

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION  
SECTION II  
Total Time - 2 hours  
Question 1- 55min

Read the following sources and accompanying contextual information carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes from at least three of the sources for support, **develop a position on whether** or not *schools* have the right to ban, or limit teaching of, books which are thought to include content that is offensive or explicit?

OR **develop a position on whether** or not *parents* have the right to ban, or limit teaching of, books their children are allowed to read in schools if they are thought to include content that is offensive or explicit?

Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. **Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three sources for support, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that schools have the right to ban, or limit teaching of, books which are thought to include content that is offensive or explicit.**

Refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, etc.; titles are included for your convenience.

Source A (Ringel)

Source B (ProCon)

Source C (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom)

Source D (Top 10 Infographic)

Source E (Censorship Infographic)

Source F (CNN)

Source G (Seuss) [Also *Late Night* Twitter Show <https://twitter.com/colbertlateshow/status/1366973616915554306>]

Source H (Frappes and Fiction)

Source I (Fister and Anderson)

**FYI — Torrentino Teaching “Do Parents Have the Right to Ban Books from School Libraries?”**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M0PD3OSobU>

## Source A (Ringel)

How Banning Books Marginalizes Children -- Since the 1800s, attitudes about which books are “appropriate” for kids to read have too often suppressed stories about different cultures and life experiences. By Paul Ringel

Every year since 1982, an event known as Banned Books Week has brought attention to literary works frequently challenged by parents, schools, and libraries. The books in question sometimes feature scenes of violence or offensive language; sometimes they’re opposed for religious reasons (as in the case of both *Harry Potter* and the Bible). But one unfortunate outcome is that 52 percent of the books challenged or banned in the last 10 years feature so-called “diverse content”—that is, they explore issues such as race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental illness, and disability. As a result, the organizers of Banned Books Week, which started Sunday, chose the theme “Celebrating Diversity” for 2016.

Since the inception of the American children’s literature industry in the 1820s, publishers have had to grapple with the question of who their primary audience should be. Do kids’ books cater to parents and adult cultural gatekeepers, or to young readers themselves? But as books that address issues of diversity face a growing number of challenges, the related question of *which* children both the industry and educators should serve has become more prominent recently. Who benefits when Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of Part-Time Indian*, which deals with racism, poverty, and disability, is banned for language and “anti-Christian content”? Who’s hurt when Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings’s picture book *I Am Jazz*, about a transgender girl, is banned? The history of children’s book publishing in America offers insight into the ways in which traditional attitudes about “appropriate” stories often end up marginalizing the lives and experiences of many young readers, rather than protecting them.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, debates over the target audience of the American children’s-literature industry largely centered around the question of how much adults should trust children to choose what they read. Before the Civil War, the prevailing answer was “very little.” Accordingly, kids’ books and magazines addressed the instructional concerns of adults without worrying much about readers’ interests. New entertainment options, from dime novels to nickelodeons, led to a greater effort to retaining children’s attention by amusing them. Yet even as publishers focused more on engagement, they carefully avoided subjects that riled the parents who bought the books. In researching my book *Commercializing Childhood*, I discovered that children’s stories and magazines during the 19th century rarely discussed slavery. When the popular children’s magazine *The Juvenile Miscellany* ran anti-slavery stories in the early 1830s, its largely New England-based audience abandoned it, and the magazine collapsed within 18 months. The outcome had a chilling effect on other publications. The subject of slavery had a brief revival during the war (when it served to highlight the evils of Southern society), but afterward the topic remained unpopular within the industry. Indeed, the recent #SlaveryWithASmile controversy over two books’ depiction of slaves’ lives indicates that publishers today still haven’t figured out how to address the subject for younger children in a way that’s both historically accurate and acceptable to parents.

When librarians and teachers reject works that may be “emotionally inappropriate” for children (a common reason), they’re adhering to the traditional and mostly prevailing view that children’s literature should avoid controversial topics. It’s understandable that adults want to minimize children’s anxiety, and schools are often under intense social and financial pressure to maintain established standards. But it’s also important to recognize that this tradition was established in the 19th century to serve the needs of the white, wealthy Protestant producers and consumers who have dominated the field of American children’s literature for much of the past 200 years.

The distinction between books that have inspired calls for censorship (including series like Nancy Drew and The Hunger Games) versus the works that more often have actually been kept out of children's hands (*Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the novels of Judy Blume) reveals the insidious effects of this tradition. Whereas violence or elements of fantasy rarely leads to widespread censorship, concerns about race or sexuality are more likely to restrict circulation. It's an especially troubling tendency, considering the structural biases within the publishing industry that have made it harder for minority authors to get children's books published. In effect, this pattern means the industry serves those who benefit from the status quo, which is why most scholars see children's literature as a conservative force in American society.

There is an alternative tradition of using children's literature specifically to introduce more diverse perspectives to young readers that dates back to *The Juvenile Miscellany*, which encouraged empathy for American Indian and slave characters. This practice mostly remained economically and culturally marginalized until the 1960s, when books like Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day* and Don Freeman's *Corduroy* began to naturalize the experiences of children of color. Around the same time, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In The Night Kitchen* challenged cultural taboos about addressing children's normal stages of psychological and emotional development.

Perhaps no recent book has illuminated the benefits of such an approach for young readers as much as R.J. Palacio's 2012 bestseller *Wonder*. This novel narrates the school year of 10-year-old Augie, a boy with a severe facial deformity, from his own perspective as well as those of the people that surround him. By encouraging children to imagine themselves in the place of Augie and his classmates, *Wonder* transports them beyond their own experiences and instills the feelings of empathy and humility that are an essential part of the reason why we tell stories.

Despite *Wonder's* commercial success, a recent survey of 574 librarians by the *School Library Journal* suggests a trend toward a more conservative approach to producing and curating children's books. Content labels, restricted access areas, and self-censorship have all been on the rise since 2008, and in 2014, a group of children's book authors started the We Need Diverse Books campaign to highlight the lack of diversity in children's publishing.

Quiet decisions by libraries not to carry titles such as Kate Messner's *The Seventh Wish*, whose protagonist has an older sibling grappling with addiction, or Alex Gino's *George*, which is about the life of a transgender fourth-grader, reflect a resurgent fear and misinterpretation of difference. As Messner wrote on her blog after being disinvited from a planned school talk, "When we say 'This book is inappropriate,' we're telling those children 'your situation ... your family ... your *life* is inappropriate.'" More broadly, keeping books about certain types of children or experiences out of libraries or putting them on separate shelves perpetuates a troubling vision of a sheltered American childhood that in fact has rarely existed.

After publishing *The Seventh Wish*, Messner received several messages from librarians and parents concerned about the topics her book dealt with. One elementary-school librarian explained why she wouldn't share Messner's book with her students. "For now," the librarian said, "I just need the 10 and 11-year-olds biggest worry to be about friendships, summer camps, and maybe their first pimple or two." Messner responded by emphasizing a broader obligation that parents, teachers, writers, and publishers all share. "We don't serve only our children," Messner said. "We serve children in the real world."

That message of tolerance, compassion, and affirmation aligns with the values of Banned Books Week, as well as with the ideals of children's literary classics ranging from *Little Women* and *Tom Sawyer* to *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This shared sensibility is grounded in respect for

young readers, which doesn't mean providing them with unfettered access to everything on the library shelves. Instead, it means that librarians, teachers, and parents curate children's choices with the goals of inspiring rather than obscuring new ideas. Such an approach allows kids to learn how to navigate imaginary worlds filled with differences, with the faith that they will apply those lessons to their own lives.

[Paul Ringel](#) is an associate professor of history at High Point University. He is the author of *Commercializing Childhood: Children's Magazines, Urban Gentility, and the Ideal of the American Child, 1823-1918*.

## Source B (ProCon)

The American Library Association (ALA) has tracked book challenges, which are attempts to remove or restrict materials, since 1990. In 2020, the ALA recorded 156 reported book challenges in the United States, a significant decrease from the 377 reported challenges in 2019 perhaps due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, challenges jumped to an all-time high in 2021 with 729 challenges, containing a total of 1,597 books. [22] [27] [28]

In most years, about 10% of the reported challenges result in removal or ban from the school or library. However, in 2016, five of the top ten most challenged books were removed. The ALA estimates that only about 3% to 18% of challenges are reported to its Office for Intellectual Freedom, meaning that the actual number of attempts to [ban books](#) is likely much higher. [1] [24]

In 2021, challenges were most frequently brought by parents (39%), followed by patrons (24%), a board or administration (18%), librarians or teachers (6%), elected officials (2%), and students (1%). Books were most often challenged at school libraries (44%), [public libraries](#) (37%), schools (18%), and academic libraries (1%). [30]

Sexually explicit content, offensive language, and "unsuited to any age group" are the top three reasons cited for requesting a book be removed. The percentage of Americans who thought any books should be banned increased from 18% in 2011 to 28% in 2015, and 60% of people surveyed believed that children should not have access to books containing explicit language in school libraries, according to The Harris Poll. A 2022 poll found 71% disagreed with efforts to have books removed, including 75% of Democrats, 58% of independents, and 70% of Republicans. [1] [3] [28]

## Should Parents or Other Adults Be Able to Ban Books from Schools and Libraries?

### **Pro 1 Parents have the right to decide what material their children are exposed to and when.**

**Having books with adult topics available in libraries limits parents' ability to choose when their children are mature enough to read specific material. "Literary works containing explicit [scenes, as well as] vulgar and obscene language" were on the approved reading list for grades 7-12, according to Speak up for Standards, a group seeking age-appropriate reading materials for students in Dallas, Texas. [4]**

**If books with inappropriate material are available in libraries, children or teens can be exposed to books their parents wouldn't approve of before the parents even find out what their children are reading. [16]**



Bans are necessary because “opting your child out of reading [a certain] book doesn’t protect him or her. They are still surrounded by the other students who are going to be saturated with this book,” said writer Macey France. [17]

**Pro 2** Children should not be exposed to sex, violence, drug use, or other inappropriate topics in school or public libraries.

Books in the young adult genre often contain adult themes that young people aren’t ready to experience. Of the top ten most challenged books in 2020, one had LGBTQ+ content, two were sexually explicit, five dealt with racism and anti-police opinions, and others had profanity and drug use. [18] [27]

According to Jenni White, a former public school science teacher, “Numerous studies on the use of graphic material by students indicate negative psychological effects,” including having “more casual sex partners and [beginning] having sex at younger ages.” [19]

The American Academy of Pediatrics has found that exposure to violence in media, including in books, can impact kids by making them act aggressively and desensitizing them to violence. [17]

Kim Heinecke, a mother of four, wrote to her local Superintendent of Public Schools that “It is not a matter of ‘sheltering’ kids. It is a matter of guiding them toward what is best. We are the adults. It is our job to protect them – no matter how unpopular that may seem.” [19]

**Pro 3** Keeping books with inappropriate content out of libraries protects kids, but doesn’t stop people from reading those books or prevent authors from writing them.

Peter Sprigg of the Family Research Council noted that removing certain books from libraries is about showing discretion and respecting a community’s values, and doesn’t prevent people from getting those books elsewhere: “It’s an exaggeration to refer to this as book banning. There is nothing preventing books from being written or sold, nothing to prevent parents from buying it or children from reading it.” [20]

What some call “book banning,” many see as making responsible choices about what books are available in public and school libraries. “Is it censorship that you’re unable to go to your local taxpayer-funded branch and check out a copy of the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’? For better or for worse, these books are still widely available. Your local community has simply decided that finite public resources are not going to be spent disseminating them,” *Weekly Standard* writer and school board member Mark Hemingway stated. [18]

**Con 1** Parents may control what their own children read, but don't have a right to restrict what books are available to other people.

Parents who don’t like specific books can have their kids opt out of an assignment without infringing on the rights of others.

The National Coalition against Censorship explained that “Even books or materials that many find ‘objectionable’ may have educational value, and the decision about what to use in the classroom should be based on professional judgments and standards, not individual preferences.” [6]

In the 1982 Supreme Court ruling on *Board of Education v. Pico*, Justice William Brennan wrote that taking books off of library shelves could violate students' First Amendment rights, adding that "Local school boards may not remove books from school libraries simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books." [21]

**Con 2** Many frequently challenged books help people get a better idea of the world and their place in it.

Robie H. Harris, author of frequently challenged children's books including *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing up, Sex, and Sexual Health*, stated, "I think these books look at the topics, the concerns, the worry, the fascination that kids have today... It's the world in which they're living." [8]

Many books that have long been considered to be required reading to become educated about literature and American history are frequently challenged, such as: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. [9]

46 of the Radcliffe Publishing Group's "Top 100 Novels of the 20th Century" are frequently challenged. Banning these books would deprive students of essential cultural and historical knowledge, as well as differing points of view. [9]

**Con 3** Books are a portal to different life experiences and reading encourages empathy and social-emotional development.

