

THE BOOK REPORT

Titles Targeted for Censorship 2023



ALA American Library Association
OFFICE FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

The American Library Association (ALA) documented an astronomical 4,240 unique book titles targeted for censorship in 2023, a 65 percent increase from the previous recorded high of 2,571 titles set in 2022.

Starting in 2021, anti-government extremist groups' efforts to undermine trust in public schools and libraries accelerated. Their actions radically reshaped what domestic censorship looks like. While their agenda and talking points have been taken up by some conservative media outlets and elected officials, prosecutors and the judiciary have flatly rejected them.

Titles representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals are disproportionately targeted by those seeking to censor library books. Groups like Moms for Liberty, No Left Turn, and MassResistance expand their influence through appeals to fears and biases regarding historically marginalized groups.

Demands to censor long lists of titles shared on book rating sites are a hallmark of these organized efforts, weaponizing reconsideration policies to deplete staff time and resources. Attempts to deter selection of inclusive materials through threats and harassment of library workers are increasingly commonplace.



OFFICE FOR
Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) remains committed to helping educators, librarians, administrators, and community members resist efforts to abridge the freedom to read. OIF is charged with implementing ALA policies concerning the concept of intellectual freedom as embodied in the Library Bill of Rights.

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THE 20 MOST FREQUENTLY TARGETED TITLES IN 2023

ALEXIE, SHERMAN

THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN (2007)

■ 38 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 34 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 BOOK RÉSUMÉ: bit.ly/indianBR

In November, a parent at the Elkhorn School District (WI) submitted more than 1,800 pages of excerpts from 337 novels in a demand for their removal from school libraries. The books targeted, including *The Absolutely True Diary*, were temporarily taken out of circulation.

Principals estimated it took an average of 24 hours to review each middle school title and 60 hours to review each high school title. All 337 titles were retained in district libraries, though some were relocated from middle school to high school collections and some titles now require parental permission for checkout.

ANDREWS, JESSE

ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL (2018)

■ 56 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 48 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/earlBR

On June 13, the board of Hanover County Schools (VA) granted itself “sole discretion to remove any and all materials of its choosing from the library, classroom, school building(s) and or division.” During the same meeting, the board voted unanimously to ban 19 titles from district libraries, including *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*.

Moms for Liberty members subsequently targeted more than 100 additional titles with material downloaded from a book rating site. Of those, 75 were removed without review. The school board received guidance and gratis legal support from the Alliance Defending Freedom, a Southern Poverty Law Center–designated hate group, and the School Board Member Alliance, an affiliate of the Family Foundation.

CHBOSKY, STEPHEN

THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER (1999)

■ 68 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 67 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:**
bit.ly/wallflowerBR

Set during freshman year at a suburban Pittsburgh high school, *Perks* received numerous accolades following its publication.

Reviewers characterized it as a latter-day *Catcher in the Rye*.

The Plano Independent School District (TX) received requests to reconsider 26 titles in middle and high school library collections. In addition to those formally challenged titles, administrators subjected an additional 40 titles to internal review.

Of the 66 titles reviewed, 64 were withdrawn from all district libraries, including *Perks*. Only Ari Folman and David Polonskys’ graphic novel adaptation of *Anne Frank’s Diary* and Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* were retained.

CURATO, MIKE

FLAMER (2020)

■ 67 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 55 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/flamerBR

Set at a Boy Scout summer camp in 1995, *Flamer* tells the tale of a Filipino American navigating bullying and body image insecurities, as he reconciles his conservative religious upbringing with his homosexuality. *Flamer* appeared on a litany of best book lists, including from *Kirkus Reviews*, NPR, *School Library Journal*, YALSA, and the Cooperative Children’s Book Center.

On November 21, Take Back Our Schools, in association with Advocates for D20 Kids, filed a criminal complaint against Academy School District 20 (CO), alleging that *Flamer* and six other library titles violated state and federal obscenity laws. Earlier in the year, Advocates for D20 Kids challenged more than 100 titles identified using a book rating site created by anti-government extremists.

Following a comprehensive legal review, the Office of the District Attorney serving El Paso and Teller counties issued a statement that the claims made by Take Back Our Schools were not supported by evidence and that it would be unethical to prosecute over these books.

The DA’s Office wrote that, “The criminal justice system in the United States should not be weaponized against political or social opponents based simply on disagreements, and the misuse of the prosecution process only erodes trust in an essential function of our shared government.”

Despite this determination, the district banned several titles from school libraries and now requires parental permission for others.

DAWSON, JUNO

THIS BOOK IS GAY (2018)

■ 71 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 55 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/thisbookBR

Bestselling author Juno Dawson wrote this pertinent award-winning book for LGBTQIA+ teens, tweens, and adults; parents of LGBTQIA+ youth; and readers seeking to learn more about the LGBTQIA+ community.



