



The Past, Present, & Future Of Book Censorship

By Kelly Jensen
Michigan Library Association Annual Conference,
October 2024

Slide Deck: <https://tinyurl.com/MLA24-Keynote>

Hello!

Editor at Book Riot (bookriot.com)

Author/Editor of 3 YA anthologies

Former Illinois + Wisconsin public librarian

2024 Library Journal Mover & Shaker

**Chicagoan of the Year in 2022 and
Publishers Weekly Person of the Year in 2022 for
anti-censorship work**



What We'll Cover

01

**A Brief History of US
Book Censorship**

02

Where We Are Now

03

What's Next?

04

The Good News



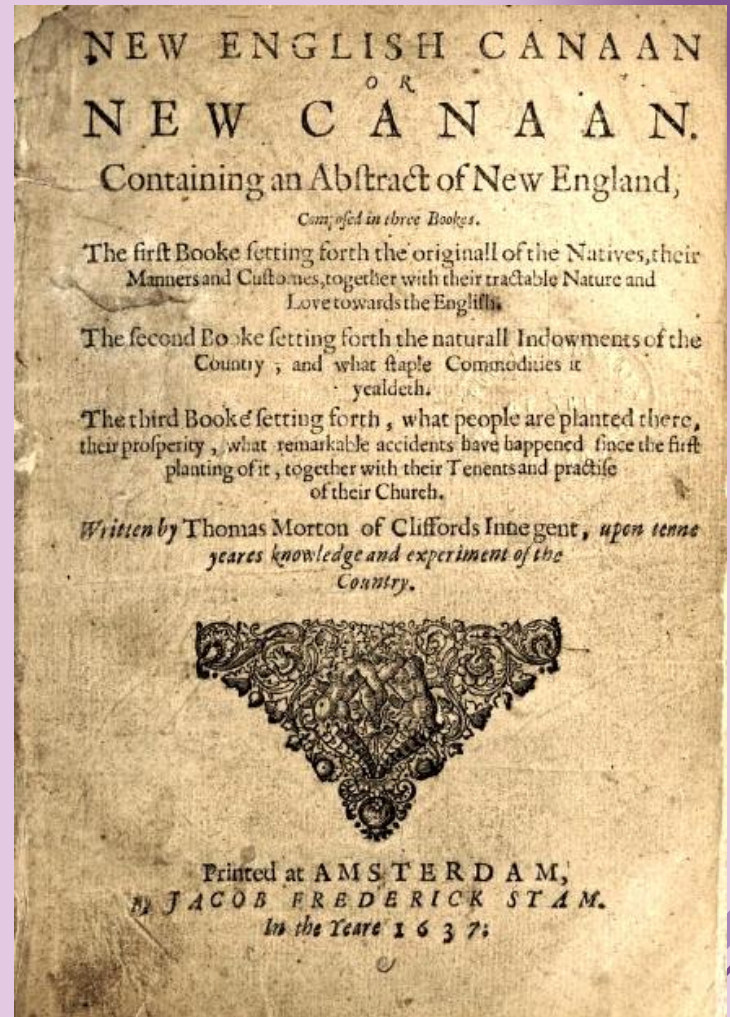
01.

A (Very) Brief History of US Book Censorship

Banning Books Is a United States Tradition

- Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* in 1637 critiqued the Puritan government and presented Native People as human.
- Significant book banning during the Civil War, with titles like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* frequently targeted.
- Post Civil War, the rise of groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy exerted authority over the content of curriculum and books in schools.

The First Amendment was ratified in December 1791.



Ulysses by James Joyce Banned

“Nausicaa” Serialized

The “Nausicaa” episode of *Ulysses* was serialized in the April 1920 American literary journal *The Little Review*.

***Ulysses* On Trial**

In 1921, the editors were put on trial for publishing the serialization. The three judges deemed the book “obscene” based on legal precedent and in violation of the Comstock Act.

Obscenity Charges Filed

The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice files a lawsuit against the (queer female) editors of *The Little Review* for publishing what they deemed obscenity.

United States v. One Book Called Ulysses

Random House had the rights to the full book and tested legal precedent in 1933. The test led to the courts, where the book was deemed not obscene...twice! It also opened the door to redefining “obscenity.”

A Detour to 1930s Germany



German nationalists began to burn books they deemed “un-German.” By the end of the Second World War, Nazis burned upwards of 100 million books across Europe.

Maybe these sound familiar?

- Marxist, communist, pacifist literature
- LGBTQ+ books (often labeled “pornography” or “explicit”)
- Jewish literature
- Any historical writing that does not exalt the German people and culture
- “Liberal” and “democratic” themes
- Writing about sex or sexuality that isn’t about advancing the German race

The American Red Scare

But who are the book burners? "Not me," replied Senator McCarthy, "I haven't burned any books." The President, McCarthy added, must be referring to his own Department of State whose directives, sanctioned by Secretary Dulles, order U.S. libraries abroad to remove all books "by Communists, fellow travelers, et cetera."