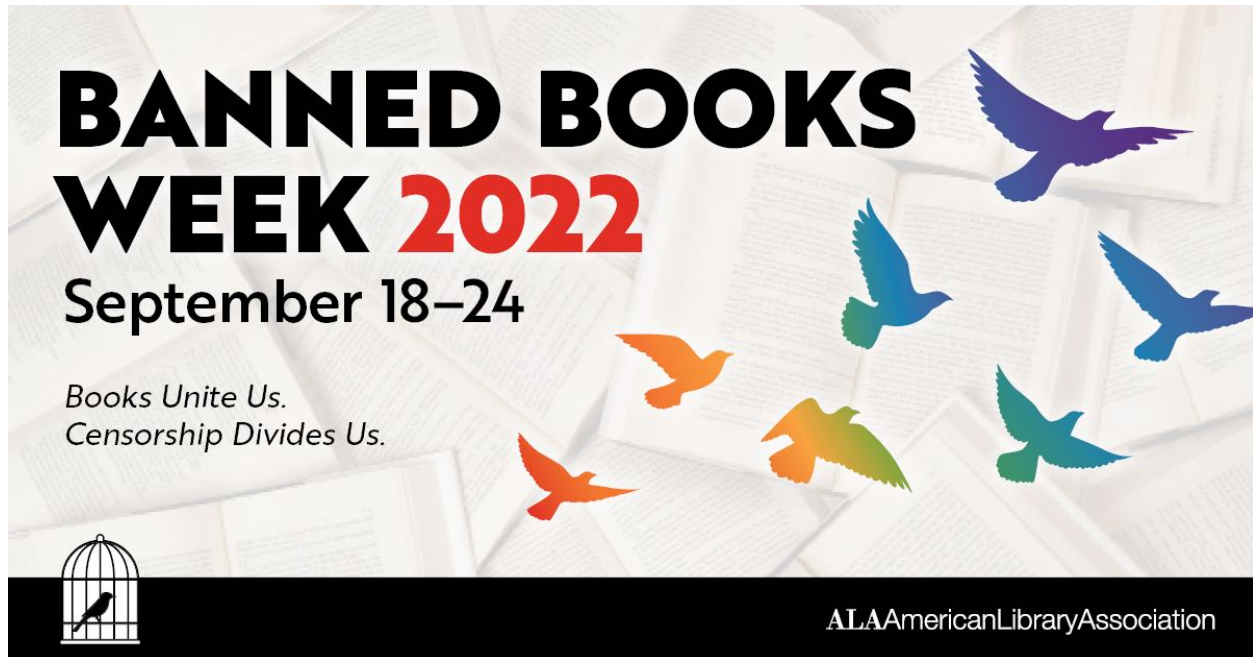
One study found that reading J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which is frequently challenged for religious concerns about witchcraft, "improved attitudes" about immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees. [11]

Another study found that reading narrative fiction helped readers understand their peers and raised social abilities. [12][13]

A study published in *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* found that people who read a story about a Muslim woman were less likely to make broad judgments based on race. [14]

Neil Gaiman, author of the frequently challenged novel *Neverwhere*, among other books, stated that fiction "build[s] empathy... You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. You're being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed. Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals." [15]

Source C (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom)



“This is a dangerous time for readers and the public servants who provide access to reading materials. Readers, particularly students, are losing access to critical information, and librarians and teachers are under attack for doing their jobs.”

-- Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom

Banned Books Week celebrates the freedom to read and spotlights current and historical attempts to censor books in libraries and schools. For 40 years, the annual event has brought together the entire book community — librarians, booksellers, publishers, journalists, teachers, and readers of all types — in shared support of the freedom to seek and to express ideas, even those some consider unorthodox or unpopular. The books featured during Banned Books Week have all been targeted for removal or restriction in libraries and schools. By focusing on efforts across the country to remove or restrict access to books, Banned Books Week draws national attention to the harms of censorship.

In a time of intense political polarization, library staff in every state are facing an unprecedented number of attempts to ban books. ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked [729 challenges to library, school and university materials and services in 2021](#), resulting in more than 1,597 individual book challenges or removals. Most targeted books were by or about Black or LGBTQIA+ persons.

The theme for Banned Books Week 2022 is "Books Unite Us. Censorship Divides Us." Sharing stories important to us means sharing a part of ourselves. Books reach across boundaries and build connections between readers. Censorship, on the other hand, creates barriers. Banned Books Week is both a reminder of the unifying power of stories and the divisiveness of censorship, and a call to action for readers across the country to push back against censorship attempts in their communities.

## About Book Bans and Challenges

Books are still being banned and challenged today. A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials.

While books have been and continue to be banned, part of the Banned Books Week celebration is the fact that, in a majority of cases, the books have remained available. This happens only thanks to the efforts of librarians, teachers, students, and community members who stand up and speak out for the freedom to read.

## Banned & Challenged Classics

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom records attempts to remove books from libraries, schools, and universities. These titles are books on the Radcliffe Publishing Course Top 100 Novels of the 20th Century (<https://www.librarything.com/bookaward/Radcliffe+Publishing+Course+Top+100+Novels+of+the+20th+Century>) that have been banned or challenged.

If you have information about bans or challenges, please contact (<http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report>) the Office for Intellectual Freedom. If you would like to support the office's work in providing confidential support to libraries and schools that face censorship attempts, please consider making a donation (<https://ec.ala.org/donation/OIF-0000-INTELL>).



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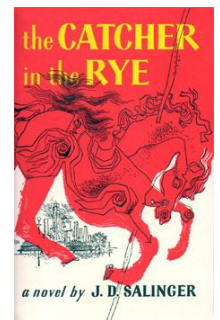
### ***The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

- Challenged at the Baptist College in Charleston, SC (1987) because of "language and sexual references in the book."

### ***The Catcher in the Rye*, by JD Salinger**

Since its publication, this title has been a favorite target of censors.

- In 1960, a teacher in Tulsa, OK was fired for assigning the book to an eleventh grade English class. The teacher appealed and was reinstated by the school board, but the book was removed from use in the school.
- In 1963, a delegation of parents of high school students in Columbus, OH, asked the school board to ban the novel for being "anti-white" and "obscene." The school board refused the request.
- Removed from the Selinsgrove, PA suggested reading list (1975). Based on parents' objections to the language and content of the book, the school board voted 5-4 to ban the book. The book was later reinstated in the curriculum when the board learned that the vote was illegal because they needed a two-thirds vote for removal of the text.
- Challenged as an assignment in an American literature class in Pittsgrove, NJ (1977). After months of controversy, the board ruled that the novel could be read in the Advanced Placement class, but they gave parents the right to decide whether or not their children would read it.
- Removed from the Issaquah, WA optional High School reading list (1978).
- Removed from the required reading list in Middleville, MI (1979).
- Removed from the Jackson Milton school libraries in North Jackson, OH (1980).
- Removed from two Anniston, AL High school libraries (1982), but later reinstated on a restrictive basis.
- Removed from the school libraries in Morris, Manitoba (1982) along with two other books because they violate the committee's guidelines covering "excess vulgar language, sexual scenes, things concerning moral issues, excessive violence, and anything dealing with the occult."
- Challenged at the Libby, MT High School (1983) due to the "book's contents."
- Banned from English classes at the Freeport High School in De Funiak Springs, FL (1985) because it is "unacceptable" and "obscene."
- Removed from the required reading list of a Medicine Bow, WY Senior High School English class (1986) because of sexual references and profanity in the book.
- Banned from a required sophomore English reading list at the Napoleon, ND High School (1987) after parents and the local Knights of Columbus chapter complained about its profanity and sexual references.
- Challenged at the Linton-Stockton, IN High School (1988) because the book is "blasphemous and undermines morality."
- Banned from the classrooms in Boron, CA High School (1989) because the book contains profanity. Challenged at the Grayslake, IL Community High School (1991).
- Challenged at the Jamaica High School in Sidell, IL (1992) because the book contains profanities and depicts premarital sex, alcohol abuse, and prostitution.
- Challenged in the Waterloo, IA schools (1992) and Duval County, FL public school libraries (1992) because of profanity, lurid passages about sex, and statements defamatory to minorities, God, women, and the disabled.
- Challenged at the Cumberland Valley High School in Carlisle, PA (1992) because of a parent's objections that it contains profanity and is immoral.
- Challenged, but retained, at the New Richmond, WI High School (1994) for use in some English classes.
- Challenged as required reading in the Corona Norco, CA Unified School District (1993) because it is "centered around negative activity." The book was retained and teachers selected alternatives if students object to Salinger's novel.



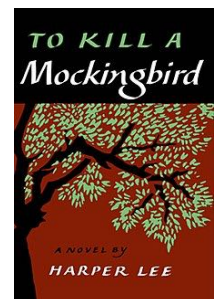
- Challenged as mandatory reading in the Goffstown, NH schools (1994) because of the vulgar words used and the sexual exploits experienced in the book.
- Challenged at the St. Johns County Schools in St. Augustine, FL (1995).
- Challenged at the Oxford Hills High School in Paris, ME (1996). A parent objected to the use of the 'F' word.
- Challenged, but retained, at the Glynn Academy High School in Brunswick, GA (1997). A student objected to the novel's profanity and sexual references.
- Removed because of profanity and sexual situations from the required reading curriculum of the Marysville, CA Joint Unified School District (1997). The school superintendent removed it to get it "out of the way so that we didn't have that polarization over a book."
- Challenged, but retained on the shelves of Limestone County, AL school district (2000) despite objections about the book's foul language.
- Banned, but later reinstated after community protests at the Windsor Forest High School in Savannah, GA (2000). The controversy began in early 1999 when a parent complained about sex, violence, and profanity in the book that was part of an Advanced Placement English class.
- Removed by a Dorchester District 2 school board member in Summerville, SC (2001) because it "is a filthy, filthy book."
- Challenged by a Glynn County, GA (2001) school board member because of profanity. The novel was retained.
- Challenged in the Big Sky High School in Missoula, MT (2009).

### ***The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck**

- Burned by the East St. Louis, IL Public Library (1939) and barred from the Buffalo, NY Public Library (1939) on the grounds that "vulgar words" were used. Banned in Kansas City, MO (1939).
- Banned in Kern County CA, the scene of Steinbeck's novel (1939).
- Banned in Ireland (1953).
- On Feb. 21, 1973, eleven Turkish book publishers went on trial before an Istanbul martial law tribunal on charges of publishing, possessing and selling books in violation of an order of the Istanbul martial law command. They faced possible sentences of between one month's and six months' imprisonment "for spreading propaganda unfavorable to the state" and the confiscation of their books. Eight booksellers were also on trial with the publishers on the same charge involving *The Grapes of Wrath*.
- Banned in Kanawha, IA High School classes (1980).
- Challenged in Vernon Verona Sherill, NY School District (1980).
- Challenged as required reading for Richford, VT (1981) High School English students due to the book's language and portrayal of a former minister who recounts how he took advantage of a young woman.
- Banned in Morris, Manitoba, Canada (1982).
- Removed from two Anniston, Ala. high school libraries (1982), but later reinstated on a restrictive basis.
- Challenged at the Cummings High School in Burlington, NC (1986) as an optional reading assignment because the "book is full of filth. My son is being raised in a Christian home and this book takes the Lord's name in vain and has all kinds of profanity in it." Although the parent spoke to the press, a formal complaint with the school demanding the book's removal was not filed.
- Challenged at the Moore County school system in Carthage, NC (1986) because the book contains the phrase "God damn."
- Challenged in the Greenville, SC schools (1991) because the book uses the name of God and Jesus in a "vain and profane manner along with inappropriate sexual references."
- Challenged in the Union City, TN High School classes (1993).

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee**

- Challenged in Eden Valley, MN (1977) and temporarily banned due to words "damn" and "whore lady" used in the novel.
- Challenged in the Vernon Verona Sherill, NY School District (1980) as a "filthy, trashy novel."
- Challenged at the Warren, IN Township schools (1981) because the book does "psychological damage to the positive integration process" and "represents institutionalized racism under the guise of good literature." After unsuccessfully trying to ban Lee's novel, three black parents resigned from the township human relations advisory council.
- Challenged in the Waukegan, IL School District (1984) because the novel uses the word "nigger."
- Challenged in the Kansas City, MO junior high schools (1985). Challenged at the Park Hill, MO Junior High School (1985) because the novel "contains profanity and racial slurs." Retained on a supplemental eighth grade reading list in the Casa Grande, AZ Elementary School District (1985), despite the protests by black parents and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People who charged the book was unfit for junior high use.
- Challenged at the Santa Cruz, CA Schools (1995) because of its racial themes. Removed from the Southwood High School



- Library in Caddo Parish, LA (1995) because the book's language and content were objectionable.
- Challenged at the Moss Point, MS School District (1996) because the novel contains a racial epithet. Banned from the Lindale, TX advanced placement English reading list (1996) because the book "conflicted with the values of the community."
- Challenged by a Glynn County, GA (2001) School Board member because of profanity. The novel was retained. Returned to the freshman reading list at Muskogee, OK High School (2001) despite complaints over the years from black students and parents about racial slurs in the text.
- Challenged in the Normal, IL Community High School's sophomore literature class (2003) as being degrading to African Americans.
- Challenged at the Stanford Middle School in Durham, NC (2004) because the 1961 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel uses the word "nigger."
- Challenged at the Brentwood, TN Middle School (2006) because the book contains "profanity" and "contains adult themes such as sexual intercourse, rape, and incest." The complainants also contend that the book's use of racial slurs promotes "racial hatred, racial division, racial separation, and promotes white supremacy."
- Retained in the English curriculum by the Cherry Hill, NJ Board of Education (2007). A resident had objected to the novel's depiction of how blacks are treated by members of a racist white community in an Alabama town during the Depression. The resident feared the book would upset black children reading it.
- Removed (2009) from the St. Edmund Campion Secondary School classrooms in Brampton Ontario, Canada because a parent objected to language used in the novel, including the word "nigger."

### ***The Color Purple, by Alice Walker***

- Challenged as appropriate reading for Oakland, CA High School honors class (1984) due to the work's "sexual and social explicitness" and its "troubling ideas about race relations, man's relationship to God, African history, and human sexuality." After nine months of haggling and delays, a divided Oakland Board of Education gave formal approval for the book's use.
- Rejected for purchase by the Hayward, CA school's trustee (1985) because of "rough language" and "explicit sex scenes."
- Removed from the open shelves of the Newport News, VA school library (1986) because of its "profanity and sexual references" and placed in a special section accessible only to students over the age of 18 or who have written permission from a parent. Challenged at the public libraries of Saginaw, MI (1989) because it was "too sexually graphic for a 12-year-old."
- Challenged as a summer youth program reading assignment in Chattanooga, TN (1989) because of its language and "explicitness."
- Challenged as an optional reading assigned in Ten Sleep, WY schools (1990).
- Challenged as a reading assignment at the New Burn, NC High School (1992) because the main character is raped by her stepfather.
- Banned in the Souderton, PA Area School District (1992) as appropriate reading for 10th graders because it is "smut." Challenged on the curricular reading list at Pomperaug High School in Southbury, CT (1995) because sexually explicit passages aren't appropriate high school reading.
- Retained as an English course reading assignment in the Junction City, OR high school (1995) after a challenge to Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel caused months of controversy. Although an alternative assignment was available, the book was challenged due to "inappropriate language, graphic sexual scenes, and book's negative image of black men."
- Challenged at the St. Johns County Schools in St. Augustine, FL (1995). Retained on the Round Rock, TX Independent High School reading list (1996) after a challenge that the book was too violent.
- Challenged, but retained, as part of the reading list for Advanced Placement English classes at Northwest High Schools in High Point, NC (1996). The book was challenged because it is "sexually graphic and violent."
- Removed from the Jackson County, WV school libraries (1997) along with sixteen other titles. Challenged, but retained as part of a supplemental reading list at the Shawnee School in Lima, OH (1999). Several parents described its content as vulgar and "X-rated."
- Removed from the Ferguson High School library in Newport News, VA (1999). Students may request and borrow the book with parental approval.
- Challenged, along with seventeen other titles in the Fairfax County, VA elementary and secondary libraries (2002), by a group called Parents Against Bad Books in Schools. The group contends the books "contain profanity and descriptions of drug abuse, sexually explicit conduct, and torture."
- Challenged in Burke County (2008) schools in Morganton, NC by parents concerned about the homosexuality, rape, and incest portrayed in the book.