BOOK RÉSUMÉS

Created in partnership with dozens of publishers, Book Résumés are free resources from Unite Against Book Bans that support access to books targeted by censors. Find them at bit.ly/BookResumes.

During the February 21 Siloam Springs City Council (AR) meeting, one man complained that 10 public library books were “pro alternative lifestyle.” While he alleged all the books were in the children’s section, eight of them, including *This Book is Gay*, were in the YA section.

Following temporary removal for review, *This Book is Gay* was relocated to adult nonfiction; all other titles were retained where they were originally shelved.

EVISON, JONATHAN

LAWN BOY (2018)

■ 23 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 22 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/lawnboyBR

“Jonathan Evison takes a battering ram to stereotypes about race and class in his fifth novel, Lawn Boy [...] an effervescent novel of hope that can enlighten everyone.”

—*The Washington Post*

In response to the passage of Iowa Senate File 496, Urbandale Community School District flagged 374 library titles for review to determine if they “depict or describe sex acts” or “deal with sexual orientation and gender identity.”

Modeled after Florida’s HB 1557 (the so-called “Don’t Say Gay law”), SF 496 prohibits “instruction related to gender identity and sexual orientation in school districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools in kindergarten through grade six.” While both SF 496 and HB 1557 apply to classroom instruction, the bills are used to justify removing LGBTQIA+ materials from school libraries.

Urbandale CSD banned 51 titles from all school libraries. *Lawn Boy* was retained in high school library collections.

In December, a federal judge blocked enforcement of SF 496.

GINO, ALEX

MELISSA (previously published as *George*, 2015)

■ 40 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 38 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/melissaBR

Gino’s award-winning children’s novel tells the story of a fourth-grade girl struggling to be herself. This tenderly written story helps kids and adults understand what it feels like to be transgender.

In September, members of Parents Advocating for Children’s Education (PACE) demanded the censorship of 30 titles held in Lexington 2 School District (SC) libraries. Seven titles were retained without restriction. Two were removed from middle school libraries. One was restricted to use by juniors and seniors. *Melissa* and 15 other titles were banned. A principal removed six titles without formal review, violating district policy.

GREEN, JOHN

LOOKING FOR ALASKA (2005)

■ 49 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 48 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/alaskaBR

This coming-of-age story interweaving themes of grief and hope won the 2006 Michael L. Printz Award and was honored

by numerous publications, including *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews*, as the best book of the year.

Local pressure group Clean Up Prattville challenged 49 titles at the Autauga–Prattville Public Library (AL) for depictions of “alternate sexualities” and “gender ideology.” Looking for Alaska was included despite the absence of LGBTQIA+ characters.

While the review committee recommended retaining all titles in their original locations, the library board relocated four children’s books with LGBTQIA+ representation to the highest shelf in the Easy Nonfiction section. Clean Up Prattville threatened to challenge an additional 80 titles in response.

HOPKINS, ELLEN

CRANK (2004)

■ 44 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 44 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/crankBR

IDENTICAL (2008)

■ 43 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 43 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/identicalBR

TRICKS (2009)

■ 56 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 49 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/tricksBR

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

In March, officials of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (AK) required removal of all “sexually explicit” titles listed on a book rating site often used by Moms for Liberty. Numerous books were removed from school libraries without following policy, including *Tricks*.

In September, the school board formed a “Library Citizens Advisory Committee” to review dozens of additional titles. To date, they have censored every title reviewed. They banned 16 titles from all school libraries, including *Identical*. *Crank* was among 14 titles removed from middle school collections.

On November 17, ACLU of Alaska filed a lawsuit against the district on behalf of six students claiming violation of their constitutional rights through the district’s removal of 56 library books.

HOSSEINI, KHALED

THE KITE RUNNER (2014)

- 37 CHALLENGES
- INCLUDED IN 36 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/kiteBR

Hosseini’s bestselling novel spans four decades of the recent history of Afghanistan and its people. It received numerous accolades, including the 2004 Alex Award, given to books

written for adults that have special appeal to youth ages 12 through 18.

In September, the board of Marietta City Schools (GA) issued a directive to the superintendent to remove all “sexually explicit” books from school libraries. The directive explicitly required review of “over 20,000 books” and circumvented approved reconsideration policies. The board named several titles they wanted removed, including *The Kite Runner*. While 23 titles were banned to date, *The Kite Runner* was retained.

JOHNSON, GEORGE M.

ALL BOYS AREN’T BLUE (2021)

- 82 CHALLENGES
- INCLUDED IN 72 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/allboysBR

Johnson’s award-winning memoir about growing up gay and Black deals frankly with experiences of bullying and sexual abuse. It appeared on numerous best book lists and was a Kids’ Book Choice Award finalist.