- A moral panic over communism infiltrating the United States and its government
- Senator Joseph McCarthy identified communist sympathizers and deemed their work and influence be suppressed
- Overseas libraries were a target of McCarthyism and the State Department demanded these libraries remove materials deemed "UnAmerican"—some libraries even burned them.

Fahrenheit 451 was written in response to the Red Scare.

Also In The 1950s

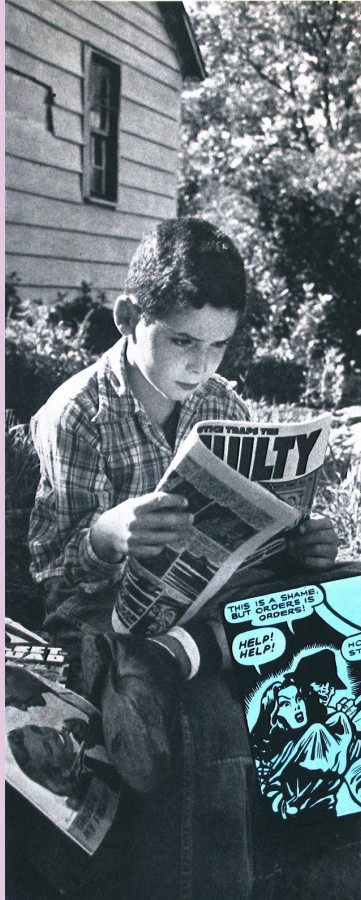
The Freedom to Read

The American Library Association publishes their Freedom to Read statement in 1953 amid widespread censorship.

Comics Under Attack

The late 1940s through the 1950s saw the rise of censors targeting comics out of fear that they contributed to juvenile delinquency.

Frederic Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent*.




What
PARENTS
don't know
about
COMIC BOOKS

The parent who shrugs and says his children read only "good" comics usually hasn't read these books himself.

Here is the startling truth about the 90,000,000 comic books America's children read each month.

BY FREDRIC WERTHAM, M. D.



"Every imaginable crime is described in detail. By teaching the technique, comic books also teach the content."

"Juvenile delinquency of our time cannot be understood unless you know what has been put into the mind of children."

Creating Laws & Codifying Definitions

Roth (1957) to Miller (1973)

Roth v. United States (1957) and Miller v. California (1973) established a definition and test for “obscenity.”

Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico (1982)

Slaughterhouse Five is among several books banned in Island Trees High School in New York for being “anti-American, anti-Christian, and just plain filthy.” This led to a divided Supreme Court decision that narrowly stated student First Amendment Rights were violated by the removals

The Supreme Court has established a three-part legal definition for obscenity called the Miller Test.

1. The average person, applying current community standards, must find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests.
2. The work depicts or describes in a patently offensive way sexual conduct as defined by state law.
3. The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.



<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorship/courtcases>

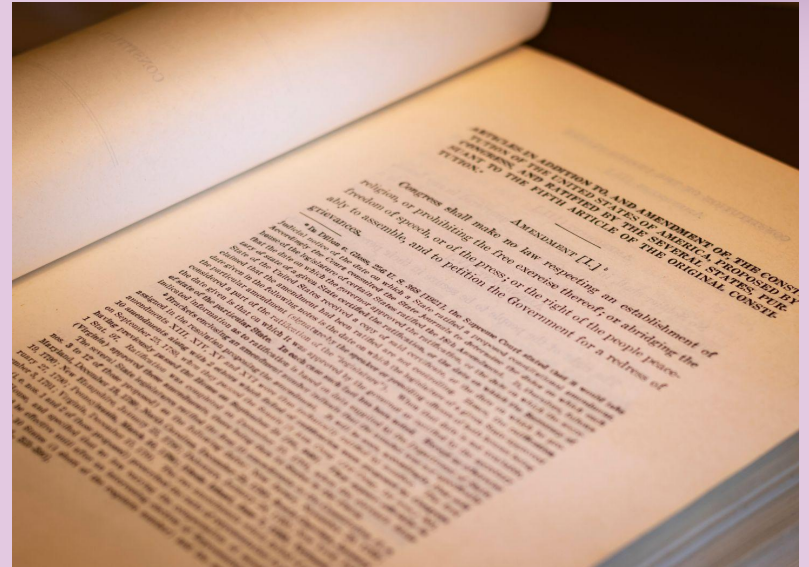
Onto the 1980s, 1990s, & Early 2000s



- The first Banned Books Week held in 1982.
- In 1991, *Daddy's Roommate* was one of the first books written for children depicting LGBTQ+ people positively. It was challenged and banned in public and school libraries nationwide. *Daddy's Roommate* was the second most challenged book between 1990 and 1999.
- The publication of *Harry Potter* in 1997 led to challenges and bans over its depiction of themes related to the occult, satanism, and anti-family messaging. *Harry Potter* was the most challenged book from 2000-2009 according to the ALA.
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and rise in comics—including their inclusion in libraries—led to challenges in the mid/late 00s.