### ***Ulysses, by James Joyce***

- Burned in the U.S. (1918), Ireland (1922), Canada (1922), England (1923) and banned in England (1929).

### ***Beloved, by Toni Morrison***



- Challenged at the St. Johns County Schools in St. Augustine, FL (1995). Retained on the Round Rock, TX Independent High School reading list (1996) after a challenge that the book was too violent.
- Challenged by a member of the Madawaska, ME School Committee (1997) because of the book's language. The 1987 Pulitzer Prize winning novel has been required reading for the advanced placement English class for six years.
- Challenged in the Sarasota County, FL schools (1998) because of sexual material. Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading listing in Arlington Heights, IL (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she'd found on the Internet.
- Challenged in the Coeur d'Alene School District, ID (2007). Some parents say the book, along with five others, should require parental permission for students to read them.
- Pulled from the senior Advanced Placement (AP) English class at Eastern High School in Louisville, KY (2007) because two parents complained that the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about antebellum slavery depicted the inappropriate topics of bestiality, racism, and sex. The principal ordered teachers to start over with *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne in preparation for upcoming AP exams.

### ***The Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding**

- Challenged at the Dallas, TX Independent School District high school libraries (1974).
- Challenged at the Sully Buttes, SD High School (1981). Challenged at the Owen, NC High School (1981) because the book is "demoralizing inasmuch as it implies that man is little more than an animal."
- Challenged at the Marana, AZ High School (1983) as an inappropriate reading assignment.
- Challenged at the Olney, TX Independent School District (1984) because of "excessive violence and bad language." A committee of the Toronto, Canada Board of Education ruled on June 23, 1988, that the novel is "racist and recommended that it be removed from all schools." Parents and members of the black community complained about a reference to "niggers" in the book and said it denigrates blacks.
- Challenged in the Waterloo, IA schools (1992) because of profanity, lurid passages about sex, and statements defamatory to minorities, God, women and the disabled.
- Challenged, but retained on the ninth-grade accelerated English reading list in Bloomfield, NY (2000).

### **1984, by George Orwell**

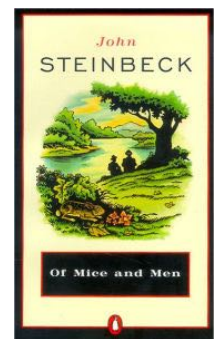
- Challenged in the Jackson County, FL (1981) because Orwell's novel is "pro-communist and contained explicit sexual matter."

### ***Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov**

- Banned as obscene in France (1956-1959), in England (1955-59), in Argentina (1959), and in New Zealand (1960). The South African Directorate of Publications announced on November 27, 1982, that *Lolita* has been taken off the banned list, eight years after a request for permission to market the novel in paperback had been refused.
- Challenged at the Marion-Levy Public Library System in Ocala, FL (2006). The Marion County commissioners voted to have the county attorney review the novel that addresses the themes of pedophilia and incest, to determine if it meets the state law's definition of "unsuitable for minors."

### ***Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck**

- Banned in Ireland (1953); Syracuse, IN (1974); Oil City, PA (1977); Grand Blanc, MI (1979); Continental, OH (1980) and other communities.
- Challenged in Greenville, SC (1977) by the Fourth Province of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan; Vernon Verona Sherill, NY School District (1980); St. David, AZ (1981) and Tell City, IN (1982) due to "profanity and using God's name in vain."
- Banned from classroom use at the Scottsboro, AL Skyline High School (1983) due to "profanity." The Knoxville, TN School Board chairman vowed to have "filthy books" removed from Knoxville's public schools (1984) and picked Steinbeck's novel as the first target due to "its vulgar language."
- Reinstated at the Christian County, KY school libraries and English classes (1987) after being challenged as vulgar and offensive.
- Challenged in the Marion County, WV schools (1988), at the Wheaton Warrenville, IL Middle School (1988), and at the Berrien Springs, MI High School (1988) because the book contains profanity.
- Removed from the Northside High School in Tuscaloosa, AL (1989) because the book "has profane use of God's name."
- Challenged as a summer youth program reading assignment in Chattanooga, TN (1989) because "Steinbeck is known to



- have had an anti business attitude." In addition, "he was very questionable as to his patriotism." Removed from all reading lists and collected at the White Chapel High School in Pine Bluff, AR (1989) because of objections to language.
- Challenged as appropriate for high school reading lists in the Shelby County, TN school system (1989) because the novel contains "offensive language."
  - Challenged, but retained in a Salina, KS (1990) tenth grade English class despite concerns that it contains "profanity" and "takes the Lord's name in vain."
  - Challenged by a Fresno, CA (1991) parent as a tenth grade English college preparatory curriculum assignment, citing profanity" and "racial slurs." The book was retained, and the child of the objecting parent was provided with an alternative reading assignment. Challenged in the Rivera, TX schools (1990) because it contains profanity.
  - Challenged as curriculum material at the Ringgold High School in Carroll Township, PA (1991) because the novel contains terminology offensive to blacks. Removed and later returned to the Suwannee, FL High School library (1991) because the book is "indecent"
  - Challenged at the Jacksboro, TN High School (1991) because the novel contains "blasphemous" language, excessive cursing, and sexual overtones.
  - Challenged as required reading in the Buckingham County, VA schools (1991) because of profanity. In 1992 a coalition of community members and clergy in Mobile, AL requested that local school officials form a special textbook screening committee to "weed out objectionable things." Steinbeck's novel was the first target because it contains "profanity" and "morbid and depressing themes."
  - Temporarily removed from the Hamilton, OH High School reading list (1992) after a parent complained about its vulgarity and racial slurs.
  - Challenged in the Waterloo, IA schools (1992) and the Duval County, FL public school libraries (1992) because of profanity, lurid passages about sex, and statements defamatory to minorities, God, women, and the disabled.
  - Challenged at the Modesto, CA High School as recommended reading (1992) because of "offensive and racist language." The word "nigger" appears in the book.
  - Challenged at the Oak Hill High School in Alexandria, LA (1992) because of profanity. Challenged as an appropriate English curriculum assignment at the Mingus, AZ Union High School (1993) because of "profane language, moral statement, treatment of the retarded, and the violent ending."
  - Pulled from a classroom by the Putnam County, TN school superintendent (1994) "due to the language." Later, after discussions with the school district counsel, it was reinstated.
  - The book was challenged in the Loganville, GA High School (1994) because of its "vulgar language throughout."
  - Challenged in the Galena, KS school library (1995) because of the book's language and social implications.
  - Retained in the Bemidji, MN schools (1995) after challenges to the book's "objectionable" language. Challenged at the Stephens County High School library in Toccoa, GA (1995) because of "curse words." The book was retained.
  - Challenged, but retained in a Warm Springs, VA High School (1995) English class. Banned from the Washington Junior High School curriculum in Peru, IL (1997) because it was deemed "age inappropriate."
  - Challenged, but retained, in the Louisville, OH high school English classes (1997) because of profanity.
  - Removed, restored, restricted, and eventually retained at the Bay County schools in Panama City, FL (1997). A citizen group, the 100 Black United, Inc., requested the novel's removal and "any other inadmissible literary books that have racial slurs in them, such as the using of the word 'Nigger.'"
  - Challenged as a reading list assignment for a ninth grade literature class, but retained at the Sauk Rapids Rice High School in St. Cloud, MN (1997). A parent complained that the book's use of racist language led to racist behavior and racial harassment.
  - Challenged in O'Hara Park Middle School classrooms in Oakley, CA (1998) because it contains racial epithets.
  - Challenged, but retained, in the Bryant, AR school library (1998) because of a parent's complaint that the book "takes God's name in vain 15 times and uses Jesus's name lightly."
  - Challenged at the Barron, WI School District (1998). Challenged, but retained in the sophomore curriculum at West Middlesex, PA High School (1999) despite objections to the novel's profanity.
  - Challenged in the Tomah, WI School District (1999) because the novel is violent and contains obscenities.
  - Challenged as required reading at the high school in Grandville, MI (2002) because the book "is full of racism, profanity, and foul language."
  - Banned from the George County, MS schools (2002) because of profanity. Challenged in the Normal, IL Community High Schools (2003) because the books contains "racial slurs, profanity, violence, and does not represent traditional values." An alternative book, Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, was offered but rejected by the family challenging the novel. The committee then recommended *The House on Mango Street* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* as alternatives.
  - Retained in the Greencastle-Antrim, PA (2006) tenth-grade English classes. A complaint was filed because of "racial slurs" and profanity used throughout the novel. The book has been used in the high school for more than thirty years, and those who object to its content have the option of reading an alternative reading.
  - Challenged at the Newton, IA High School (2007) because of concerns about profanity and the portrayal of Jesus Christ. Newton High School has required students to read the book since at least the early 1980s. In neighboring Des Moines, it is on the recommended reading list for ninth-grade English, and it is used for some special education students in the eleventh and twelfth grades.



- Retained in the Olathe, KS ninth grade curriculum (2007) despite a parent calling the novel a “worthless, profanity-riddled book” which is “derogatory towards African Americans, women, and the developmentally disabled.”

### **Catch-22, by Joseph Heller**

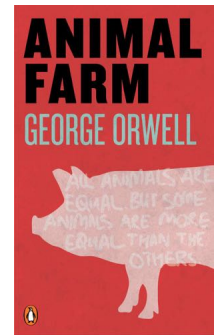
- Banned in Strongsville, OH (1972), but the school board's action was overturned in 1976 by a U.S. District Court in *Minarcini v. Strongsville City School District*.
- Challenged at the Dallas, TX Independent School District high school libraries (1974); in Snoqualmie, WA (1979) because of its several references to women as “whores.”

### **Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley**

- Banned in Ireland (1932). Removed from classrooms in Miller, MO (1980), because it makes promiscuous sex “look like fun.”
- Challenged frequently throughout the U.S. as required reading. Challenged as required reading at the Yukon, OK High School (1988) because of “the book’s language and moral content.”
- Challenged as required reading in the Corona-Norco, CA Unified School District (1993) because it is “centered around negative activity.” Specifically, parents objected that the characters’ sexual behavior directly opposed the health curriculum, which taught sexual abstinence until marriage. The book was retained, and teachers selected alternatives if students object to Huxley’s novel.
- Removed from the Foley, AL High School Library (2000) pending review, because a parent complained that its characters showed contempt for religion, marriage, and family. The parent complained to the school and to Alabama Governor Don Siegelman.
- Challenged, but retained in the South Texas Independent School District in Mercedes, TX (2003). Parents objected to the adult themes—sexuality, drugs, suicide—that appeared in the novel. Huxley’s book was part of the summer Science Academy curriculum. The board voted to give parents more control over their children’s choices by requiring principals to automatically offer an alternative to a challenged book.
- Retained in the Coeur D’Alene, ID School District (2008) despite objections that the book has too many references to sex and drug use.

### **Animal Farm, by George Orwell**

- A Wisconsin survey revealed in 1963 that the John Birch Society had challenged the novel’s use; it objected to the words “masses will revolt.” In 1968, the New York State English Council’s Committee on Defense Against Censorship conducted a comparable study in New York State English classrooms. Its findings identified the novel on its list of “problem books”; the reason cited was that “Orwell was a communist.”
- Suppressed from being displayed at the 1977 Moscow, Russia International Book Fair.
- A survey of censorship challenges in the schools, conducted in DeKalb County for the period of 1979 to 1982, revealed that the novel had been objected to for its political theories.
- Banned from Bay County’s four middle schools and three high schools in Panama City, FL by the Bay County school superintendent in 1987. After 44 parents filed a suit against the district claiming that its instructional aids policy denies constitutional rights, the Bay County School Board reinstated the book, along with sixty-four others banned.
- Banned from schools in the United Arab Emirates, along with 125 others in 2002. The Ministry of Education banned it on the grounds that it contains written or illustrated material that contradicts Islamic and Arab values—in this text, pictures of alcoholic drinks, pigs, and other “indecent images.”



### **The Sun Also Rises, by Ernest Hemingway**

- Banned in Boston, MA (1930), Ireland (1953), Riverside, CA (1960), San Jose, CA (1960).
- Burned in Nazi bonfires in Germany (1933).

### **As I Lay Dying, by William Faulkner**

- Banned in the Graves County School District in Mayfield, KY (1986) because it contains “offensive and obscene passages referring to abortion and used God’s name in vain.” The decision was reversed a week later after intense pressure from the ACLU and considerable negative publicity.
- Challenged as a required reading assignment in an advanced English class of Pulaski County High School in Somerset, KY (1987) because the book contains “profanity and a segment about masturbation.”

- Challenged, but retained, in the Carroll County, MD schools (1991). Two school board members were concerned about the book's coarse language and dialect. Banned at Central High School in Louisville, KY (1994) temporarily because the book uses profanity and questions the existence of God.

### ***A Farewell to Arms*, by Ernest Hemingway**

- The June 1929 issue of Scribner's Magazine, which ran Hemingway's novel, was banned in Boston, MA (1929).
- Banned in Italy (1929) because of its painfully accurate account of the Italian retreat from Caporetto, Italy.
- Burned by the Nazis in Germany (1933).
- Banned in Ireland (1939). Challenged at the Dallas, TX Independent School District high school libraries (1974).
- Challenged at the Vernon-Verona-Sherill, NY School District (1980) as a "sex novel."

### ***Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston**

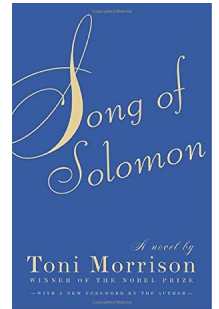
- Challenged for sexual explicitness, but retained on the Stonewall Jackson High School's academically advanced reading list in Brentsville, VA (1997). A parent objected to the novel's language and sexual explicitness.