In August, the pressure group Freedom Fathers demanded removal of four titles from Douglas County Public Libraries (CO). They claimed the books contained “inaccurate gender

information” and exposed readers to “an unnatural homosexual lifestyle.” The titles, including *All Boys Aren’t Blue*, were retained without restriction.

KOBABE, MAIA

GENDER QUEER: A MEMOIR (2019)

- 106 CHALLENGES
- INCLUDED IN 58 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/genderBR

Kobabe wrote this tender, visually complex, and painfully honest graphic novel to help friends and family understand what it means to be asexual and nonbinary. Due to organized efforts, *Gender Queer* has been targeted for censorship more than any other title.

On March 18, the board of the Ada Community Library (ID) voted to remove six titles, including *Gender Queer*. They claimed the books were “harmful to minors” because they appeared on an ALA list of frequently challenged titles. The board also falsely claimed that having the books in the library violated Idaho state law. The library had not received requests to reconsider the titles.

On April 25, the board acknowledged a “procedural deficit” at their March meeting and returned all six titles to the shelves.

REPORT CENSORSHIP

Report censorship to the Office for Intellectual Freedom (oif.ala.org) when there’s a censorship attempt at your library, school, or university. You don’t have to be a librarian or ALA member to get confidential one-on-one help. Find more ways to reach us at ala.org/oif.



VISIT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY
to check out a variety of materials on an array of perspectives, attend programs, and take advantage of the library’s many resources!

MAAS, SARAH J.

A COURT OF MIST AND FURY (2016)

■ 49 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 48 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

A COURT OF THORNS AND ROSES (2016)

■ 37 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 34 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

EMPIRE OF STORMS (2016)

■ 37 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 36 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

In 2023, ALA documented 324 challenges to 17 of Maas's titles

across five bestselling series, the most attempts to censor the works of one author during a single year.

In January, pressure group We the People of Jackson County submitted more than 200 written requests targeting 57 titles in libraries of Lee's Summit R-7 Schools (MO). The titles included *A Court of Mist and Fury*, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, and *Empire of Storms*.

The school board stated that while they must abide by their reconsideration policies, they were obligated to reject coordinated book banning efforts. The district formed 28 review committees, on which volunteers spent nearly 2,000 hours and district staff worked more than 400 hours. The process cost the district nearly \$19,000. All challenged titles were retained without restriction.

On October 19, the board adopted a new policy allowing removal of library books any district resident deems objectionable to their "values or fundamental religious beliefs." The policy requires removing the books as soon as a challenge is received.

The Education Law Center and the American Association of School Librarians sent letters citing grave constitutional concerns and urging the Board to overturn this policy.

MOEN, ERIKA AND MATTHEW NOLAN

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT THE TEEN'S GUIDE TO SEX, RELATIONSHIPS, AND BEING A HUMAN (2021)

■ 55 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 36 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

📖 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/talkBR

This comprehensive, thoughtful, well-researched graphic novel was written to help teens navigate friendships, relationships, jealousy, rejection, body image, gender, sexuality, and sex.

On April 4, the mayor of Anderson County (TN) and four county commissioners asked the sheriff to investigate whether 17 titles in the county's four public libraries violated state obscenity laws. The titles included *Let's Talk About It*.

While three of the books had previously been challenged and retained without restriction at the Clinton Public Library, the other titles had not been formally challenged. According to County Commissioner Stephen Verran, the list of titles was compiled by the Republican National Committee.

The sheriff's office found no grounds to pursue criminal charges. *Let's Talk About It* was retained.

If there's a local challenge reported in the news, write a letter to the editor or decision-makers.



Your letter could touch on the benefits of unrestricted reading, defend your right to read, or share your personal experience with reading a banned book. Find tips at uniteagainstbookbans.org/toolkit.

During 2023, **475 public library systems** and **435 school districts** reported at least one attempts to censor materials or services.

CELEBRATE BANNED BOOKS WEEK (SEPT. 22-28, 2024)

Attend local programs or start your own event. Learn more at ala.org/bbooks.

MCCORMICK, PATRICIA SOLD (2006)

■ 53 CHALLENGES
■ INCLUDED IN 51 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

📖 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/soldBR

Sold tells the story of a 13-year-old Nepalese girl sold into sexual slavery by her stepfather. It received the Gustav-Heinemann Peace Prize, the Quill Award, a California Young Reader Medal, and the Eliot Rosewater Award, and it was a National Book Award finalist.

In February, the Blackhawk Area School District (PA) began banning library books at the behest of two Moms for Liberty members serving on the board. Ten titles, including *Sold*, were removed without following district policy.



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

HOW CAN YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY STAND TOGETHER AGAINST CENSORSHIP?



Join the Unite Against Book Bans campaign and use the action toolkit at uniteagainstbookbans.org/toolkit to get started.

