

Banned Books Week 2021

**Banned or challenged children's
and young adult books**

Banned Books and Banned Books Week

Banned Books Week was launched in 1982 in response to a sudden surge in the number of challenges to books in schools, bookshops and libraries across the USA. Since then, according to the American Library Association, more than 11,000 books have been challenged, and the number continues to grow.

Banned Books Week UK mirrors the United States initiative and aims to highlight the importance of ensuring the freedom to read, write and publish.

Libraries, book shops, schools and reading groups are encouraged to hold events celebrating the freedom to read and to challenge voices and ideas being silenced.

The annual event this year is 26 September – 2 October, with the theme “Books Unite Us. Censorship Divides Us.”

This is a revised listing of 26 titles, all but two being fiction, and includes titles that address racism and racial justice. They have all been banned or challenged for a variety of reasons such as sex, sexuality, drugs, or bad language.

The list was compiled by freedom of expression campaign group Index on Censorship and Islington Council’s Library and Heritage Services, who are part of the Banned Books Week UK coalition.

As well as this book list, you can find out more in the banned books school’s toolkit. For more information visit <https://bannedbooksweek.org>
Or to see a comprehensive list of banned and challenged books visit www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks

All books on this list and many more are available from Islington Libraries. You can check the catalogue or reserve online at:
<https://capitadiscovery.co.uk/islington>

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Sherman Alexie The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

A native American boy from a dysfunctional family attends an all-white school away from the reservation and encounters bullying and racism. Challenges came not just for raising those issues but it was accused of being anti-family, cultural insensitive, portraying addiction, using offensive language and being sexually explicit. One reviewer commented "If Arnold can overcome generations of poverty and bigotry, if he can lose his best friend over his decision to better himself and forgive a drunk driver for the death of his grandmother, then surely we can accept the use of the word 'fuck' every so often."

Laurie Halse Anderson Speak

Melinda seems like your average teenage girl. She struggles with her identity, family and a new school. But Melinda is holding onto a secret. A secret that threatens to destroy her and any hope for her future. Melinda was raped. Banned, challenged and restricted because it was thought to contain a political viewpoint. It was claimed to be biased against male students and included rape and profanity. One professor to challenge it said it "should be classified as soft pornography".

Laurie Halse Anderson Wintergirls

Cassie and Lia want to be thin, but when Cassie is found dead in a motel room, Lia questions whether she should continue to lose weight or choose life instead. Challenges said the book glamourised the disorder and young people might copy the behaviour. The author replied "I take my responsibilities to my readers seriously. When I was working on the book, I spoke to a number of mental health professionals. Doctors with first-hand experience with the devastation of eating disorders encouraged me to publish the book. Wintergirls does not glamourise eating disorders. It is real and for that reason, it has become a positive tool, something helps people reach for help and health."

Jay Asher Thirteen Reasons Why

Slated for its references to drugs, sex and suicide, the story tells of a boy who finds he's the owner of a box of cassettes recorded by his classmate, Hannah, who has committed suicide. Hannah explains that there are 13 reasons why she did what she did, and Clay is one of them. The author offered up this poignant response: "The very day I found out Thirteen Reasons Why was the third most-challenged book, I received an e-mail from a reader claiming my book kept her from committing suicide. I dare any censor to tell that girl it was inappropriate for her to read my book."

Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins & Ann Hazzard Something Happened in Our Town

Emma and Josh heard that something happened in their town. A black man was shot by the police. "Why did the police shoot that man?" "Can police go to jail?" Follows two families — one White, one Black — as they discuss a police shooting of a Black man in their community. The story aims to answer children's questions about such traumatic events, and to help children identify and counter racial injustice in their own lives. Challenged for "divisive language" and because it was thought to promote anti-police views.

Suzanne Collins The Hunger Games

To represent your district in the annual Hunger Game is a fight to the death on live TV. But 16 year-old Katniss has been close to death before and survival, for her, is second nature. Challenged or banned on grounds of insensitivity, offensive language, violence and for being anti-family, anti-ethnic and occult/satanic, Collins describes her trilogy as being like an extreme reality TV program where voyeuristic thrills and desensitisation mean the audience doesn't respond to real tragedy in the way it should. She said "One of the most memorable things I hear is when someone tells me that my books got a reluctant reader to read. That's just the best feeling. The idea that you might have contributed to a child's enjoyment of reading."

Chris Crutcher Whale Talk

Misfit students form a shabby swim team in order to sabotage their high school's elitist athletics programme. Complaints included: "contains over 140 profane words. There is sexual content, drug use, suicide, violence, references to smoking". Crutcher, a child abuse therapist, responded by saying "When a teacher looks out over his or her classroom, he/she is looking at one in three girls and one in five boys who have been sexually mistreated. That doesn't take into consideration the number of kids who have been beaten, locked up, or simply never allowed to be good enough. Stories are buffered in fiction and therefore allow discussion of issues that would not otherwise be brought up. They save many students".