### ***Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison**

- Excerpts banned in Butler, PA (1975).
- Removed from the high school English reading list in St. Francis, WI (1975).
- Retained in the Yakima, WA schools (1994) after a five-month dispute over what advanced high school students should read in the classroom. Two parents raised concerns about profanity and images of violence and sexuality in the book and requested that it be removed from the reading list.

### ***Song of Solomon*, by Toni Morrison**

- Challenged, but retained, in the Columbus, OH schools (1993). The complainant believed that the book contains language degrading to blacks, and is sexually explicit.
- Removed from required reading lists and library shelves in the Richmond County, GA. School District (1994) after a parent complained that passages from the book are "filthy and inappropriate."
- Challenged at the St. Johns County Schools in St. Augustine, FL (1995). Removed from the St. Mary's County, MD schools' approved text list (1998) by the superintendent, overruling a faculty committee recommendation. Complainants referred to the novel as "filth," "trash," and "repulsive."
- Reinstated in the Shelby, MI school Advanced Placement English curriculum (2009), but parents are to be informed in writing and at a meeting about the book's content. Students not wanting to read the book can choose an alternative without academic penalty. The superintendent had suspended the book from the curriculum.



### ***Gone with the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell**

- Banned from Anaheim, CA Union High School District English classrooms (1978).
- Challenged in Waukegan, IL School District (1984) because the novel uses the word "nigger."

### ***Native Son*, by Richard Wright**

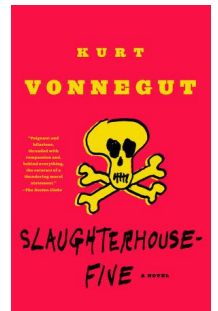
- Challenged in Goffstown, NH (1978); Elmwood Park, NJ (1978) due to "objectionable" language; and North Adams, MA (1981) due to the book's "violence, sex, and profanity."
- Challenged at the Berrian Springs, MI High School in classrooms and libraries (1988) because the novel is "vulgar, profane, and sexually explicit."
- Retained in the Yakima, WA schools (1994) after a five-month dispute over what advanced high school students should read in the classroom. Two parents raised concerns about profanity and images of violence and sexuality in the book and requested that it be removed from the reading list.
- Challenged as part of the reading list for Advanced Placement English classes at Northwest High School in High Point, NC (1996). The book was challenged because it is "sexually graphic and violent."
- Removed from Irvington High School in Fremont, CA (1998) after a few parents complained the book was unnecessarily violent and sexually explicit.
- Challenged in the Hamilton High School curriculum in Fort Wayne, IN (1998) because of the novel's graphic language and sexual content.

### ***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, by Ken Kesey**

- Challenged in the Greeley, CO public school district (1971) as a non-required American Culture reading.
- In 1974, five residents of Strongsville, OH, sued the board of education to remove the novel. Labeling it "pornographic," they charged the novel "glorifies criminal activity, has a tendency to corrupt juveniles and contains descriptions of bestiality, bizarre violence, and torture, dismemberment, death, and human elimination."
- Removed from public school libraries in Randolph, NY, and Alton, OK (1975).
- Removed from the required reading list in Westport, MA (1977).
- Banned from the St. Anthony, ID Freemont High School classrooms (1978) and the instructor fired. The teacher sued. A decision in the case—Fogarty v. Atchley—was never published.
- Challenged at the Merrimack, NH High School (1982).
- Challenged as part of the curriculum in an Aberdeen, WA High School honors English class (1986) because the book promotes "secular humanism." The school board voted to retain the title.
- Challenged at the Placentia-Yorba Linda, CA Unified School District (2000) after complaints by parents stated that teachers "can choose the best books, but they keep choosing this garbage over and over again."

### ***Slaughterhouse Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut**

- Challenged in many communities, but burned in Drake, ND (1973).
- Banned in Rochester, MI because the novel "contains and makes references to religious matters" and thus fell within the ban of the establishment clause. An appellate court upheld its usage in the school in *Todd v Rochester Community Schools*, 41 Mich. App. 320, 200 N. W 2d 90 (1972).
- Banned in Levittown, NY (1975), North Jackson, OH (1979), and Lakeland, FL (1982) because of the "book's explicit sexual scenes, violence, and obscene language."
- Barred from purchase at the Washington Park High School in Racine, WI (1984) by the district administrative assistant for instructional services.
- Challenged at the Owensboro, KY High School library (1985) because of "foul language, a



section depicting a picture of an act of bestiality, a reference to 'Magic Fingers' attached to the protagonist's bed to help him sleep, and the sentence: 'The gun made a ripping sound like the opening of the fly of God Almighty.'"

- Restricted to students who have parental permission at the four Racine, WI Unified District high school libraries (1986) because of "language used in the book, depictions of torture, ethnic slurs, and negative portrayals of women."
- Challenged at the LaRue County, KY High School library (1987) because "the book contains foul language and promotes deviant sexual behavior."
- Banned from the Fitzgerald, GA schools (1987) because it was filled with profanity and full of explicit sexual references: 'Challenged in the Baton Rouge, LA public high school libraries (1988) because the book is "vulgar and offensive:'
- Challenged in the Monroe, MI public schools (1989) as required reading in a modern novel course for high school juniors and seniors because of the book's language and the way women are portrayed.
- Retained on the Round Rock, TX Independent High School reading list (1996) after a challenge that the book was too violent.
- Challenged as an eleventh grade summer reading option in Prince William County, VA (1998) because the book "was rife with profanity and explicit sex:"
- Removed as required reading for sophomores at the Coventry, RI High School (2000) after a parent complained that it contains vulgar language, violent imagery, and sexual content.
- Retained on the Northwest Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, IL (2006), along with eight other challenged titles. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she'd found on the internet.
- Challenged in the Howell, MI High School (2007) because of the book's strong sexual content. In response to a request from the president of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education, or LOVE, the county's top law enforcement official reviewed the books to see whether laws against distribution of sexually explicit materials to minors had been broken. "After reading the books in question, it is clear that the explicit passages illustrated a larger literary, artistic or political message and were not included solely to appeal to the prurient interests of minors," the county prosecutor wrote. "Whether these materials are appropriate for minors is a decision to be made by the school board, but I find that they are not in violation of criminal laws."

### ***For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway**

- Declared non-mailable by the U.S. Post Office (1940). On Feb. 21, 1973, eleven Turkish book publishers went on trial before an Istanbul martial law tribunal on charges of publishing, possessing, and selling books in violation of an order of the

Istanbul martial law command. They faced possible sentences of between one month's and six months' imprisonment "for spreading propaganda unfavorable to the state" and the confiscation of their books. Eight booksellers also were on trial with the publishers on the same charge involving For Whom the Bell Tolls.

### ***The Call of the Wild*, by Jack London**

- Banned in Italy (1929), Yugoslavia (1929), and burned in Nazi bonfires (1933).

### ***Go Tell It on the Mountain*, by James Baldwin**

- Challenged as required reading in the Hudson Falls, NY schools (1994) because the book has recurring themes of rape, masturbation, violence, and degrading treatment of women.
- Challenged as a ninth-grade summer reading option in Prince William County, VA (1988) because the book is "rife with profanity and explicit sex."

### ***All the King's Men*, by Robert Penn Warren**

- Challenged at the Dallas, TX Independent School District high school libraries (1974).

### ***The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien**

- Burned in Alamogordo, NM (2001) outside Christ Community Church along with other Tolkien novels as satanic.

### ***The Jungle*, by Upton Sinclair**

- Banned from public libraries in Yugoslavia (1929). Burned in the Nazi bonfires because of Sinclair's socialist views (1933).
- Banned in East Germany (1956) as inimical to communism.
- Banned in South Korea (1985).

### ***Lady Chatterley's Lover*, by D.H. Lawrence**

- Banned by U.S. Customs (1929).
- Banned in Ireland (1932), Poland (1932), Australia (1959), Japan (1959), India (1959).
- Banned in Canada (1960) until 1962.
- Dissemination of Lawrence's novel has been stopped in China (1987) because the book "will corrupt the minds of young people and is also against the Chinese tradition."



### ***A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess**

- In 1973 a bookseller in Orem, UT was arrested for selling the novel. Charges were later dropped, but the book seller was forced to close the store and relocate to another city.
- Removed from Aurora, CO high school (1976) due to "objectionable" language and from high school classrooms in Westport, MA (1977) because of "objectionable" language.
- Removed from two Anniston, AL High school libraries (1982), but later reinstated on a restricted basis.

### ***The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin**

- Retained on the Northwestern Suburban High School District 214 reading list in Arlington Heights, IL along with eight other challenged titles in 2006. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she'd found on the Internet.
- First published in 1899, this novel so disturbed critics and the public that it was banished for decades afterward.

### ***In Cold Blood*, by Truman Capote**

- Banned, but later reinstated after community protests at the Windsor Forest High School in Savannah, GA (2000). The controversy began in early 1999 when a parent complained about sex, violence, and profanity in the book that was part of an Advanced Placement English Class.

### ***Satanic Verses*, by Salman Rushdie**

- Banned in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Qatar, Indonesia, South Africa, and India because of its criticism of Islam.
- Burned in West Yorkshire, England (1989) and temporarily withdrawn from two bookstores on the advice of police who took threats to staff and property seriously.
- In Pakistan five people died in riots against the book. Another man died a day later in Kashmir.
- Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa or religious edict, stating, "I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of the Satanic Verses, which is against Islam, the prophet, and the Koran, and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, have been sentenced to death."
- Challenged at the Wichita, KS Public Library (1989) because the book is "blasphemous to the prophet Mohammed."
- In Venezuela, owning or reading it was declared a crime under penalty of 15 months' imprisonment.
- In Japan, the sale of the English-language edition was banned under the threat of fines.
- The governments of Bulgaria and Poland also restricted its distribution.
- In 1991, in separate incidents, Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator, was stabbed to death and its Italian translator, Ettore Capriolo, was seriously wounded. In 1993 William Nygaard, its Norwegian publisher, was shot and seriously injured.

### ***Sophie's Choice*, by William Styron**

- Banned in South Africa in 1979.
- Returned to La Mirada High School library (CA) in 2002 after a complaint about its sexual content prompted the school to pull the award-winning novel about a tormented Holocaust survivor.

### ***Sons and Lovers*, by D.H. Lawrence**

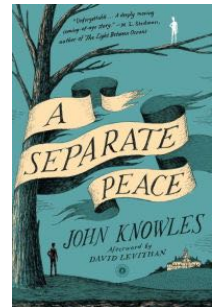
- In 1961 an Oklahoma City group called Mothers United for Decency hired a trailer, dubbed it "smutmobile," and displayed books deemed objectionable, including Lawrence's novel.

### ***Cat's Cradle*, by Kurt Vonnegut**

- The Strongsville, Ohio School Board (1972) voted to withdraw this title from the school library; this action was overturned in 1976 by a U.S. District Court in *Minarcini v. Strongsville City School District*, 541 F. 2d 577 (6th Cir. 1976).
- Challenged at Merrimack, NH High School (1982).

### ***A Separate Peace*, by John Knowles**

- Challenged in Vernon-Verona-Sherill, NY School District (1980) as a "filthy, trashy sex novel."
- Challenged at the Fannett-Metal High School in Shippensburg, PA (1985) because of its allegedly offensive language.
- Challenged as appropriate for high school reading lists in the Shelby County, TN school system (1989) because the novel contains "offensive language."
- Challenged, but retained in the Champaign, IL high school English classes (1991) despite claims that "unsuitable language" makes it inappropriate.
- Challenged by the parent of a high school student in Troy, IL (1991) citing profanity and negative attitudes. Students were offered alternative assignments while the school board took the matter under advisement, but no further action was taken on the complaint.
- Challenged at the McDowell County, NC schools (1996) because of "graphic language."



### ***Naked Lunch*, by William S. Burroughs**

- Found obscene in Boston, MA Superior Court (1965). The finding was reversed by the State Supreme Court the following year.

### ***Brideshead Revisited*, by Evelyn Waugh**

- Alabama Representative Gerald Allen (R-Cottondale) proposed legislation that would prohibit the use of public funds for the "purchase of textbooks or library materials that recognize or promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle." The bill also proposed that novels with gay protagonists and college textbooks that suggest homosexuality is natural would have to be removed from library shelves and destroyed. The bill would impact all Alabama school, public, and university libraries. While it would ban books like *Heather Has Two Mommies*, it could also include classic and popular novels with gay characters such as *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Color Purple* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2005).

***Women in Love*, by DH Lawrence**

- Seized by John Summers of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice and declared obscene (1922).

***The Naked and the Dead*, by Norman Mailer**

- Banned in Canada (1949) and Australia (1949).

***Tropic of Cancer*, by Henry Miller**

- Banned from U.S. Customs (1934).
- The U.S. Supreme Court found the novel not obscene (1964). Banned in Turkey (1986).

***An American Tragedy*, by Theodore Dreiser**

- Banned in Boston, MA (1927) and burned by the Nazis in Germany (1933) because it "deals with low love affairs."

***Rabbit, Run*, by John Updike**

- Banned in Ireland in 1962 because the Irish Board of Censors found the work "obscene" and "indecent," objecting particularly to the author's handling of the characters' sexuality, the "explicit sex acts" and "promiscuity." The work was officially banned from sales in Ireland until the introduction of the revised Censorship Publications Bill in 1967.
- Restricted to high school students with parental permission in the six Aroostock County, ME community high school libraries (1976) because of passages in the book dealing with sex and an extramarital affair.
- Removed from the required reading list for English class at the Medicine Bow, WY Junior High School (1986) because of sexual references and profanity in the book.