When a challenge occurs in your community,

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



When legislation adverse to public and school libraries is introduced,

contact your representatives and share your concerns. If you need talking points, contact your state library association or ALA. When school and library board members are on the ballot, ask them to sign the candidate pledge or use the candidate questionnaire at uniteagainstbookbans.org/vote.

"CHALLENGES" ARE NOT JUST COMPLAINTS ABOUT BOOKS.

They are willful attempts to remove or restrict access to library resources or programming. Challenges can be written complaints, forms submitted to a library, or calls to action on social media.



MORRISON, TONI THE BLUEST EYE (1994)

- 62 CHALLENGES
- INCLUDED IN 55 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

 **BOOK RÉSUMÉ:** bit.ly/bluestBR

Nobel laureate Toni Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye* raises questions about race, class, and gender while examining beauty and conformity. It tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, an 11-year-old Black girl who prays for her eyes to turn blue so she will be beautiful, people will notice her, and her world will be different.

On August 30, a group called Parents and Taxpayers Against Pornography in Rockford Public Schools (MI) filed a lawsuit claiming school administrators were circulating library books that were "harmful to minors." They also claimed the district violated state guidelines on sex education materials because "sexually explicit" books were in school libraries. The suit focused on 14 titles, including *The Bluest Eye*. Most were by or about LGBTQIA+ or BIPOC individuals.

On October 25, Judge George J. Quist dismissed the lawsuit, ruling the books possessed literary value and did not meet the statutory definition of "harmful to minors." He cited the fact that all received accolades or appeared on bestseller lists as proof. Quist also ruled the books did not qualify as sex education instructional materials as they were not part of the curriculum.

THOMAS, ANGIE THE HATE U GIVE (2017)

- 40 CHALLENGES
- INCLUDED IN 32 MULTI-TITLE CHALLENGES

The Hate U Give received eight starred reviews and numerous accolades, including a Horn Book Award. This powerful YA novel tells the story of how everything in the life of a 16-year-old Black girl changed after witnessing a White police officer shoot and kill an unarmed Black man during a traffic stop.

Collier County Public Schools (FL) removed 88 titles from district libraries because board members feared they had "sexual content" prohibited by Florida HB 1069. The district posted a 73-page document to their website listing the "explicit sexual content" used to justify the bans.

This is their rationale for banning *The Hate U Give*: "There's talk of an affair between two adults. Teens engage in heavy petting, talk about having sex and condoms. A teen girl is described as being on birth control, and there's discussion of teen pregnancy and the assumption that a married couple is having sex when they go to their bedroom and turn the television up loud. A woman is revealed to be a sex worker."

STAY UPDATED ON CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS



Follow the Office for Intellectual Freedom on X (@OIF) and Facebook (@ALAOIF), and subscribe to Intellectual Freedom News (oif.ala.org).

TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2023

The American Library Association documented **1,247 attempts to censor** materials and services at libraries, schools, and universities in 2023. Of the **4,240 unique titles** that were challenged or banned in 2023, here are the top 10 most frequently challenged.



1



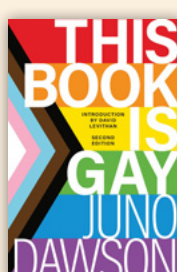
GENDER QUEER
by Maia Kobabe
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

2



ALL BOYS AREN'T BLUE
by George M. Johnson
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

3



THIS BOOK IS GAY
by Juno Dawson
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, sex education, claimed to be sexually explicit

4



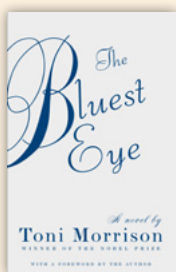
THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER
by Stephen Chbosky
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content, depicts rape, depicts drug use, profanity

5



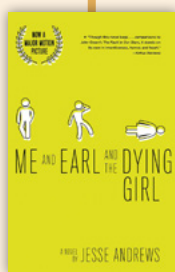
FLAMER
by Mike Curato
REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

6



THE BLUEST EYE
by Toni Morrison
REASONS: depicts rape, depicts incest, claimed to be sexually explicit, EDI content

7/8

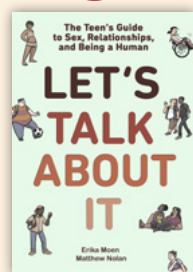


ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL
by Jesse Andrews
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, profanity



TRICKS
by Ellen Hopkins
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, depicts drug use, depicts rape, LGBTQIA+ content

9



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT
by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, sex education, LGBTQIA+ content

10



SOLD
by Patricia McCormick
REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, depicts rape

Claims that material is "sexually explicit" are frequently used to target non-explicit materials with LGBTQIA+ characters. "EDI Content" encompasses works on race, racism, and social justice, which are often targeted as "critical race theory" or "divisive concepts."



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The Book Report 2023 (25-pack)



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