Emily M Danforth The Miseducation of Cameron Post

Criticised for its offensive language, drug/alcohol use and gay sex, the story deals with a girl who is sent by her aunt to a "de-gaying" camp. The author commented "My experience of researching this conversion therapy was often upsetting and always baffling. There's absolutely zero credible scientific evidence to suggest that such 'therapies' are effective at changing attraction or desire or identity in the least. In fact, there is much evidence that such 'therapies' cause all kinds of harm to those who partake in them."

Alex Gino George

When people look at George, they see a boy, but George knows she's a girl named Melissa. Resigned to living with the secret, her school's production of Charlotte's Web gives her the chance to reveal who she really is. After she comes out as transgender to her best friend Kelly, they devise a plan for her to play Charlotte. The book was banned or censored essentially for containing transgender characters. In response to the question "Is there a banned book you believe everyone should read?", author David Levithan nominated George because "I think it shows why the notion of banning a book is so ridiculous. It is a sweet, moving, ultimately upbeat story of a girl who the world sees as a boy — but that's their problem, not hers. It is a call for openmindedness and openheartedness."

John Green The Fault in Our Stars

Two teens with cancer, Grace and Augustus, meet at a support group. After reading each other's favourite novel, they try to find out the fate of one of the characters in Grace's choice. The book was not only slammed for its inclusion of offensive language and sex, but even for covering death and cancer. As one reviewer said "The thing that bothered me about The Daily Mail piece [which condemned the book] was that it was a bit condescending to teenagers. I'm tired of adults telling teenagers that they aren't smart, that they can't read critically, that they aren't thoughtful."

Ellen Hopkins Tricks

Five teenagers. Three girls. Two guys. Four straight. One gay. Some rich. Some poor. Some from great families. Some with no one at all. All living their lives as best they can, but all searching...for freedom, safety, community, family, love. The book was banned for its discussion of sex and sexuality, but as one young person said of another of Hopkins' books "The only thing that's made life bearable this month was having the opportunity to read your books, relate to them, and realise that I'm not alone and I never have been.... [Sexual abuse] really happens and [your books help me realise] I'm not going through it by myself."

Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You

Chronicles the story of anti-black, racist ideas over the course of American history and inspires hope for an antiracist future. Reynolds says it's filled with "the things that I needed someone to say to me when I was 15 years old." Banned and challenged because of the author's public statements and because of claims that the book contains "selective storytelling incidents" and does not encompass racism against all people.

Dong Hwa Kim The Color of Water

Second in the Color trilogy of graphic novels by this Korean author, this one met with both outstanding praise for its beautiful, creative, and sensitive content and with strong criticism, resistance, and banning over content, nudity, and discussions of sexuality. In 2011, it was the second most challenged book in the USA. At the same time, reviewers praised the books, noting about one that “indelicate moments” were “tenderly rendered” and that while “sexuality and puberty . . . are frankly depicted,” this “quiet, dreamy book” is also “a thoughtful coming-of-age story.”

Susan Kuklin Beyond Magenta

Susan Kuklin met and interviewed six transgender or gender-neutral young adults and used her skills to represent them thoughtfully and respectfully before, during, and after their personal acknowledgment of gender preference. It was challenged for being anti-family, its offensive language, discussion of homosexuality, references to sex education and supposed political and religious viewpoints. Kuklin said “My book being banned was a punch in the gut, a slap in the face. { [...] ‘Tell the world who you are,’ said I. And they did — honestly, intimately, boldly. And their stories were banned because of who they are.”

Harper Lee To Kill a Mockingbird

Based loosely on Lee’s own childhood experiences, the novel takes place in the Deep South during the Great Depression. This is the story of lawyer Atticus Finch as he defends a black man wrongly accused of raping a white woman in Alabama. It was banned and challenged for racial slurs and their negative effect on students, featuring a “white saviour” character, and its perception of the Black experience.

David Levithan Two Boys Kissing

Craig and Harry are trying to set the world record for the longest kiss. They're not a couple, but used to be. Peter and Neil are a couple. Their kisses are different. Avery and Ryan have only just met. As the marathon progresses, these boys, their friends and families evaluate the changing nature of feelings, behaviour and love. One complaint was that the book "condones public displays of affection" while another criticised the cover image which showed boys kissing. Levithan said "The book is about two boys kissing. Why hide that? What good would that do? The people who are going to object to two boys kissing on the cover were going to object to the book from the moment I typed the first sentence. They can argue it all they want. They will always be wrong."

Stephenie Meyer Twilight

The most popular of all the vampire series. The concept of immortality through vampirism is not embraced by all and the creation of "good" vampires has been seen by some as distorting the battle between what is traditionally good and evil. A key aspect of vampirism is sexuality and the relationship between Edward and Bella has raised objections. One young person said of the criticism the book generated "Here is a top five list of the reasons that I think people wanting to ban these books are absolutely crazy: nothing naughty happens, they're make-believe characters, the books champion not having sex before marriage, they provide an excellent platform to discuss faith issues and they get kids reading."