Source D (Top 10 Infographic)

# TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2021

The American Library Association tracked **729 challenges** to library, school, and university materials and services in 2021. Of the 1,597 individual books that were challenged or banned in 2021, here are the top 10 most challenged:



<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Gender Queer</b> By Maia Kobabe REASONS: Banned, challenged, and restricted for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to have sexually explicit images</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Lawn Boy</b> By Jonathan Evison REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to be sexually explicit</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>All Boys Aren't Blue</b> By George M. Johnson REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, profanity, and because it was considered to be sexually explicit</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Out of Darkness</b> By Ashley Hope Perez REASONS: Banned, challenged, and restricted for depictions of abuse and because it was considered to be sexually explicit</p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>The Hate U Give</b> By Angie Thomas REASONS: Banned and challenged for profanity, violence, and it was thought to promote an anti-police message and indoctrination of a social agenda</p>
<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</b> By Sherman Alexie REASONS: Banned and challenged for profanity, sexual references, and use of a derogatory term</p>	<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>Me and Earl and the Dying Girl</b> By Jesse Andrews REASONS: Banned and challenged because it was considered sexually explicit and degrading to women</p>	<p><b>8</b></p> <p><b>The Bluest Eye</b> By Toni Morrison REASONS: Banned and challenged because it depicts child sexual abuse and was considered sexually explicit</p>	<p><b>9</b></p> <p><b>This Book is Gay</b> By Juno Dawson REASONS: Banned, challenged, relocated, and restricted for providing sexual education and LGBTQIA+ content</p>	<p><b>10</b></p> <p><b>Beyond Magenta</b> By Susan Kuklin REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to be sexually explicit</p>

American Library Association, "Banned Books: Free Downloads," [ala.org](https://www.ala.org) (accessed Aug. 2, 2022) Source:

Source E (Censorship Infographic)

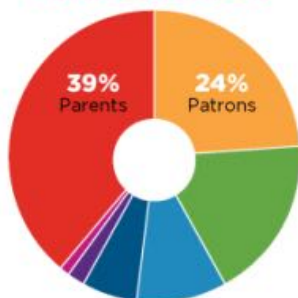
# CENSORSHIP

## BY THE NUMBERS

Books unite us. They reach across boundaries and build connections between readers. Censorship, on the other hand, divides us and creates barriers. In 2021, 1,597 books were affected by censorship attempts. **Learn more at [ala.org/bbooks](http://ala.org/bbooks).**



### WHO INITIATES CHALLENGES?



- 18% Board/administration
- 10% Political/religious groups
- 6% Librarians/teachers
- 2% Elected officials
- 1% Students

Statistics based on 715 responses

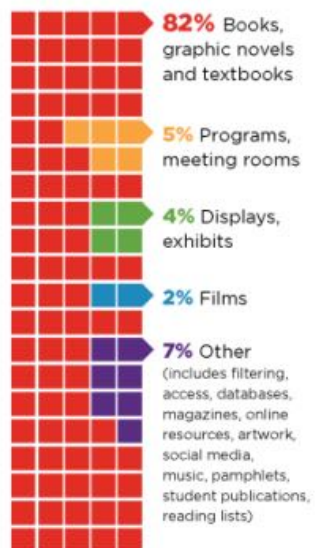
### WHERE DO CHALLENGES TAKE PLACE?



Statistics based on 729 responses

### BOOKS AND BEYOND

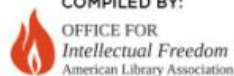
The ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked **729 challenges** in 2021. Here's the breakdown:



### REASONS FOR CHALLENGES



CENSORSHIP STATISTICS COMPILED BY:



Source: American Library Association, "Banned Books: Free Downloads," [ala.org](http://ala.org) (accessed Aug. 2, 2022)



## **Source F (CNN) Students fight back against a book ban that has a Pennsylvania community divided** By [Evan McMorris-Santoro](#), [Linh Tran](#), [Sahar Akbarzai](#) and [Mirna Alsharif](#), CNN

Students in a southern Pennsylvania school district are battling the latest example of panic spreading over how history and race are taught in schools across the US.

“I don’t think a moral compass will let you ban books about equality and loving each other,” Central York High School senior Christina Ellis told CNN.

Ellis is among the students protesting a book ban in York, Pennsylvania, and questions whether the officials who decided to remove certain reading materials from the curriculum even read the resources they deem controversial. She was joined by other teens protesting in front of Central York High School this week.

On Monday, students, parents and other community members debated during a virtual school board meeting about the list of anti-racism books and resources that were banned from the curriculum by the Central York school board last year.

Last October, the all-White school board unanimously banned a list of educational resources that included a children’s book about Rosa Parks, Malala Yousafzai’s autobiography and CNN’s Sesame Street town hall on racism.

From chaotic school board meetings to political strife along party lines, debates about diverse curriculum have ignited controversy across the country in recent months. And earlier this month, a new Texas law aimed at restricting discussions of race and history in schools had some educators second guessing themselves and forgoing civics-related activities to avoid running afoul of it.

But in York, discussions about race erupted in the wake of last summer’s protests and students started having more conversations about racism and creating more inclusive environments.

School officials say it’s not a ban, and the materials are “frozen” while the board vets the material. But that process has taken nearly a year. At the virtual board meeting on Monday, district leaders said the materials are still prohibited.

Some students and their parents said it’s frustrating and questioned the logic of a school board that they say isn’t diverse and doesn’t address the concerns of a multicultural student body.

A senior at Central York High School, Edha Gupta, said the book ban, “was a slap in the face.”

“This is a board that after hearing their students’ concerns about diversity in the district, hearing my struggle with race, being an Indian American and consistently feeling like I didn’t belong. After all those conversations for weeks on end, they still pursued the book ban.”

Gupta isn’t the only student angry with the board.

“I was deeply hurt when I heard about this book ban, which hurts Black and brown authors and resources,” said Ellis, a Black senior, at the high school.

She said the books are crucial to teaching students about racism.

“Why is a Sesame Street episode threatening the education of children. If anything this school board is threatening education,” she said during the meeting.

School librarians have pulled books from shelves, and teachers say their lesson plans have been impacted.

“I have to now, with this resource ban, think twice about whether or not I should or could use a James Baldwin quote as an opening for my class,” said Ben Hodge, a teacher at Central York High School.

There’s also some fear among educators.

“There are teachers looking over their shoulders wondering if someone’s going to be at their door darkening their door, saying you said something or you mentioned something or used something that you were not supposed to,” said Patricia Jackson, who has taught in the Central York School District for more than 20 years.

The fact that all the banned materials are by or about people of color is just a coincidence, according to Jane Johnson, the school board president.

“Concerns were based on the content of the resources, not the author or topic...,” she said in a statement.

### **What do the parents say**

“I don’t think that a board that lacks diversity is the appropriate authority to determine what qualifies as appropriate material to address race in this community,” said Brandi Miller, a parent of a student in the school district.

However, other parents were supportive of the ban.

One mother said, “the community is 100% against an critical race theory indoctrination agenda,” during Monday’s meeting. “Schools are not the place for politics or identity to be shaped.”

But critical race theory is not taught in K-12 curriculum.

“This is very clearly an attack on diversity, equity (and) inclusion. It very much feels like a political overreach based on misinformation,” Ana Ramón, deputy director of advocacy at the Intercultural Development Research Association, [told CNN earlier this month](#).

York parent Matt Weyant commended the school board for implementing the ban.

“I don’t want my daughter growing up feeling guilty because she’s White,” he said.

That sentiment is spreading across the US. A growing number of states have passed or are considering policies strictly defining what students are allowed to learn about race.

But it’s the students who are missing out say former and current students.

During the board meeting, a man who said he was alumnus of the school district, said that unless the school board can go through each book on the ban and explain what’s so “abhorrent,” about each of them, then the books should be allowed back into the school’s curriculum.

“I want to learn genuine history,” said Olivia Pituch, a student who was protesting in front of Central York High

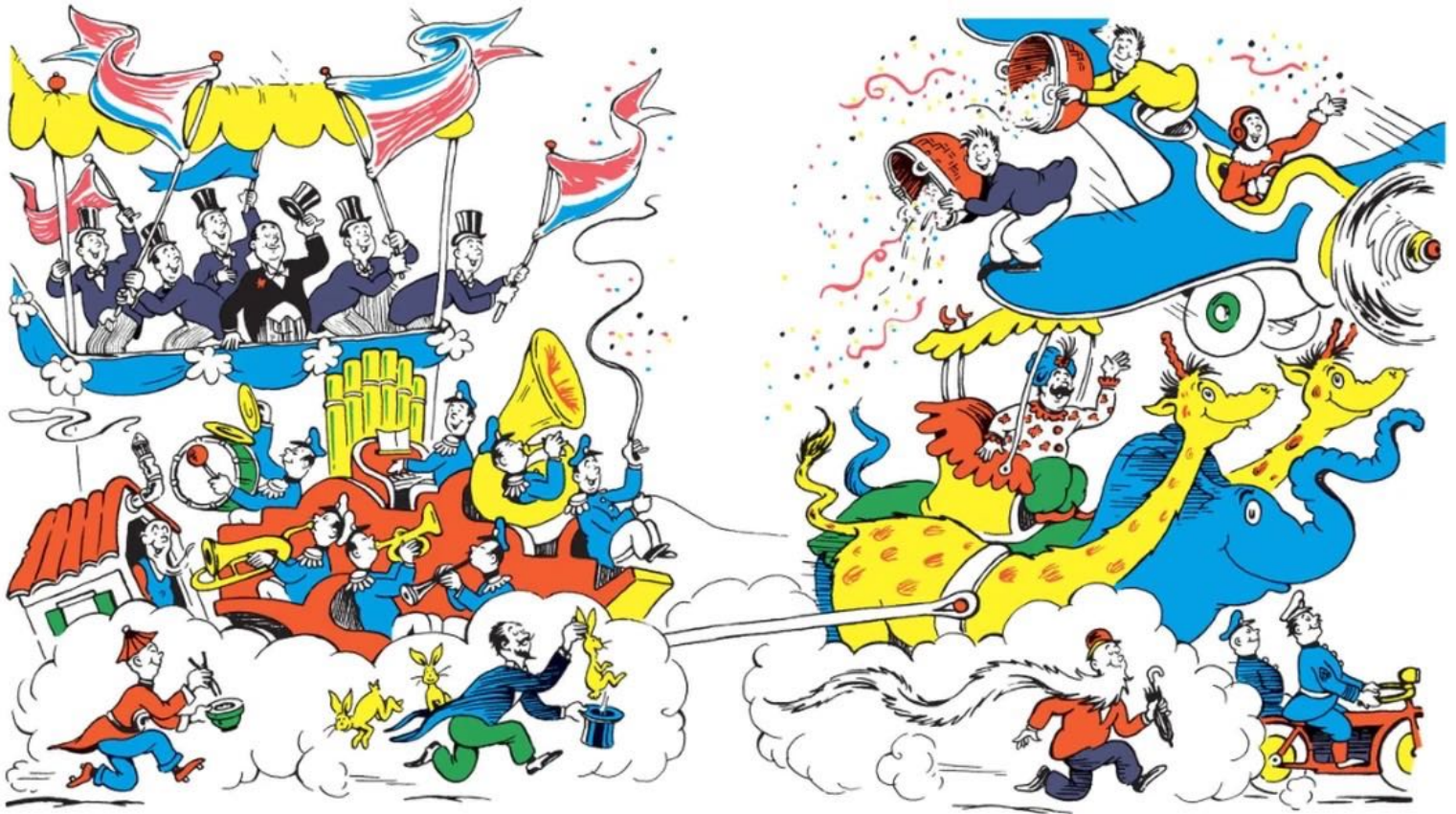
“I don’t want to learn a White-washed version. I want to hear all of it. I don’t want everyone to be worried about how we feel because no one was worried about how BIPOC members of the community felt.”

But one expert said this ban is different from many of the other debates across the country.

“This seems pretty egregious. I can see how certain trainings or workshops that some parents take exception to seem really outside of what a history class can be expected to do,” said Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, an associate professor of history at the New School. “But the kind of texts that are being banned here make me feel that there is now just sort of an allergy to anything that mentions race or racism.”

This is about more than a book, or a movie, or even a curriculum, veteran teachers argue. In York, they worry it’s a war on their profession.

“I am not an enemy of the state. I am here to take care of your babies when they walk into my classroom and there are some I’m looking up at them, but they’re still babies,” Jackson, the York teacher, said.



... A Chinese man  
Who eats with sticks. . . .

A big Magician  
Doing tricks. . . .

A ten-foot beard  
That needs a comb. . . .

No time for more,  
I'm almost home.

A page from *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. The 1937 work by Dr. Seuss will no longer be published due in part to this page featuring an illustration of a "Chinese man who eats with sticks."

## Here are the 'wrong' illustrations that got six Dr. Seuss books cancelled

*Two of the six permanently pulled from publication currently rank as the world's best-selling children's books*

Tristin Hopper

Published Mar 02, 2021 • Last updated Mar 03, 2021 • 4 minute read

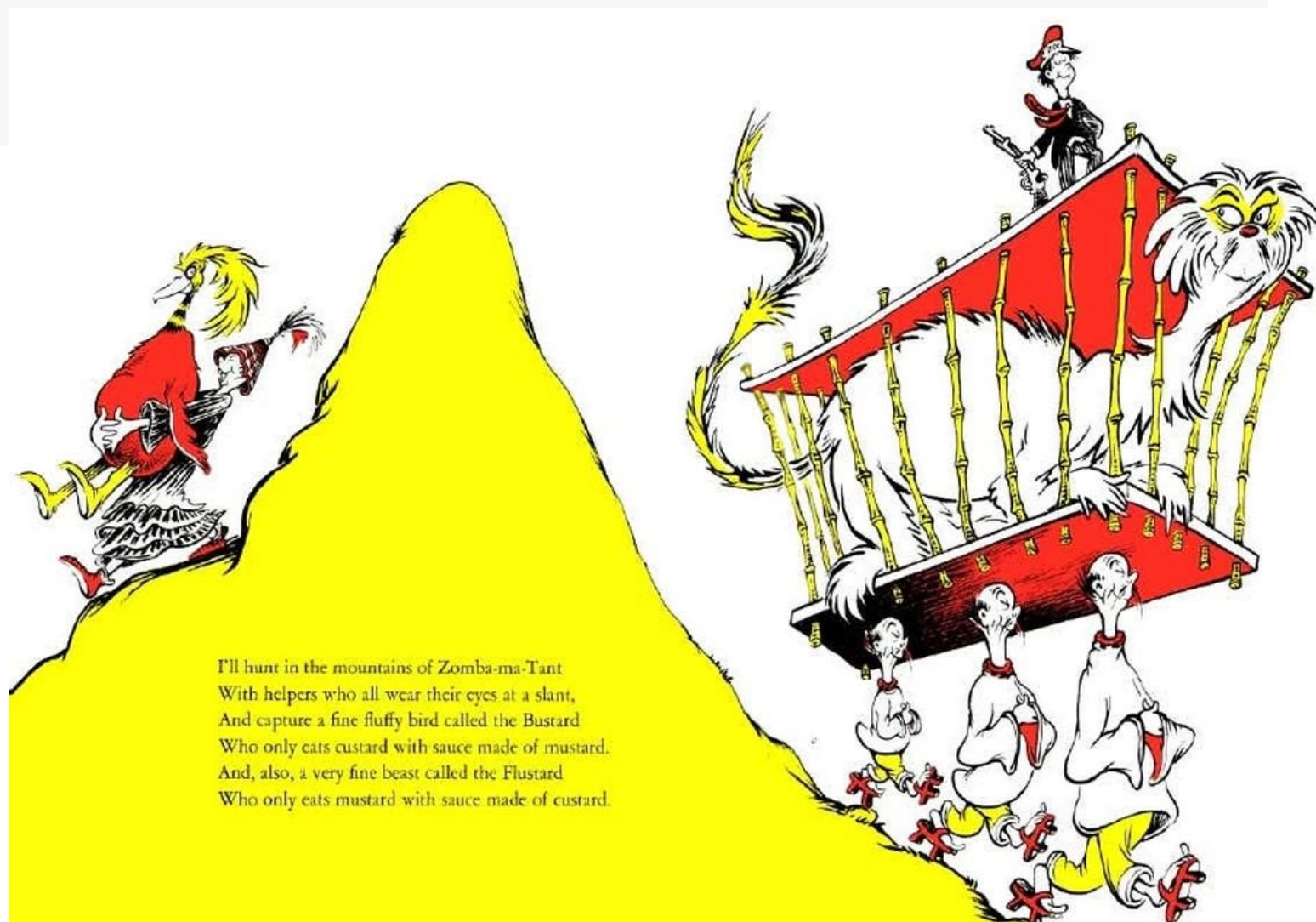
*Reviews and recommendations are unbiased and products are independently selected. Postmedia may earn an affiliate commission from purchases made through links on this page.*

Dr. Seuss Enterprises, the official manager of books published under the moniker Dr. Seuss, announced Tuesday that it will no longer be publishing six Dr. Seuss titles because they "portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong."