The First Amendment

- The First Amendment provides that censorship is a violation of the freedom of speech.
- The only types of speech not protected by the First Amendment is imminent threats, obscenity, defamation, and words meant to incite violence.
- The First Amendment only protects **government speech**. It does not apply to private businesses or entities—that's why banning books in public libraries or public schools is censorship. Those are government entities.
- Growth in online forums raises some questions about freedom of speech—we *know* accounts like LibsofTikTok incite violence, but that speech is also not limited.



A key question is whether or not materials purchased for libraries constitutes government speech.

Puritanical Values

*The thread through historical & contemporary
book censorship*

“The fact is we’re not banning books, we’re not burning the classics,”

Opinion: We’re not banning books; just making sure they’re age-appropriate

“We’re not banning books, we’re just removing them from the library,”

‘This is not a book ban’

“First of all, I’d like to say, we’re not banning books,” said Light. “Stop saying we’re banning books. We’re not banning any books.”

02.

Book Censorship in the 2020s

First: Definitions

- **Book Challenge:** A formal complaint filed by an individual or group about a particular book. Challenges can lead to bans, but (thankfully!) most do not.
- **Censorship:** The broad term for suppression, erasure, or removal of any parts of a book, movie, play, or other work deemed “inappropriate,” offensive, or politically unacceptable.

Book censorship is composed of four actions:

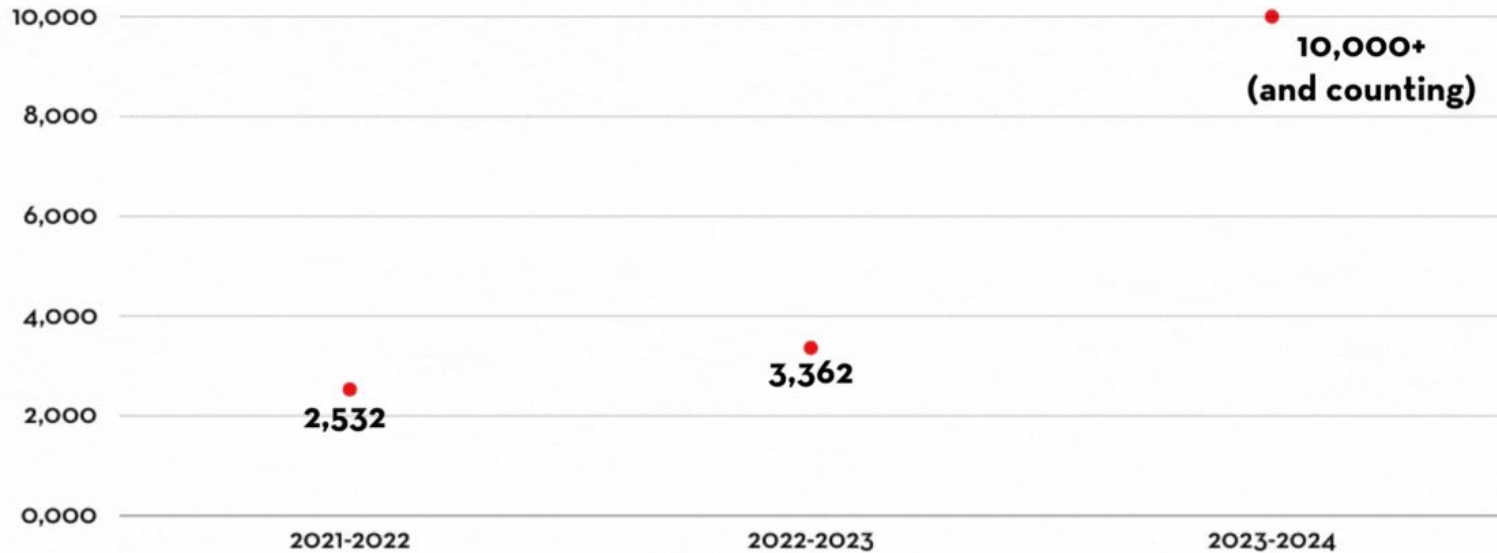
- Redaction
- Relocation
- Restriction
- Removal – AKA: a book ban

Book Ban:
the intentional removal of
material from where it once
belonged.