Lauren Myracle tfn

Written in text-speak, tfn features the lives of three teenagers. It has been challenged because of the use of swear words, graphic descriptions of sex, alcohol use, pot smoking, student-teacher relationships, and "too much partying." Asked "What do your critics tell you?" the author replied "That I'm Satan. Or Satan's handmaiden. One asked me, 'Are you a paedophile?' Another said, 'What's the matter with you, lady? Your brain is sick. I hope you go to a mental hospital.'" She adds "I don't write with the goal of corrupting my readers. I write with the hope of handing my readers a mirror in which they can see themselves as well as a window through which they can see the pains and joys of others."

Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely All American Boys

A bag of chips. That's all sixteen-year-old Rashad is looking for. What he finds instead is a fist-happy cop. There were witnesses - and a video camera. Soon the beating is all over the news and the cop is getting threatened with accusations of prejudice and racial brutality. Banned and challenged for profanity, drug use, and alcoholism and because it was thought to promote anti-police views, contain divisive topics, and be “too much of a sensitive matter right now.”

Alex Sanchez Rainbow Boys

The first title in the Rainbow trilogy, the story focuses on three high school seniors as they come to terms with their sexuality and the other turmoil of their lives. Not surprisingly, it was the mere discussion of sexual identity that generated the volume of challenges that arose. Sanchez commented on challenges that “Several teachers and librarians have told me they know exactly who could benefit from reading Rainbow Boys. Librarians see how gay kids hide in the library to avoid harassment. That's what I did, Unfortunately, there weren't any books like Rainbow Boys when I was growing up”.

John Steinbeck Of Mice and Men

The childlike Lennie is lost without his guardian, George, who feels his slow-witted friend has been delivered into his keeping. Bound by their fragile dream of owning land where they will 'belong', their paradisiacal future is soon shattered. This Depression-era tragic tale that was praised for its realism was banned and challenged for using offensive language, violence, and racist stereotypes and their negative effect on students.

Robin Stevens Death in the Spotlight

During a “Detective Society” case in a London theatre, 15 year-old Daisy develops her first crush which happens to be on a girl. The book was banned by a school after the teacher discovered that the author had retweeted posts by Mermaids – an organisation supporting transgender and gender diverse young people. The author said ‘The thing I found upsetting was not that they disagreed with me [about supporting Mermaids], but that they were using the disagreement as a reason to ban my books in their school. Seeing a character who children can relate to in a popular children’s book series has given them a lot of joy and confidence, and it’s deeply saddening that both straight and queer kids at this teacher’s school won’t have the chance to read the book”.

Mariko Tamaki This One Summer

One summer Rose and her friend start to explore their interest in boys and pay attention to the emotional lives of those around them. This graphic novel was challenged because it included LGBT characters, drug use and profanity, and it was considered too sexually explicit, dealing with mature themes teenagers could not be expected to handle. A few people were shocked to find that the award winning graphic novel was intended for audiences age 12+. Rather than acknowledging their error, some attacked the book, calling for its removal. One of the authors said of its removal from some libraries: “I like protest. Protest is good. But protest needs to be a conversation, not just a removal of the antagonizing agent.”

Raina Telgemeier Drama

Callie is a theatre-lover who works in her school's drama production crew. In seventh grade she deals with confusing crushes and budding friendships. This is a coming-of-age story exploring themes of friendship, teamwork and inclusion. Although most readers of all ages found it to be endearing and authentic, a small but vocal minority objected to the inclusion of two gay characters, one of whom shares a chaste on-stage kiss with another boy. In an interview, the author said that while she and her editors were very careful to make the book age-appropriate, they never considered omitting the gay characters because “finding your identity, whether gay or straight, is a huge part of middle school.”

Angie Thomas The Hate U Give

Starr is a black teenager finding her way in two very distinct worlds: the streets of the poor area she lives in, and the suburban prep school she attends in the “good” part of town. Her life changes irrevocably when a white police officer shoots dead her best friend Khalil and Starr is the sole witness to the shooting. Ostensibly challenged or banned due to its language and sexual content, one commentator noted, “A quick scroll of related tweets suggests it is the book’s thematically uncomfortable material that led to the ban. In other words, racism and police violence.” Angie Thomas’s reaction on Twitter was blunt: “I’m saddened to hear that a school district in Texas banned #TheHateUGive, but I’m also empowered - you’re basically telling the kids of the Garden Heights of the world that their stories shouldn’t be told. Well, I’m going to tell them even louder. Thanks for igniting the fire.”

Cecily von Ziegesar Gossip Girl

The Gossip Girl series has faced many challenges, often about whether the events in the story are appropriate for a teenage audience. Feminist Naomi Wolf calls the books "corruption with a cute overlay" adding that "sex saturates the Gossip Girl books.... This is not the frank sexual exploration found in a Judy Blume novel, but teenage sexuality via Juicy Couture, blasé and entirely commodified." A former official within the American Library Association however, said she was simply "happy to see teen girls reading" and added that young girls will move onto other literature. "Unless you read stuff that's perhaps not the most literary, you'll never understand what good works are."