The most popular of the six titles are 1950's *If I Ran the Zoo* and the 1937 book *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, which was the first children's book published under the Dr. Seuss name by author Theodor Seuss Geisel. As of March 2, which also happens to be the author's birthday, both books remained in the top 10 most popular children's titles on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

The other titles no longer being published are *McElligot's Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *Scrambled Eggs Super!*, and *The Cat's Quizzer*, which were all released between 1947 and 1976.



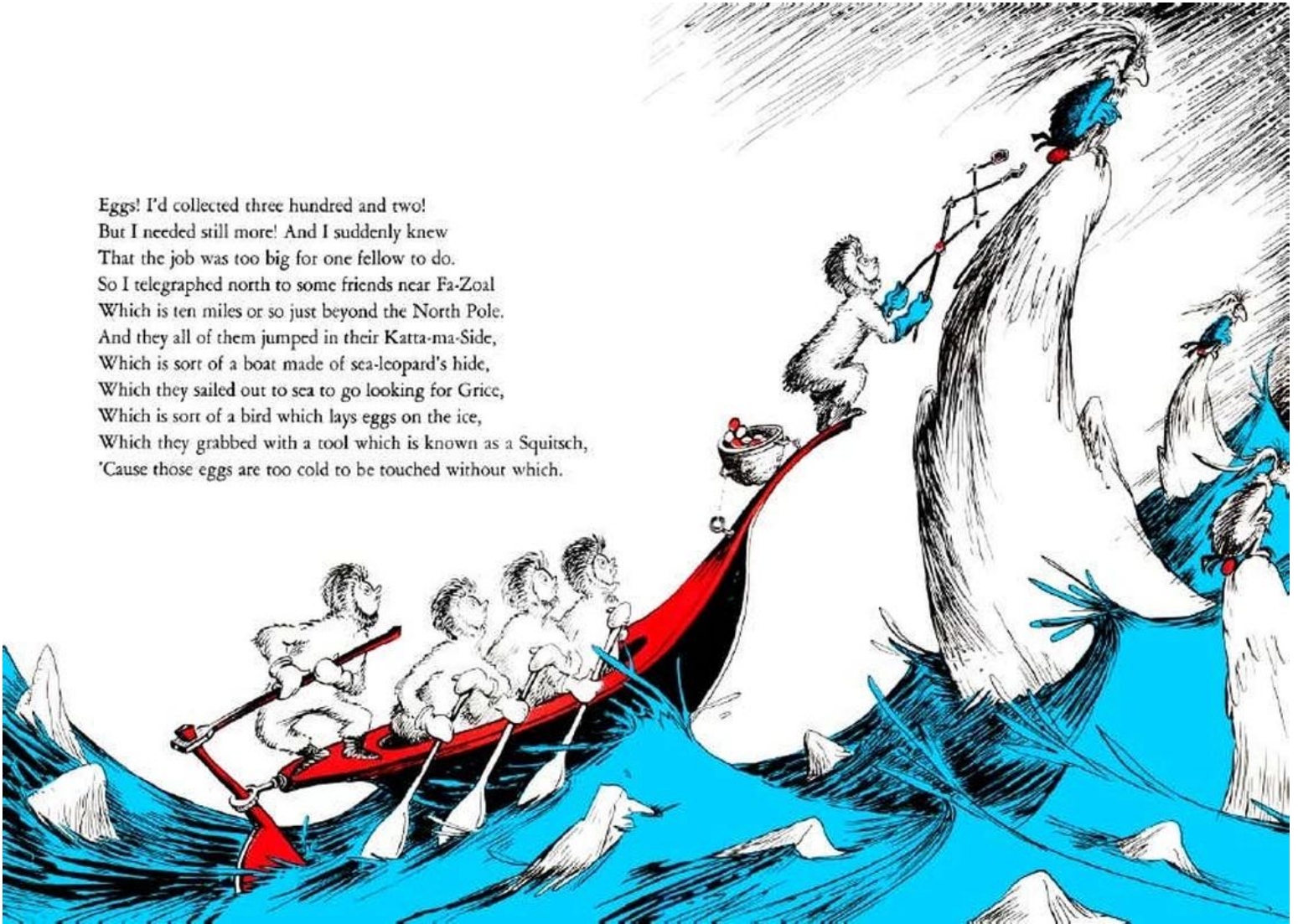
An illustration from *If I Ran the Zoo*.

Dr. Seuss Enterprises did not specify which illustrations were offensive, but four of the titles contain cartoon depictions of Asian people, while three contain stereotypical portrayals of Inuit.

*If I Ran the Zoo* features a young boy imagining a hunting expedition to the fictional land of Zomba-ma-tant where locals “wear their eyes at a slant.” Other pages also show the “African island of Yerka,” featuring squat African tribesmen with large hoops through their noses.

*And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street* has its young protagonist imagining an increasingly fanciful street parade that includes “a Chinaman who eats with sticks,” a “Rajah, with rubies” and two fur-clad figures being pulled by a reindeer.

Eggs! I'd collected three hundred and two!  
But I needed still more! And I suddenly knew  
That the job was too big for one fellow to do.  
So I telegraphed north to some friends near Fa-Zoal  
Which is ten miles or so just beyond the North Pole.  
And they all of them jumped in their Katta-ma-Side,  
Which is sort of a boat made of sea-leopard's hide,  
Which they sailed out to sea to go looking for Grice,  
Which is sort of a bird which lays eggs on the ice,  
Which they grabbed with a tool which is known as a Squitsch,  
'Cause those eggs are too cold to be touched without which.



Inuit-looking figures depicted in *Scrambled Eggs Super!*

*McElligot's Pool* follows a boy imagining the far-out things he'll catch while fishing in a stagnant pond, including “Eskimo Fish from beyond Hudson Bay.”

*Scrambled Eggs Super!* has its young protagonist boasting about the increasingly rare eggs he would source for breakfast, including that of the Mt. Strookoo Cuckoo, for which he would enlist the help of a beturbaned helper named Ali. The people of the fictional Arctic nation of Fa-Zoal are also shown clad in furs and paddling skin boats in order to harvest eggs from a “Grice.”

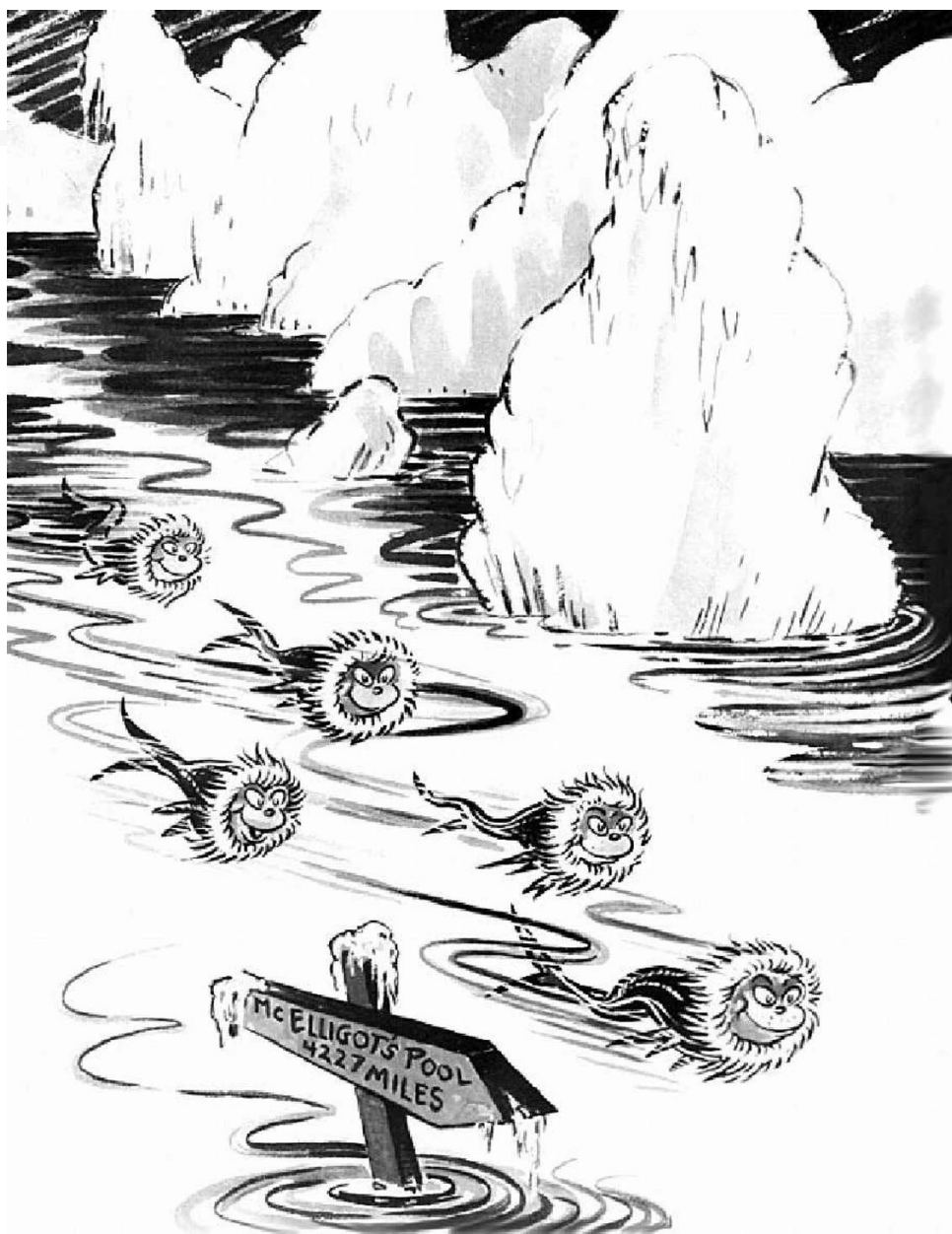
*The Cat's Quizzer*, the most recent (and least popular) of the six books appears to have gotten pulled because of a page 11 illustration of a yellow figure in a coolie hat with the caption, “how old do you have to be to be a Japanese?”



Of the six, the problematic imagery in *On Beyond Zebra!* is probably the least obvious. The book catalogues a whimsical set of new letters in the alphabet, and briefly features the “Nazzim of Bazzim,” a figure of unspecified nationality riding a camel-like creature called a “Spazzim.”

The six titles were selected after consultation with a “panel of experts,” according to Dr. Seuss Enterprises. The books will no longer be printed or licensed, meaning that the titles will also not be available for sale as e-books.

Thirty years after his death, Theodor Seuss Geisel remains the world’s top-selling children’s author. Of the 20 best-selling children’s books on Amazon right now, 15 of them are Dr. Seuss titles. The Publisher’s Weekly ranking of top-selling children’s show five Dr. Seuss books currently in the top 10.