Book Bans are off the charts

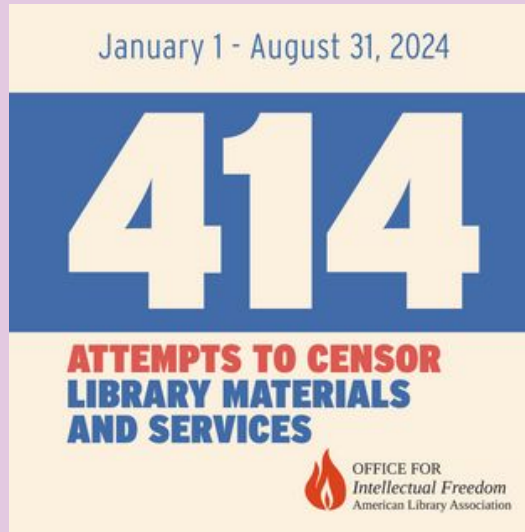


Book bans recorded per school year, July 1, 2021-June 30, 2024



And...

The American Library Association's data, which comes from reports they receive and news they find and record.



Three Key Phrases

1

“Critical Race Theory”

Books by or about people of color, as well as history by or about people of color.

2

“Comprehensive Sexuality Education”

LGBTQ+ books and content, as well as puberty books, anatomy books, and books about sexuality.

3

“Social Emotional Learning”

A catch-all including mental health, climate change, and other books deemed “inappropriate”/“indoctrination”

Why Books? Why Now?

“Reopen the schools” shifted to anti-masking debates shifted to anti-vaccination debates led to “parental rights”

Post 2020 election, right-wing groups found ways to give their voice—and money—to censorship efforts

Ongoing rhetoric around “Marxist” “government” schools meant to destabilize public institutions, with an end goal of public funding for private education.

Books are a very easy tool because they require time and effort to read and cherry-picking passages as evidence can appear good enough evidence. Create panic --> gain power --> own the outrage cycle



Framing the **Outrage**



“Reopen the Schools”

“Unmask Our Kids”

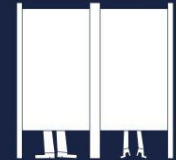
“My Body, My Choice”

“Ban CRT”

“No Naughty Books”

Transphobia

“Safe Bathrooms”



“Health Freedom”

“Curriculum Transparency”

“Parents’ Rights” / “School Choice”

“School Privatization”

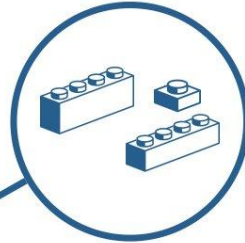
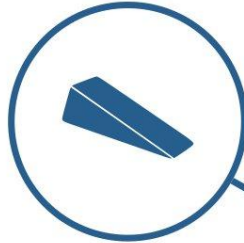
Framing the **Policy**



How do these emerging themes function together?

They Create a Wedge

The focus on opposition to pandemic-mitigation responses and on “banning CRT” serves to divide communities (Teachers, Students, Boards; Hospitals, Healthcare Workers). In general, it serves simply to generate outrage, fear and division.



They Serve as Building Block Issues

Issues such as “banning CRT”, “parental rights” and “health freedom” combine not only with each other but with other libertarian/anti-government views and values. CRT, in particular, is unique in being so loosely defined and poorly understood that any manner of things can be included in the concept (“Marxism”, “Communism”, “Indoctrination”).



“Take Back Control”

The opposition to CRT and masks/etc. taps into a Brexit-like populist theme about “taking back control” from elites - bureaucrats, teachers, academics, media, etc. It functions as the “politics of grievance”, distracting people from real issues.



They Mobilize the Base

This multi-pronged focus also serves to activate conservative voters, getting them to take action at a local level (petitions, speaking at school board meetings, posting on social media, etc.). It organizes the base. This will be tapped into at election time.



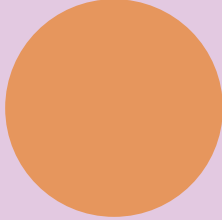
They Damage Public Schools

When organizers and promoters generate outrage around these topics they are prompting some parents (and students) to leave public schools for private “charter” schools. There is also the issue of the “closing of American minds” by making some topics off limits.

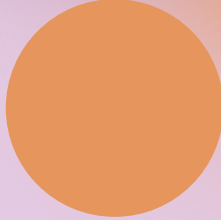
Of Note



The end goal is destabilizing & defunding public institutions like schools and libraries

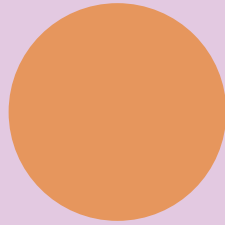


Book banners insist they aren't banning books and continue to change their definition to suit their goals.

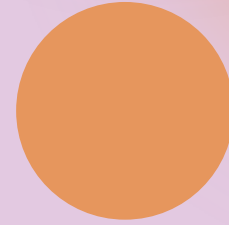


Book banning is extremely unpopular—but more on that soon

Of Note



Libraries already have policies regarding the collection and allow patrons to challenge materials—that's also a First Amendment right.

