

The Freedom to Read Is Under Assault

According to PEN America, an organization devoted to protecting free expression, **the freedom to read is under assault in the United States—particularly in public schools—curtailing students’ freedom to explore words, ideas, and books.** In the first half of the 2023-2024 school year, PEN America found more than 4,000 instances of book bans, beating the number found in the entire 2022-2023 academic year. Authors whose books are targeted are most frequently female, people of color, and/or LGBTQ+ individuals.



PEN America defines a **book challenge** as any attempt to restrict or remove a book based on objections to its content. A **book ban** is the removal or restriction of materials that were previously accessible.

While those behind school and library challenges and bans argue that targeted books are harmful to children, it is actually the *removal* of books that center Black, LGBTQ and other marginalized-group characters that deprives children. **These stories are important “mirrors,”** affirming children’s identities and experiences. **And they are also valuable “windows”** for children who don’t share the identities of a book’s characters, enabling them to learn about the world around them, including the broad diversity of people and their rich and complex histories, and to develop empathy and understanding around difference.

The following books have been banned or challenged in various communities and states across the country. As we contemplate book bans and challenges, the content and authors that are most targeted, and the protestations about safeguarding children and social order, we must ask ourselves “WHY?” **What knowledge is contained in these books, what might be its effect on readers, and why are some people so driven to hide truths, silence voices and erase experiences?**

TUUCW LIBRARY OF BANNED AND CHALLENGED BOOKS

Including reasons for the ban/challenge

**FOR BOOK RÉSUMÉS, visit UniteAgainstBookBans.org
an initiative of the American Library Association**

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

Profanity, alcohol, bullying, poverty, slurs;
claimed to be sexually explicit

All American Boys by Jason Reynolds and
Brendan Kiely

Racial content and depiction of law enforcement

All Boys Aren’t Blue by George M Johnson
LGBTQ+ content, profanity, claimed to be
sexually explicit

American Street by Ibi Zoboi

Profanity, obscenity, violence, drug and alcohol
use; claimed to be sexually explicit

Beloved by Toni Morrison

Racism, sexual content, violence

Between the World and Me by Ta’Nehisi
Coates

Anti-Black racism; claimed to be “leftist
propaganda” and “anti-police”

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
Racism, sexual assault, child molestation, invent, drunkenness; claimed to be sexually explicit

The Breakaways by Cathy G. Johnson
LGBTQ content including a transgender character

Dear Martin by Nic Stone
Anti-Black racism, profanity, depiction of law enforcement

Elijah of Buxton by Christopher Paul Curtis
Slavery

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
Race-based themes, profanity, depiction of law enforcement

The Hill We Climb by Amanda Gorman
Claimed to include “hate messages”

How to Be An Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
Race, anti-Black racism in America; claimed to teach “critical race theory”

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson
Racism and mass incarceration; claimed to teach “critical race theory”

Kite Runner by Khalid Hosseini
Sexual violence; claimed to have offensive language, “inspire terrorism” and “promote Islam”

Little and Lion by Brandy Colbert
Profanity, LGBTQ and other “controversial” content (abortion, intersectionality, drug use)

Monday’s Not Coming by Tiffany D. Jackson
Racism, justice, poverty; claimed to be sexually explicit

Out of Darkness by Ashley Hope Perez
Claimed to be sexually explicit

The Skin I’m In by Sharon G. Flake
Colorism, racism, and bullying

Stamped (for Kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds (2 copies)

History of anti-Black racism, claimed to be anti-American and Marxist and to have fabricated and conspiratorial content

The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story by Nikole Hannah Jones (3 copies)
History of slavery and anti-Black racism, claimed to be anti-American, Marxist, historically inaccurate, “racially divisive” and “a revisionist account”

The 57 Bus by Dashka Slater (1 copy)
Gender identity/LGBTQ content, criminal justice system, race-based content, violence

For elementary aged audiences

What are your words? A Book About Pronouns by Katherine Locke, School Library Journal recommendation PK-3 (1 copy)
Gender identity

It Feels Good to be Yourself A Book About Gender Identity by Theresa Thorn, School Library Journal recommendation K-2 (1 copy)
Gender identity

FOR BOOK RÉSUMÉS
visit UniteAgainstBookBans.org
an initiative of
the American Library Association