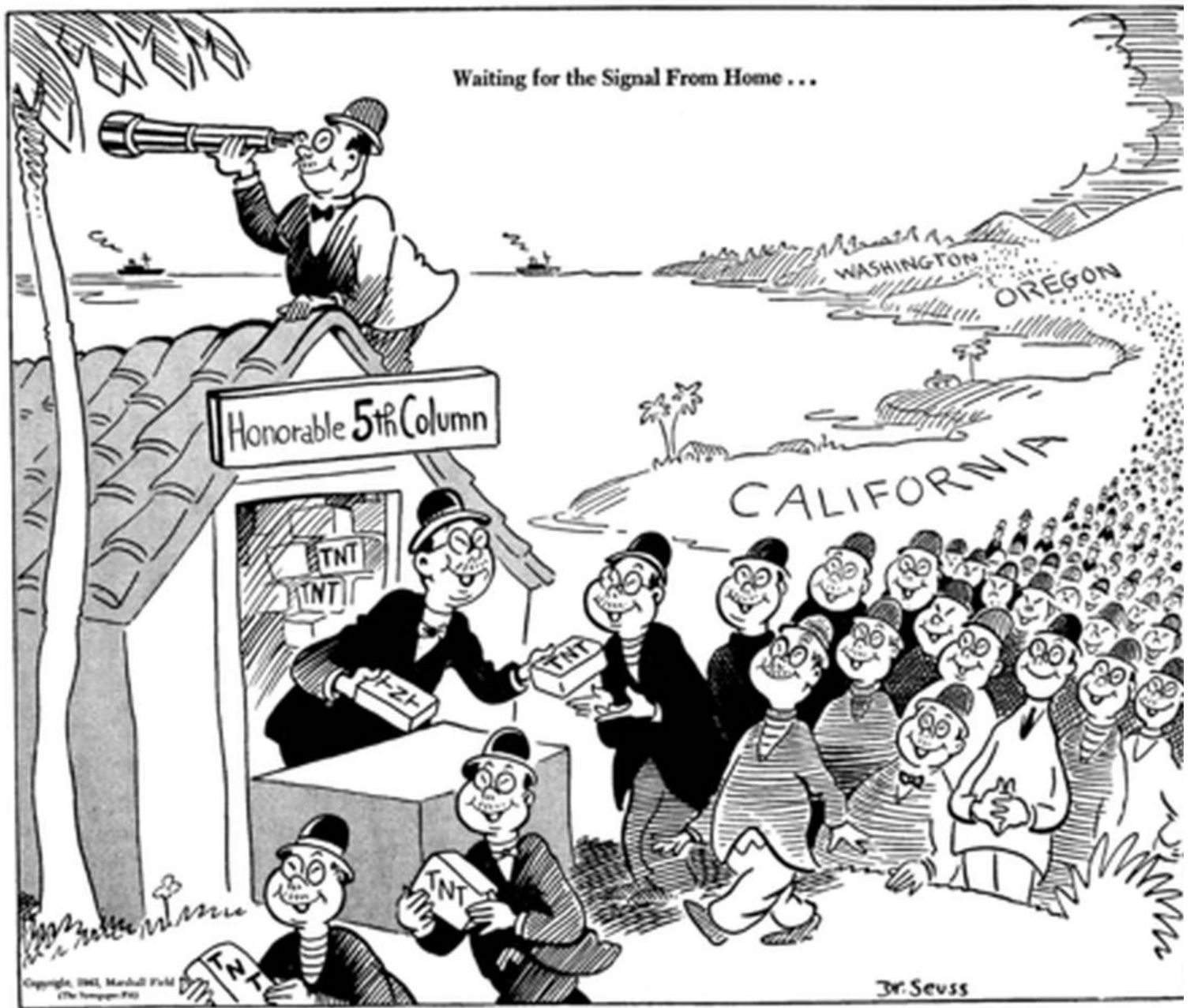
The “Eskimo Fish” featured in McElligot’s Pool.



The “Nazzim of Bazzim” featured in *On Beyond Zebra!*

After the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, Geisel published a number of cartoons depicting Japanese people with stereotypically prominent front teeth. One 1942 cartoon even endorses Japanese-American internment by showing Japanese-Americans as disloyal citizens stockpiling explosives and “waiting for the signal from home.”

Despite this, Geisel could simultaneously take stances against racism and prejudice, even when those concepts were against the mainstream. While an editorial cartoonist for the liberal New York paper *PM*, Geisel was an early advocate for strong U.S. action against Nazi Germany, and in one cartoon said Americans needed a “good mental insecticide” to clear their minds of “racial prejudice.”



Waiting for the signal from home, published by Theodor Seuss Geisel just at the onset of Japanese-American internment in 1942. PHOTO BY UC SAN DIEGO SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Later in life, Geisel would pen several Dr. Seuss titles that would openly grapple with racism, most notably *The Sneetches*, which catalogues the travails of a bird-like species that enforces a rigid class structure based on which among them have stars on their bellies.

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# A Deep Dive Into The Book Community's Toxic Cancel Culture

The rabbit hole of book and author cancellations at the hand of YA Twitter is a deep one— and it's a symptom of a larger cultural problem in the book community that we would be remiss to ignore.

in [Discussion May 17, 2022](#)[January 8, 2023](#)

Twitter is notorious for its toxicity, mostly in the context of politics. But as it turns out, the site has a similarly brutal reputation in the world of books, specifically in the world of YA publishing. **The rabbit hole of book and author cancellations at the hand of YA Twitter is a deep one— and it's a symptom of a larger cultural problem in the book community that we would be remiss to ignore.**

I'll start with the history of cancel culture in the book community before moving on to why I believe this is the most toxic trend on the booknet right now.

## The Road To Hell Is Paved With Good Intentions: The History of Book Community Cancel Culture

Let's start by going through a sort of history of cancel culture in the book community, most notoriously on YA Twitter. I've only been on Book Twitter since 2021, and I started my blog in 2020, but I want to contextualize this cultural phenomenon within a larger timeframe.

In doing research for this post, the first year I really started to see articles about book cancellations and scandals popping up is 2016— but I think we should start by going back further than that. **What was going on in the world of YA before this trend started, and how does it relate to the emergence of cancel culture?**

### 2014-2015: The YA Publishing World Begins to Open Its Eyes to Diversity and Social Justice Issues

YA as a category has existed for decades, but it really rose to prominence in the 2000s and early 2010s with franchises like *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, and what I like to call the Age of John Green. With the newfound cultural prominence of YA, it began to draw criticism for its lack of diversity.

**In the early days of YA, the vast majority of popular books featured white protagonists and had little in the way of representation for minority groups, leading to a push for YA literature that more accurately reflected the diverse reader base it was marketed to.** There were also concerns about the disproportionately white demographics of publishing itself.

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In 2014, the **We Need Diverse Books nonprofit** grew out of the #WeNeedDiverseBooks hashtag on Twitter with the goal to advocate for more diversity in children's literature.

The **#OwnVoices hashtag** began in 2015, a way to denote books whose authors are writing from their own experiences to incorporate diverse representation. For example, a book with an autistic character written by an autistic author would be #OwnVoices, a book with a gay character written by a gay author would be #OwnVoices, etc. This was intended to help readers and publishers find books with accurate representation for marginalized groups.

2015 was also the year that Kirkus Reviews reportedly began noting the races of characters in the books they reviewed, and the year that *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas's novel about the Black Lives Matter movement and the problem of police brutality against black Americans, was published, becoming one of the first major YA books to feature social justice activism.

**This sort of consciousness shift in the publishing world seemed on the surface to be a win for diversity and giving every young person the opportunity to see themselves and their cultures represented in literature— and it was.** The number of diverse YA books being published skyrocketed from 2013 to 2016, and in 2022, at the time of this article, the book community continues to champion diverse literature. Although there are still concerns about equity in publishing, we have clearly made progress since the early 2010s, and that is great. I do not at all intend to imply in this post that this movement was a negative thing. It has greatly improved the diversity in publishing and I believe greater consciousness about diversity is extremely necessary.

**However, I believe that some of the applications of this movement for more diversity have had some unintended side effects, and the kind of hyper-focus on identity that was unwittingly created may have helped set the stage for the rise of cancel culture.**

## YA Twitter's Notoriety Begins: A Timeline of Early Cancellations

**With the newfound focus on diversity and positive representation, authors found themselves under greater scrutiny to accurately and inoffensively write about minority groups.** It was around 2016 that cancel culture began to become more prevalent in the book community, and most of the incidents revolved around the purported mishandling of representation.

**2016:**

*When We Was Fierce* by E.E. Charlton-Trujillo is delayed publication for incorporating a pseudo-AAVE invented dialect for its cast of black characters, which readers deemed offensive

2017:

*The Black Witch* by Laurie Forest is met with a huge wave of backlash for “racism.” The fantasy novel features a protagonist who is raised in a sheltered environment and must overcome the bigotry she has been taught when she attends a university and is exposed to different people.

The publication of *The Continent* by Keira Drake, another fantasy novel, is delayed for accusations of racial insensitivity for alleged parallels between fantasy races described unfavorably and real life groups of people. One such complaint was that the name of the “savage” fantasy race, called the “Topi”, was too similar to that of the Hopi Native American tribe. It was also accused of having a “white savior narrative”

*American Heart* by Laura Moriarty is accused of Islamophobia. The novel is set in a dystopian future United States in which Muslim Americans are rounded up into internment camps. Its protagonist is a white teenager who must overcome her own Islamophobia to help a Muslim woman escape– and therein lies the problem according to the critics: another “white savior narrative.” The online backlash to *American Heart* was such that Kirkus Reviews, which had originally published a starred review written by a Muslim woman for the book, issued a public apology, revised the review to atone for the wrongthink, and removed the star.

2019:

*Blood Heir* by Amelie Wen Zhao is cancelled on Twitter, causing Zhao to delay its publication and issue an apology. The novel is yet another fantasy book, and yet again it was accused of racism. Zhao, a Chinese immigrant, intended to draw attention to the problem of human trafficking with a plot line involving slavery, but readers interpreted it as analogous to American chattel slavery and especially took issue with the line “oppression is blind to skin color.” (Don’t we love when Americans interpret everything through the lens of America only)

*A Place for Wolves* by Kosoko Jackson is cancelled for insensitive portrayal of the Kosovo war.

## The State of Book Community Cancel Culture Now

If anything, things have gotten more volatile in the past few years. The scrutiny with regard to representation has continued, and the YA world’s increasing politicization has also intensified the climate.

For the sake of brevity, and because I wrote a separate post about the more recent attitude and author cancellations, I’ll just briefly describe the past two years in terms of major incidents.

In 2020, J.K. Rowling of course officially became Public Enemy No. 1 of the book community for her allegedly “anti-trans” sentiment. Impressively, she still hasn’t capitulated, and the outrage has reached rather extraordinary heights (Apparently now we’re equating *Harry Potter* tattoos to swastikas and praising authors for writing about Rowling dying in a fire– I’m not even kidding; someone has actually published a book in which J.K. Rowling is written into the story and dies in a fire)

The J.K. Rowling situation has migrated from the realm of book community drama into the realm of actual politics that normal people care about, so let’s quickly move back to the esoteric land of the YA/general sphere again.

The climate that began around 2016 in the book community seems to have continued through 2022. It's become commonplace to witness people sharing lists of problematic authors and books that you simply must avoid and also make sure to dissuade others from reading. There are Instagram accounts and YouTube channels dedicated to "calling out" (their words) "problematic" people and recounting drama. **When I was on bookstagram, it seemed that every day a new infographic would circulate about how problematic a certain author, book, influencer, or other figure in the community was.**

(I've written more extensively about the rise in people calling things "problematic" in the book community in [this post](#))

I've seen various threads and posts and whatnot about authors like Jay Kristoff, T.J. Klune, Casey McQuiston, Francina Simone, Sarah J. Maas, V.E. Schwab, Lauren Hough, and plenty of others, for offenses of varying severity. Not all of the criticism of authors is due to the content of their books; some of these people were called out for rude behavior online. And **it's important to concede that in some instances criticism of an author is warranted, especially if there is proof of clear wrongdoing, harassment, or racism on their part.**

However, the sins of the authors that have been called out vary dramatically, and oftentimes the reaction is disproportionate to the crime. **I also believe in separating the art from the artist, and I don't think that it is wrong to read books by an author even if they have been revealed as doing something wrong.** The current obsession with purifying authors and only reading books from people you personally like has become a bit counterproductive. And it's not great to shame other people for reading books by "problematic" authors.

One example of a major recent cancellation of a non-author on bookstagram: in August 2021, the book subscription box OwlCrate was met with a wave of backlash when they announced that they would start selling their *Harry Potter* mug collection again. The problem, of course, is because *Harry Potter* mugs → *Harry Potter* → J.K. Rowling → How Dare You, Bigot. After being mobbed with angry comments about how harmful and violent and transphobic and disappointing this was, OwlCrate issued an apology and redacted the mug collection again.

I also witnessed a bookstagrammer get mobbed, called a racist and even receive death threats for posting that she was pro-life.

(These are some of the reasons I left bookstagram)

**So cancel culture is alive and well on the bookish Internet. But why is that?**

## Why Is Cancel Culture So Prevalent in the Book Community

### The Book Community's Obsession With Identity Politics

It seems that there are several main factors contributing to this toxic climate on the bookish Internet. First is the community's strong interest in social justice and the unfortunate side effect of hyper-fixation on identity and political correctness. I'm not one to say political correctness, or, as it's now more colloquially termed, depending on who you're talking to, "wokeness", is necessarily negative, and obviously we don't want books to be racist or offensive.

**But the book community's bigotry-detector, perhaps, has become slightly hypersensitive.**

## The Politically Progressive Homogeneity of the YA Book Community

A related factor is the relative political homogeneity of the YA book community (and of YA books themselves, for that matter) The majority of the people who write about books on the Internet, particularly YA books, seem to be women aged 15-35 who are politically progressive.

**There is nothing wrong with this, but because everyone is surrounded in places like book Twitter and bookstagram by people with similar opinions, they begin to believe that theirs are the only acceptable ones.** It also can lead to people being dog-piled for holding opinions outside of the progressive canon (e.g. pro-life, pro-Trump, and pro-Israel are each opinions I have seen used as evidence of an author or influencer's impurity)

Again, important caveat: you don't have to agree with people who have more "conservative" politics and it's really important to stand up for what you believe. I think it's important to say when you think someone is wrong, but there's a difference between disagreeing with a person and calling for them to be cancelled and for no one to read their books or support them ever.

## There's An Element of Status-Seeking and Competition

**Overall, I think the main driving factor behind cancel culture seems to be a sort of competition as to who is the most "woke"**

Calling out a "problematic" author or book gives you social status online, it makes you virtuous, it shows how much you care about advancing social justice and holding people accountable. And whoever finds the most "problematic" things in a book is the most devoted to the cause.

The BBC actually has a podcast episode on this sort of pattern called "The Purity Spiral", where they actually talk about YA Twitter:

*"In its extremes, a purity spiral is how we tumble towards The Crucible, or Mao's Red Guard, or Stalin's show trials— yet, as you're about to hear, they're just as present in the world of online knitting, or in Young Adult fiction."*

**In essence, a purity spiral is a phenomenon that occurs in isolated cultural groups, characterized by members of the group participating in a cycle of "moral outbidding": attempting to prove their moral stature or devotion to an ideology, eventually turning inwards and purging their ranks of those presumed to be ideologically impure.** It fits the Book Twitter situation perfectly, especially in cases of people like Kosoko Jackson, who participated in online pile-ons of other authors before they eventually turned on him.

# What's So Wrong With Cancel Culture in the Book Community?

Some would say that cancel culture isn't really that big of a problem. Maybe it's just holding people accountable and showing authors what behavior is socially unacceptable. However...

## "Holding People Accountable" Is Moot When Standards Are Constantly Shifting

**Supporters of cancel culture often refer to it as "call-out culture" and describe it as simply a means of "holding people accountable" for their "problematic views."**

But the question is: holding people accountable for what? The definition of what is or is not acceptable changes frequently when you're going based off mob rule. People have been canceled in the book community for everything from harassing reviewers to being pro-life.