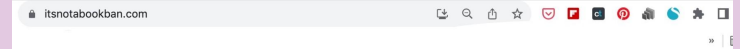
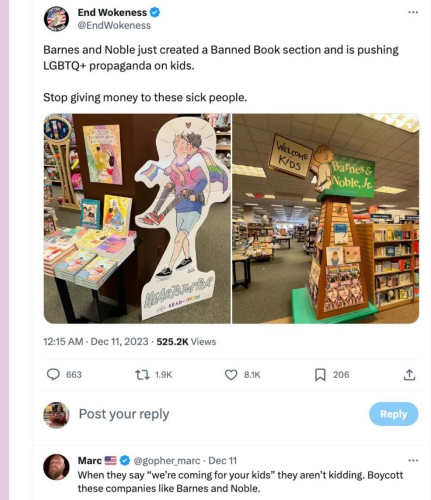


Public libraries are not parents; parents are!

“We’re Not Banning Books”

Are you trying to get these books banned?

We do **not** support 'banning' books. First and foremost, our mission is to inform parents on what is in these books being made available to children in schools. Parents can use this information to provide the proper guidance to children reading any of these books. Parents can also use this information to individually, or through groups representing their interests, engage with school boards to determine what works should be made available to their children while under the custodial care of their schools. We fully support both of these use cases, though we are not directly engaged in the latter. Any books that may be excluded from school libraries would still be available in public libraries or in stores for interested students to procure with parental consent.



Are You Being Told This Is An Attack on 'To Kill A Mockingbird'?

Are You Hearing Others Being Called "Book Banners"?

You Should Be Upset...

What Else?

Death of Local News

70 million people live in the 200 counties without a paper or the 1,630 counties with only one paper.

The largest 10 chains of news owners now own more than half the daily newspapers still remaining. As of 2022, 545 digital-only news sites, most employing 6 or fewer reporters. Most are in urban areas.

Algorithms

What happens when people engage with content online? They see more of the same. Bait people with outrageous claims and they'll continue to see and engage with it.

Mis-, Dis-, Mal- Information

Misinformation: Incorrect, misleading, not intentional

Disinformation: Purposefully incorrect or misleading

Malinformation: Close enough to feel true but meant to do harm

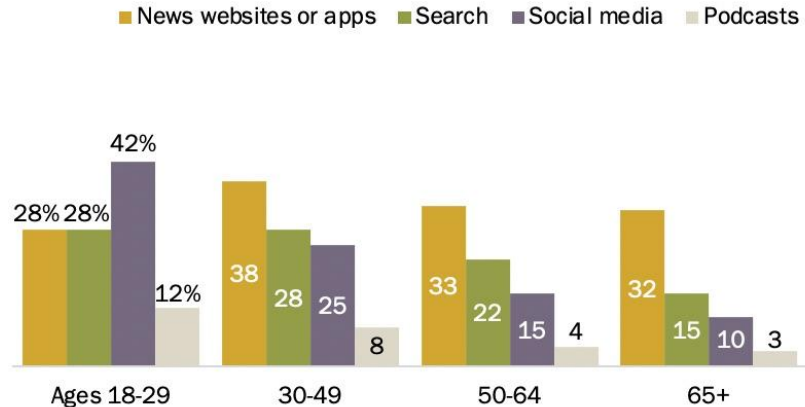
Down Ballot + The Long Game

Down ballot measures and candidates tend to not get much attention, and the long game of extremism is to take advantage of that.

How Do Adults Get Their News?

Online, most turn to news websites except for the youngest, who are more likely to use social media

% of U.S. adults who get news *often* from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

An Example



Moms for Liberty ✓
@Moms4Liberty



Looks like the cubs are unscathed.

Good job Mama.



