

# BANNED Books

WEEK 2022

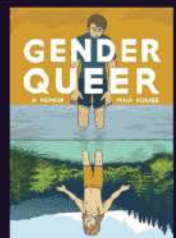
"If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all—except the censor. We must know all the facts and hear all the alternatives and listen to all the criticisms. Let us welcome controversial books and controversial authors. For the Bill of Rights is the guardian of our security as well as our liberty." — **President John F. Kennedy**

Beginning in the 1980s as a statement against the challenges to book choices due to their content, Banned Books Week brings together the reading community (*domestic and international*) to recognize historical and current efforts to censor books in libraries and schools. This year's theme of **"Books Unite Us. Censorship Divides Us"** highlights that all readers -- particularly young people -- deserve to see themselves, their stories, histories, and cultures reflected in the books available to them; the protection of access to books and reading is not only foundational to libraries, but also to American democracy.

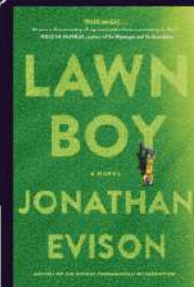
"Being the honorary chair for Banned Books Week is important to me because I know what it is like to grow up and not have stories about my own lived experience, nor the truth outside of a historical context. This is a fight for the truth that has always existed even if it rarely gets told. When the youth are empowered with stories about the experiences of others, they become adults who understand the necessity for equity and equality and have the tools to build a world the likes of which we have never seen." -- **George M. Johnson**, author of *All Boys Aren't Blue* and Honorary Chair of Banned Books Week.



While often the battleground for legal challenges to access and remove materials, the library vehemently protects the First Amendment rights of all individuals as outlined in the Constitution and as one of the first amendments of the Bill of Rights. This effort includes protecting access to knowledge – and the right to receive information—a right reinforced by the Supreme Court ruling in *Board of Education v. Pico* (1982): "the right to receive ideas is a necessary predicate to the recipient's meaningful exercise of his own rights of speech, press, and political freedom."



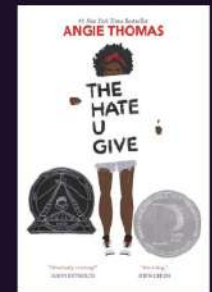
The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom has been tracking challenges made to library, university, and school materials since 1990. In 2021 alone, more than 729 documented challenges were made in the United States; this marked the highest number of challenges recorded by the ALA in the twenty-one years of data collection by the organization. Books about or written by Black and/or LGBTQIA+ people were the most targeted of the efforts to ban materials. The campaign to ban books has shifted from not just racial justice (a popular subject for book challenges in 2020) to include gender identity and expression in 2021.



The unprecedented surge in the number of challenges in 2021 and today are increasingly from the top-down – at the level of local and state governments restricting access to materials in schools and libraries. For libraries, censorship is a significant and urgent issue that directly counteracts their position to uphold the intellectual freedom guaranteed in these spaces as public institutions.

"In recent months, a national campaign demanding the censorship of books and resources that mirror the lives of those who are gay, queer, or transgender, or that tell the stories of persons who are Black, Indigenous, or persons of color have surfaced. Efforts to ban books have empowered elected and non-elected officials to abandon constitutional principles, ignore the rule of law, and disregard individual rights, resulting in local and state governments attempting to censor library collections. Some individuals who have filed challenges have resorted to intimidation and threats to achieve removal, targeting the safety and livelihoods of library workers, educators, and board members who have dedicated themselves to public service and educating youth." — **the American Library Association**

Libraries play a crucial role in protecting access from censorship and the right to read, learn, and grow – one of the foundations of democracy. Named the "*Patron Saint of Banned Books*" by the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund due to her work consistently making the top ten challenged and banned books lists, Toni Morrison wrote and spoke about the pivotal role of access to materials. In 1982, she referenced that Adolf Hitler used book banning to spread fascism and the oppression of marginalized groups. Shortly after he was officially appointed as the Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler and his followers first attacked and burned what they deemed "*un-German*" literature across the country. On May 6, 1933, Nazis burned over 20,000 books from the (privately funded) Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute of Sexology) in Berlin's Bebelplatz Square. The destruction of these vital works – including many of the first original academic texts on sexuality, gender, equality, and identity — began the "*moral crusade*" of persecution against many communities, including queer men, as they sought to create a "*racially and culturally pure*" nation.



"The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, canceled films—that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink." — **Toni Morrison**

Celebrate **Banned Books Week** by learning more about the books challenged last year and the continued fight by libraries to maintain access to materials in the face of censorship. Each of the Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2021 are available to check out at the Ramstein and Vogelweh Libraries or online through the Libby and Hoopla applications.



"Young people need to have access to a variety of books from which they can learn about different perspectives. So, despite this organized effort to ban books, libraries remain ready to do what we always have: make knowledge and ideas available so people are free to choose what to read." — **ALA President Patricia Wong**

The ALA defines a challenge as a documented request to remove materials based on their content by an individual or group; a ban is the physical removal of a title. While most removals are unsuccessful, the push to challenge the use/availability of a book in a classroom or library is one of the most common forms of censorship in the USA. A survey by the ALA found that 82-97% of book challenges are not reported to the organization.