have unintended consequences"). Book banning advocacy groups, while carrying out their

initiative to bar children from certain content, are in turn promoting the literature they deem unfit for society.

The real detriment of banning books is how it can limit our perspective and understanding of humanity. A well-read individual is a thoughtful, empathetic, open-minded, and informed individual. A broader range of ideas is developed through the process of reading. And while all literature may not be appropriate for all ages, school library shelves are stocked at the discretion of school librarians. The books available in these libraries, the ones included in the curriculum, are a reflection of our history and the human condition.

### Works Cited

“About.” *Moms for Liberty*, 2025 <https://www.momsforliberty.org/about/>

Anderson, Rachel. “Burning Books over Politics: Why Federal Guidance Is Essential to Protect Literature in Public Schools.” *University of Toledo Law Review*, vol. 56, no. 1, Oct. 2024, pp. 65–86. *EBSCOhost*, [research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=1fbc7836-7e5a-365d-8e73-3acb81e4d2c6](https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=1fbc7836-7e5a-365d-8e73-3acb81e4d2c6).

Austin, Sophie. “California governor signs law barring schoolbook bans based on racial, gender teachings.” *AP News*, 2023 <https://apnews.com/article/california-schools-book-ban-law-a8b4ebefb289a3d843b1757276115d2c>

“Banned: And Tango Makes Three.” *PBS*, 2017 <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/banned-and-tango-makes-three/>

“Banned books list 2025.” *PEN America*, 2025 Banned Books List 2025 - PEN America

“Banned in the USA: Beyond the Shelves.” *PEN America*, 2024

<https://pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/>

“Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools.” *PEN America*, 2023

<https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-supercharge-book-suppression-in-schools/>

“Banned in the USA - the Mid-Terms Will Increase Censorship in American Schools.”

*Education Journal*, no. 505, Nov. 2022, p. 16. *EBSCOhost*,

[research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=7dbcae6e-20db-30e7-a1a0-04f2e636e34d](https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=7dbcae6e-20db-30e7-a1a0-04f2e636e34d).

Bella, Timothy. “Texas teacher fired over graphic “diary of Anne Frank” adaptation assignment to eighth graders.” *The Washington Post*, 2023

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/09/20/texas-teacher-anne-frank-fired/>

Blakemore, Erin. “The history of book bans-and their changing targets-in the U.S.” *National Geographic*, 2024

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/history-of-book-bans-in-the-united-states>

“Book bans may have unintended consequences in increasingly polarized United States.”

*Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College*, (n.d.)

<https://www.heinz.cmu.edu/media/2023/October/book-bans-may-have-unintended-consequences-in-increasingly-polarized-united-states>

Brennan, William J., Jr, and Supreme Court Of The United States. "U.S. Reports: Board of Education v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853." Periodical. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, 1981 <[www.loc.gov/item/usrep457853/](http://www.loc.gov/item/usrep457853/)>.

"Comstock Act." *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/event/Comstock-Act>

"Cover to cover." *PEN America*, 2025 <https://pen.org/report/cover-to-cover/>

Dawkins, April. "CENSORSHIP AND SILENCE: How Book Bans and Removals Threaten Diverse Stories and Voices." *Literacy Today* (2411-7862), vol. 39, no. 4, Apr. 2022, pp. 30–34. *EBSCOhost*, [research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=3a6d5632-c60c-3d84-9fd2-05e772c12924](https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=3a6d5632-c60c-3d84-9fd2-05e772c12924)

Flannery, Mary Ellen. "Book bans are "common and rampant." So are educators and parents fighting them." *NEA*, 2025 <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/book-bans-are-common-and-rampant-so-are-educators-and-parents-fighting-them>

"HB 900 implementation." *Texas Library Association*, 2025 <https://txla.org/advocacy/hb-900-vendor-ratings-for-school-library-materials/hb-900-implementation/>

"Island Trees Sch. Dist. v. Pico by Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)." *Justia U.S. Supreme Court*, (n.d.) <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/457/853/>

Italie, Hillel. "Stephen King is the most banned author in US schools, Pen report says." *AP News*, 2025 <https://apnews.com/article/stephen-king-pen-america-book-bans-6e55e4b48e0f1b6c2addc02e9baeaf79>

Kucirkova, N. "How could children's storybooks promote empathy? A conceptual framework based on developmental psychology and literary theory." *Frontiers*, 2019  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00121/>

Latorre, Yulianna. Markham, Madison. Interview. *Pen America*, 2025

Lavietes, Matt. "Author of "gender queer," one of most-banned books in the U.S. addresses controversy." *NBCNews.com*, 2021  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-life-and-style/author-gender-queer-one-banned-books-us-addresses-controversy-rcna8991>

Metz, Sam. "Utah district bans Bible in Elementary and middle schools "due to vulgarity or violence." *AP News*, 2023  
<https://apnews.com/article/book-ban-school-library-bible-fc025c8ccf30e955aaf0b0ee1899608a>

"More than 1,600 books banned in Escambia County, Florida." *PEN America*, 2024  
<https://pen.org/escambia-county-florida-banned-books-list/>

Negussie, Tesfaye, et al. "Florida schools directed to cover or remove classroom books that are not vetted." *ABC News*, 2023  
<https://abcnews.com/Politics/florida-schools-directed-cover-remove-classroom-books-vetted/story?id=96884323>

"Now the Most Challenged and Banned Book, Gender Queer Was Written to Give Teenagers the Guidance that Author Maia Kobabe Never Had." *PEN America*, 2023

<https://pen.org/press-release/now-the-most-challenged-and-banned-book-gender-q-ueer-was-written-to-give-teenagers-the-guidance-that-author-maia-kobabe-never-had/>

“School Library Book Removals in Virginia.” *Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission*.

<https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt606.pdf>

Savage, Claire. “First of its kind” Illinois law will penalize libraries that ban books.” *AP News*, 2023

<https://apnews.com/article/book-ban-library-lgbtq-illinois-f5516941473e474712eaaafda084de76>

“The Florida Senate.” House Bill 1467 - The Florida Senate, 2022

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1467>

“The normalization of Book banning.” *PEN America*, 2025

<https://pen.org/report/the-normalization-of-book-banning/>

“Top 52 banned books: The most banned books in U.S. schools.” *PEN America*, 2025

<https://pen.org/top-52-banned-books-since-2021/>

Turner, Sarah E. “Trolling Toni Morrison: Book Banning, Beloved, and Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory and the American Media” Routledge, 2025, pp. 201–16.

Waxman, O. B. “Why Toni Morrison books are frequent targets of book bans.” *Time*,

2022 <https://time.com/6143127/toni-morrison-book-bans/>

“We’re suing to fight book bans!” *PEN America*, 2025

<https://pen.org/pen-america-v-escambia-county/>

---

[1] “PEN America defines a school book ban as any action taken against a book based on its content and as a result of parent or community challenges, administrative decisions, or in response to direct or threatened action by governmental officials, that leads to a book being either completely removed from availability to students, or where access to a book is restricted or diminished. (“The normalization of book banning”)