6:45 PM · Sep 11, 2023 · 130.7K Views



An Example

 **Clay Bennett**
@BennettCartoons

9/8/2023- The Mama Bear #MomsforLiberty #MamaBear
tinyurl.com/4ha9cyvz

THE MAMA BEAR



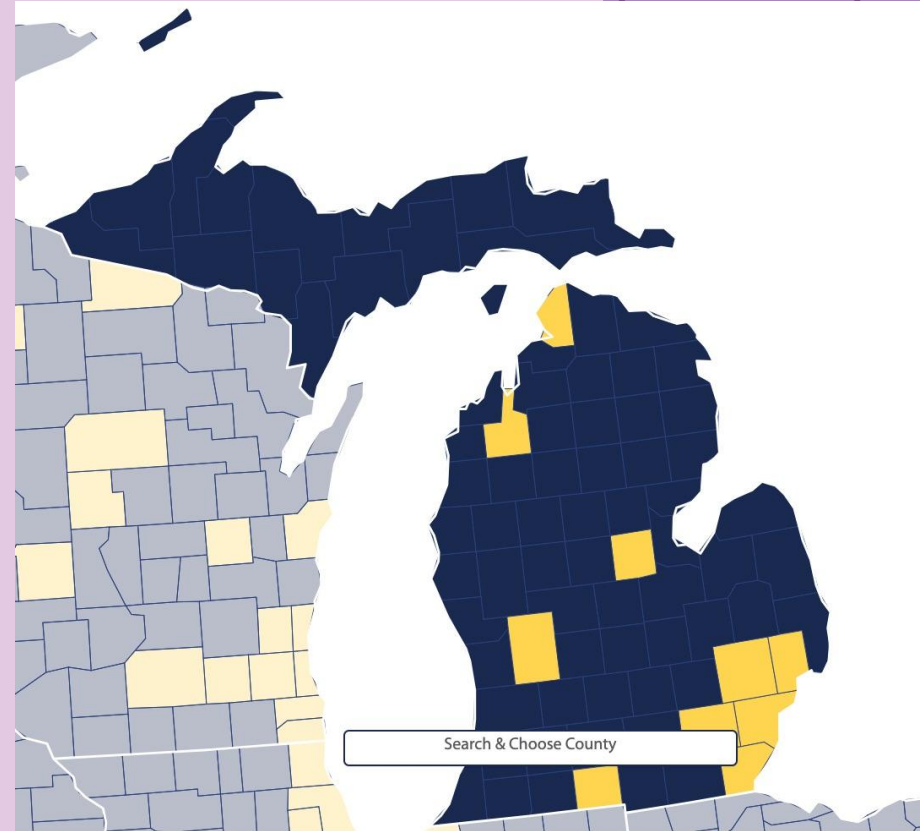
6:00 PM · Sep 7, 2023 · 8,098 Views

26 87 242 7

Moms For Liberty

- “Biggest” players in the book banning game
- 200 chapters, 40 states, 100,000+ members
- Operate on the county level
- Creators and curators of BookLooks.org (formerly booklook.info)

Michigan chapters in Emmet, Grand Traverse, Midland, Kent, Macomb, Oakland, Wayne, Washtenaw, Monroe, and Branch counties



Moms For Liberty

- It only takes 10 “liberty minded” people to form a chapter.
- No requirements for a chapter other than to show up for meetings.
- Active omission of information fuels their success
- Their review system, BookLooks, is entering school systems nationwide & actively cited by media as though it is a legitimate review source.

Do you perform the full “Miller Test” for obscenity for each work?

We are not determining if a work, as a whole, is obscene, per the legal definition. Our rating system gives a recommendation for the level of parental guidance or action based on the work as a whole. Suffice it to say, most works we rate as “No Minors” (4) or “Aberrant Content” (5) would likely be considered obscene by most standards, but that is not what we are determining.

Some astute critics have opined on the fact our definition for “obscene” mirrors the definition from the Miller test but leaves out the wording “taken as a whole.” This is because we are only applying the word “obscene” to instances contained within the work (evaluated in context), not the work as a whole. Again, our rating system is not evaluating obscenity (in the legal sense) for the overall work. This should not be misunderstood to construe that we do not evaluate the work as a whole when we assign a rating- we most assuredly do.

TLDR: We do everything one would do to perform a Miller test, evaluating all “obscene” instances in context and taking the work as a whole. We **don't** make a determination of the legal “obscenity” status of the work as a whole because lawyers are expensive. We **do** make a determination of where the work as a whole (with everything evaluated in context) lands in our rating scale. We also offer our opinion that anything with a 4 or 5 on our scale would likely be determined to be “obscene” in the eyes of the law.

BookLooks.org

Profanity/Derogatory	Count
Ass	9
Bitch	10
Clit	2
Cock	9
Cunt	2
Dick	8
Dyke	1
Fag	1
Fuck	47
Goddamn	3
Piss	1
Pussy	4
Queer	7
Shit	11

- “Review” database used to distribute biased information about “inappropriate” books.
- Uses “UBC” ratings which amounts to counting curse words, “sexual” scenes, religious beliefs
- Group insists that it is not theirs, but the receipts are there.

The naughty word count from Roxane Gay’s “Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture.” It’s rated 4, meaning no one under 18 should access it.