**The victims of cancel culture range from people who have actually done harmful things (often unrelated to their books) to people who just happen to have an opinion unapproved by the majority of the chronically online reading obsessed public.** It's unreasonable to treat them the same way.

Also, the apologies of cancelled people never seem to be accepted, no matter how gratuitously they grovel about how they will "do the work" and are "deeply sorry for the harm they have caused." I've never seen an apology lead to anything but gloating condescension— or even further criticism.

## Cancel Culture is a Threat to Freedom of Speech

Another argument I see often is the "freedom of speech, not freedom from the consequences of that speech" or "freedom of speech only means that the government can't censor or punish you for your speech, but other people can!" **These people are correct: the Constitution has no power against cancel culture. But that doesn't make cancel culture a good thing.** Just because something is LEGAL doesn't mean it's POSITIVE. I hate when people conflate legality with absolute righteousness.

Saying something isn't illegal is no argument as to whether or not it's morally right or objectively beneficial. A lot of negative things aren't illegal. And for that matter, no one is attempting to make cancel culture illegal, that would be totalitarian, ineffective, and stupid so this argument is pretty irrelevant.

(However, now that I think about it, some of the accusations lobbed at people on the bookternet could potentially constitute libel/slander, but that's beside the point)

**I also disagree with the "freedom of speech, not freedom from consequences" argument because it misses the *point* of free speech rights in general.** Yes, the freedom of speech protected by the first amendment of the US Constitution is the prevents the government from prosecuting you for your speech, but consider the idea behind freedom of speech: it's intended to preserve the right to speak against people in positions of power who would take the opportunity to censor your speech. *Why* do we have free speech as a principle? To protect unpopular opinions. When such opinions are being silenced by a mob of loud Twitter users, it's the same end result as if the government was censoring it. Yeah, Twitter can't put you in jail for your speech, but they *can* prevent you from speaking. Or writing.

**And because we're talking about books: Twitter has proven to have the capability to delay publication for books and to ruin authors' reputations before their work has even been released.**

The volatility and unpredictability of the online book world has rather disturbing potential for the censorship of authors. I know I would not want to be a YA writer right now. No matter how careful you are to tread lightly, there's always some way your work could be construed as problematic.

**On social media, there is a huge amount of power held by certain people who see it as their responsibility to punish others for what they consider unacceptable views or problematic writing.** Cancel culture has caused people to lose their jobs, receive death threats and suffer social alienation as a result of their speech. In the book community, people have lost business opportunities, etc.

**I think, when there is so much power in the hands of— for lack of a better word— “the mob”, it does become a free speech issue.**

The reason freedom of speech is protected is to prevent a society in which one entity controls political/social discourse. With cancel culture, it's not the government who's trying to control said discourse: it's other people. But that doesn't make it any less of a threat to free society.

## Cancel Culture is Glorified Bullying

**Putting aside all the lofty free speech idealism: cancel culture is also just mean.**

Do you remember middle school friendship drama? Because I sure do, and the whole cancel culture stuff makes me feel like I'm 13 again, pacing around my room in anticipation on FaceTime while my friend “spills the tea” about the latest stupid, peŕjy he-said she-said nonsense.

The “tea”, reaction videos, screenshots and subtweets and name-calling is like being stuck on a loop in the most toxic, caŕjy circles of tween girls, but they NEVER grow out of it.

It doesn't at all feel like it's about “social justice” or “holding people accountable” anymore.

Yes, I'm sure you may think going in someone's DMs and telling them to kill themselves is an action of commendable heroism, **but the rest of us realize you're just a person capitalizing off the current political climate to go on a power trip and bully someone into obscurity in exchange for social capital.**

# In Conclusion: Book Community Cancel Culture is Toxic

I think cancel culture is one of the worst things about the “booknet,” because of the ideological echo chamber and socially-enforced dogma of maligned social justice it perpetuates, and for its incompatibility with freedom of speech online. We should prioritize the rights of authors to write without fear of blown-up misinterpretation of their words or the enforcement of ideological purity. And while legitimate criticism is important, especially if an author is proven to have done something such as harassment, it’s important to distinguish those cases from situations in which allegations have been exaggerated via Twitter or are dubiously serious, such as a controversial joke in a novel.

And we shouldn’t forget the dangers of censorship.

To quote Oscar Wilde:

*“I may not agree with you, but I will defend to the death your right to make an ass of yourself.”*

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By Tonya Fister And Cora Anderson • Last Updated September 21, 2022

# Banned Books Week 2022: What Are We Losing When We Ban Books?



From left: Authors Alice Walker, George M. Johnson (back), Malinda Lo and Toni Morrison. Photo Courtesy: Bettmann/Getty Images; Sean Howard & Devin Tracy/IMDb; Sharona Jacobs/author's website; Bettmann/Getty Images

Sadly, the act of banning books is nothing new. In fact, the practice has been around for centuries. Some once-controversial books are now regarded as must-read classics, while others remain banned in various states or school systems. But even though book banning isn't new, it remains a cause for alarm.

Recent book bannings that have cropped up in conservative-led states in 2021 and 2022 disproportionately impact books written by people of color and LGBTQ+ authors. By targeting certain groups of writers with book bans, stories kids of color and queer and trans kids need most – those in which they see themselves reflected – become inaccessible.

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## The History of Book Banning

Book banning has been around for **a long, long time**. Sometime between 259–210 B.C. Shih Huang, the then-Emperor of China, burned books and stopped Confucian scholars from documenting work he didn't agree with. Later, around 8 A.D., the poet Ovid was banned from Rome; in 35 A.D, Caligula, the Emperor of Rome, was upset about the Greek ideas of freedom that Homer wrote about in The Odyssey some 300 years earlier and opposed it.

In the 1500s, the **Roman Catholic church opposed the Protestant Reformation**, claiming the pope was infallible and that only the Roman Catholic Church could provide eternal salvation to worshippers. Back then, the Roman Catholic Church controlled everything, from religion and politics to education and art. The heads of the Roman Catholic Church needed a way to maintain that power and, as a result, opposed people having access to printed or written text.



A stack of books that have been challenged or banned in Texas, April 2022.

Even Bibles were written in languages that the “everyman” didn’t necessarily read, which meant the church remained the ultimate source of information and authority. With the advent of the Protestant Reformation, all of that changed. Gutenberg’s printing press, for example, allowed for religious materials that were written in the vernacular to spread quickly. Books, more so than ever before in the Western world, became a source of knowledge – one that, in theory, anyone could have access to and form opinions about.

In an attempt to regain control, the church later put forth a list of publications it deemed heretical, banning Catholic practitioners from reading them. As you can see in these historical examples of book banning, censorship often stems from an authority’s attempt to retain power by narrowing the scope of what information and ideas are accessible to the public.

## **So, Why Do People Ban Books Now?**

Today, people in positions of power ban books for many reasons – religious and political reasons; because they’re discriminatory; or because they want to control information (often by spreading misinformation – or not providing a whole picture).

But, whatever the reasons, the underlying root of book banning is often fear – a fear of losing control or power, of no longer being the “dominant” narrative. For example, banning books that explore ideas or take on points of view that undermine the views of an organized religion helps said religious institutions eliminate ideas that don’t benefit it. The same is true in situations where books are banned for political reasons.

As we're seeing today, some groups or people in positions of power ban books to allegedly "protect" children from difficult ideas or stories that aren't "age appropriate". But this is a kind of willful ignorance. "Since the 1800s, attitudes about which books are 'appropriate' for kids to read have too often suppressed stories about different cultures and life experiences," writes Paul Ringel in *The Atlantic*.



Forrest Goodluck, Sasha Lane and Chloe Grace-Moretz in the film adaptation of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2018). Photo Courtesy: FilmRise/IMDb

The article, "[How Banning Books Marginalizes Children](#)", goes on to report that 52 percent of the books that have been challenged or banned between 2006 and 2016 feature "so-called 'diverse content'... [explorations of] race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental illness, and disability." That trend has since continued.

In [an article for Diversity in YA](#), author Malinda Lo ([Last Night at the Telegraph Club](#)) discusses how [emily m. danforth's lesbian coming-of-age novel, The Miseducation of Cameron Post](#), was removed from a summer reading list, with parents and (ultimately) the high school in question citing "explicit language" as the reason. "Several other books on the summer reading list also included explicit language," Lo writes. "It was no great leap to wonder if 'language' was used as a cover for homophobia."

This also begs the question: do people banning books even read the titles they're challenging? For example, Matt Krause, a Republican state representative in Texas, released a list of 850



books he wanted “investigated”. “What is immediately apparent from a look at Krause’s list,” Harvey J. Graff writes for **Publisher’s Weekly**, “is that it is compiled from an internet search of keywords.”

In this example, and others, it’s clear that politicians who’re challenging books about characters of color or queer and trans characters are pushing a political agenda. The censorship isn’t about protection, but about silencing groups of people or pushing them (and readers like them) to the margins. Ringel perhaps puts it best, writing, “Keeping books about certain types of children out of libraries perpetuates a vision of a sheltered American childhood that has rarely existed.”

## What Are Some Commonly Banned Books?



Oprah Winfrey and Kimberly Elise holding on to one another in a scene from the film adaptation of *Beloved* (1998). Photo Courtesy: Harpo Films/Getty Images

### **Beloved by Toni Morrison**

**Beloved**, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988, tells the story of Sethe, a Black woman who’s living in Ohio in 1873.

Haunted by her memories, Sethe recounts her time as an enslaved person as well as the impossible choices she had to make in the face of oppression and white supremacy.

Notably, Toni Morrison based Sethe's story on that of a real formerly enslaved person, Margaret Garner, who made the impossible decision to kill her child to spare her from being enslaved again. "Before Morrison's novel, narratives around slavery rarely centered on the humanity and choices of Black women," [Danielle Rollins writes](#). "In *Beloved*, however, Sethe exercises agency, and although there are devastating consequences for every choice she makes, Sethe ultimately has the power to make them."

## **The Color Purple by Alice Walker**

*The Color Purple* tells the story of Celie, a young Black girl who lives in Georgia during the early 1900s. Celie is a survivor of sexual and physical abuse, inflicted upon her by her father. But *The Color Purple* is a story about the struggle for empowerment, and we see Celie find agency over her own life. Since 1984, schools have banned Alice Walker's book for many reasons, including for its depiction of queerness.

## **Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya**

*Bless Me, Ultima* is about a young Mexican American boy living in eastern New Mexico during the 1940s. A curandera, or folk healer, named Ultima comes to live with Antonio's family when he's six. *Bless Me, Ultima* faces bans due to adult language, sexual references, and what some believe to be anti-Catholic messages. In some [Arizona schools](#), Rudolfo Anaya's book was banned after conservative opponents claimed the story promoted overthrowing the federal government.

## **What's the Importance of Banned Books Week?**

Since 1982, the American Library Association (ALA) and Amnesty International have promoted Banned Books Week — a campaign that raises awareness around banned, challenged and censored books. This year, [Banned Books Week](#) will be celebrated September 18–24, and it couldn't be coming at a better time.



Danny Glover and Whoopi Goldberg in the film adaptation of *The Color Purple* (1985). Photo Courtesy: Warner Bros. Entertainment/IMDb

In 2022, [PEN America](#), a nonprofit that fights for freedom of expression, found that 1,145 titles were being targeted by conservative politicians and censors. Moreover, “1,586 bans were implemented in 86 school districts across 26 states” in a rash of book bans that’s “unparalleled in intensity” (via [The Guardian](#)).

Overwhelmingly, these book bans and challenges target writers of color and queer and trans writers as well as books that discuss race or feature LGBTQ+ narratives. Banned Books Week is a good reminder to speak out against censorship, ensuring we all have intellectual freedom, the freedom to read, and, for creators, the freedom to write their stories and truths.

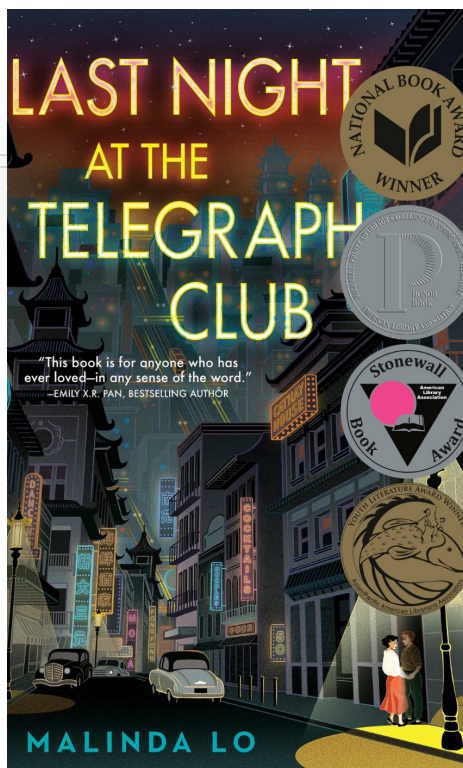
## **Which Contemporary Titles Are Under Attack?**

While it may seem like books that are several decades old are the only targets of book bans and challenges, that’s simply not the case. Here are a few of the contemporary titles that are under attack today:



- *Melissa* by Alex Gino: The story of a 4th-grade transgender girl who is deadnamed and not affirmed by those around her.
- *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* by Susan Kuklin: This work contains six interviews with transgender or genderqueer young adults.
- *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson: A memoir-manifesto about the author's experiences growing up Black and queer.
- *New Kid* by Jerry Craft: The main character, Jordan, attends a school where he's one of only a handful of students of color. A school district in Texas banned *New Kid* for a time, claiming it promoted Marxism and **critical race theory**.
- *Between The World And Me* by **Ta-Nehisi Coates**: Discusses the effects of centuries of racial violence and systemic racism on Black Americans.

Books help us expand our views, gain new perspectives and confront real-world issues and struggles that others contend with. Many people don't realize that not every book is meant to be light or happy.



When people ban books, like *Beloved* or *The Color Purple*, they forget – or willfully choose to ignore – that what Sethe and Celie went through in their respective novels was a reality for many people (and, in regards to surviving abuse, continues to be a reality for many). These works raise uncomfortable questions for white readers – but that’s the point.

When people ban and challenge queer coming-of-age stories, like *All Boys Aren’t Blue*, they’re erasing and invalidating queer and trans kids who want to read stories that reflect their experiences. Banning books limits access to lived experiences and erases much-needed voices.

Instead of challenging books, maybe readers should challenge how they think about stories that are different from their own.