BookLooks.org [BookLook.Info]

Rating ↓	Title ↑	Author ↑
5	Lucky	Alice Sebold
5	Push	Sapphire
5	Sold	Patricia McCormick
5	TRIANGLES	Ellen Hopkins
5	Tricks	Ellen Hopkins
5	YOU: A NOVEL	Caroline Kepnes
4	SEX PLUS: LEARNING, LOVING, AND ENJOYING YOUR BODY	Laci Green
4	SEX IS A FUNNY WORD	Cory Silverberg and Fiona Smyth
4	BREATHLESS	Jennifer Niven
4	A COURT OF MIST AND FURY	Sarah J. Maas
4	A Court of Silver Flames	Sarah J. Maas
4	BREATHLESS	Jennifer Niven
4	Crank	Ellen Hopkins
4	Damsel	Elana Arnold
4	Forever...	Judy Bloom
4	INFANDOUS	Elana K. Arnold
4	LAST NIGHT AT THE TELEGRAPH CLUB	Malinda Lo
4	Red Hood	Elana Arnold
4	The Haters	Jesse Andrews
4	THE INFINITE MOMENT OF US	Lauren Myracle
4	THE NOWHERE GIRLS	Amy Reed
4	This Book Is Gay	Juno Dawson
4	Tilt	Ellen Hopkins

4	WHAT GIRLS ARE MADE OF	Elena K. Arnold
4	A Court of Thorns and Roses	Sarah J. Maas
4	A Court of Frost and Starlight	Sarah J. Maas
4	A Court of Wings and Ruin	Sarah J. Maas
4	Empire of Storms	Sarah J. Maas
4	House of Earth and Blood	Sarah J. Maas
4	The Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini
4	Milk and Honey	Rupi Kaur
4	Jesus Land: A Memoir	Julia Scheeres
4	People Kill People	Ellen Hopkins
4	Beautiful	Amy Reed
4	Living Dead Girl	Elizabeth Scott
4	The Perks of Being a Wallflower	Stephen Chbosky
4	All Boys Aren't Blue	George M. Johnson
4	House of Sky and Breath	Sarah J. Maas
4	Slaughterhouse-Five	Kurt Vonnegut
4	Normal People	Sally Rooney
4	The V-Word	Amber Keyser

BookLooks.org [BookLook.Info]

LOLITA



Lolita

50th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Adult

By Vladimir Nabokov

ISBN: 9780307744029

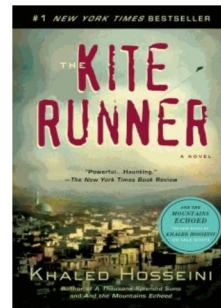


You are about to access material that may contain content of an ADULT nature. These files may include pictures and materials that some viewers may find offensive. If you are under the age of 18, or if such material offends you or if it is illegal for you to view these materials, please exit now.

3
/5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

THE KITE RUNNER



Adult

By Khaled Hosseini

ISBN: 9781101217238



You are about to access material that may contain content of an ADULT nature. These files may include pictures and materials that some viewers may find offensive. If you are under the age of 18, or if such material offends you or if it is illegal for you to view these materials, please exit now.

4
/5

Not For Minors
BookLooks Review Rating

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities involving pedophilia; sexual nudity; and mild profanity

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual assault of a minor; prostitution involving minors and adults; and mild/infrequent profanity.

In Michigan: Mary in the Library

- Mary in the Library—an offshoot of LaVerna in the Library, a creation by Utah Parents United, a group modeled in the spirit of No Left Turn in Education.
- Utilize and develop RatedBooks.org, similar to and aligned with BookLooks.org.
- Track and report on where books deemed “inappropriate” are located in schools statewide and help trigger challenges in those institutions.

Book Boundaries

Just like videos that are rated “R” that are not available in schools, neither should rated “R” or above books be available in schools.

Parents who desire rated “R” or above books for their kids can use the public libraries or buy them just about anywhere.

Booklooks Rating System 0-5

- 0 = For everyone: Content is appropriate for all ages
- 1 = Child Guidance: Some content may not be appropriate for very young children
- 2 = Teen Guidance: Some content may not be appropriate for children under 13
- 3 = Minor Restricted: Under 18 requires guidance of a parent or guardian
- 4 = No Minors: Adult content. No Children under 18
- 5 = Aberrant Content: Adult only

Resources

Michigan School Library Book Transparency



Booklooks.org



Mary in the Library USA Facebook



Destiny Discover/Follett



Do you want **SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT** in your children's hands?



Then let Mary show you what your kids can read.

WARNING
NO MINORS ALLOWED

In Michigan: Mary in the Library

Tandr Irish Admin · Group expert · September 25 at 8:40 AM

Grand Haven School District, Michigan.

Mary Jane Evink, curriculum director of Grand Haven Schools: "4 pages of the book had content of teens being intimate and 2 pages had two college students being intimate." She also said she was disgusted by the lactation scene. She states "yah, it was uncomfortable". She goes on to say that "the writing was really good." Because the author is black makes the content of the book good.

"Red at the Bone" Rated 3/5: <https://tinyurl.com/2dcdeaph>

See more

7

1 comment

Like Comment Send

Stephanie Jazdyk Jacobson
Ugh...the writing in these books is NOT good. Simple sentences, filled with profanity. Very few challenging, new words - unless they are related to sexual activities and/or drug use.

2w Like Reply

Write a comment...

Tandr Irish Admin · December 12 at 9:41 AM

Me and My Dysphoria Monster by Laura Kate Dale

Found in Michigan Elementary School Libraries and possibly the classrooms.

Rated 1/5 (Child Guidance)

Book Rating Review: <https://tinyurl.com/4pu6duxv>

ME & MY DYSPHORIA MONSTER

Book Summary:
A story for teens who gender dysphoria is a constant struggle. Right with the characters for us to get.

Summary of Concerns:
The book includes illustrations of gender dysphoria and references to gender dysphoria and references to gender dysphoria and references to gender dysphoria.

Easy Reader

By Laura Kate Dale
ISBN: 978-1-8399-7093-1

1 Child Guidance

1 2 comments

Like Comment Send

Tandr Irish Author Admin
Attwood Elementary, Lansing, MI
Dwight Rich School of the Arts elementary School, Lansing MI
Lewton Elementary, Lansing, MI... See more

2w Like Reply

Carrie Sparks
You know what blows my mind? Our school is a hotspot right now because many parents are LIVID about impending transgender bathrooms. I am sitting going, "Seriously. Have you seen what's in your LIBRARY, for the love of God???" None of these people HAVE A CLUE!!!!

2w Like Reply

In Michigan: Mary in the Library

Mary Book Brochure

Pico -Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico. This case is what some schools lawyers use to keep the books in the schools, it is worth a read. The case ended in a plurality opinion which does not make it binding or precedence

[Organizations Revealing Inappropriate Library Books - Google My Maps](#)-This map identifies parent organizations for informational purposes only. A listing does not necessarily imply affiliation or agreement. Want to add your organization? Fill out this form: <https://tinyurl.com/mrtm2dj4>

How to search for MI books

[Destiny Discover | Follett School Solutions | School Picker \(gofollett.com\)](#) This site is what most schools use but not all for search for books

Website for Michigan [Michigan School Library Book Transparency | Rated Books](#)

Michigan School Map locations of books Rated 5/5 [Books Rated 5/5 \(Worst-Adults Only\) Mary in the Library Michigan](#)

Michigan School Map Locations of books Rated 4/5 [Books Rated 4/5 \(NC-17\) Mary in the Library Michigan](#)

Michigan Book List [Michigan List](#) In the book list there are sheets that include Books in MI schools, Schools that books have been found with links, Good Reads options and any Articles or Videos about the book issues.

A presentation on how to challenge books, which includes laws and resources

Challenging Books

The Rating System explained. [Book Rating Process](#)

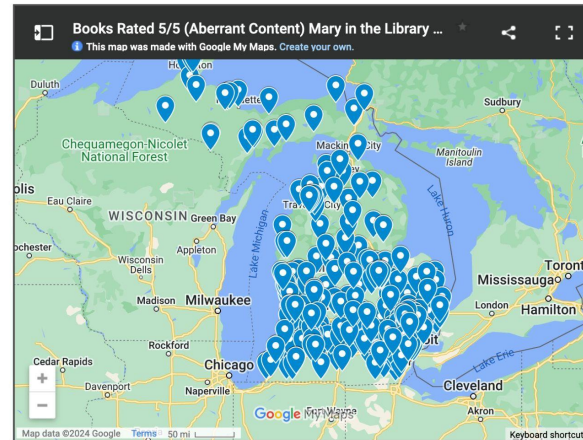
How to create a professional binder of the material in your schools

[Create a district school binder](#)

Information about Michigan Electronic Library Sora, these allow easy access to inappropriate books in schools [Michigan Election Library](#)

Spreadsheet

Specific Schools Where Available....



Rated 5 (worst) →

Rated 4 (18+) →

Rated 3 →

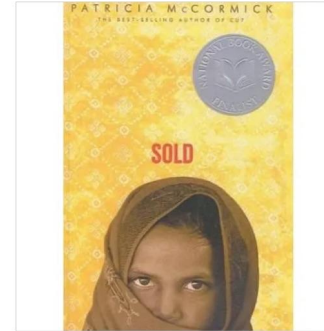
Elementary →

National Orgs →

RatedBooks.Org

teens. Additionally, the description of one girl's suicide and the Nepalese mothers drinking the juice from the ink tree so that they will cause themselves to miscarry babies that they do not want to be born only to die later, yields difficult classroom discussions. This is particularly true when the teacher may not be aware of the personal beliefs or opinions of the student's family on such topics. I would

RatedBooks gives **Sold** a rating of 5, "Aberrant Content, Adults Only."



Sold by Patricia McCormick

Book Summary

The story of a girl from Nepal named Lakshmi, who is sold into sexual slavery in India.

Summary of Concerns

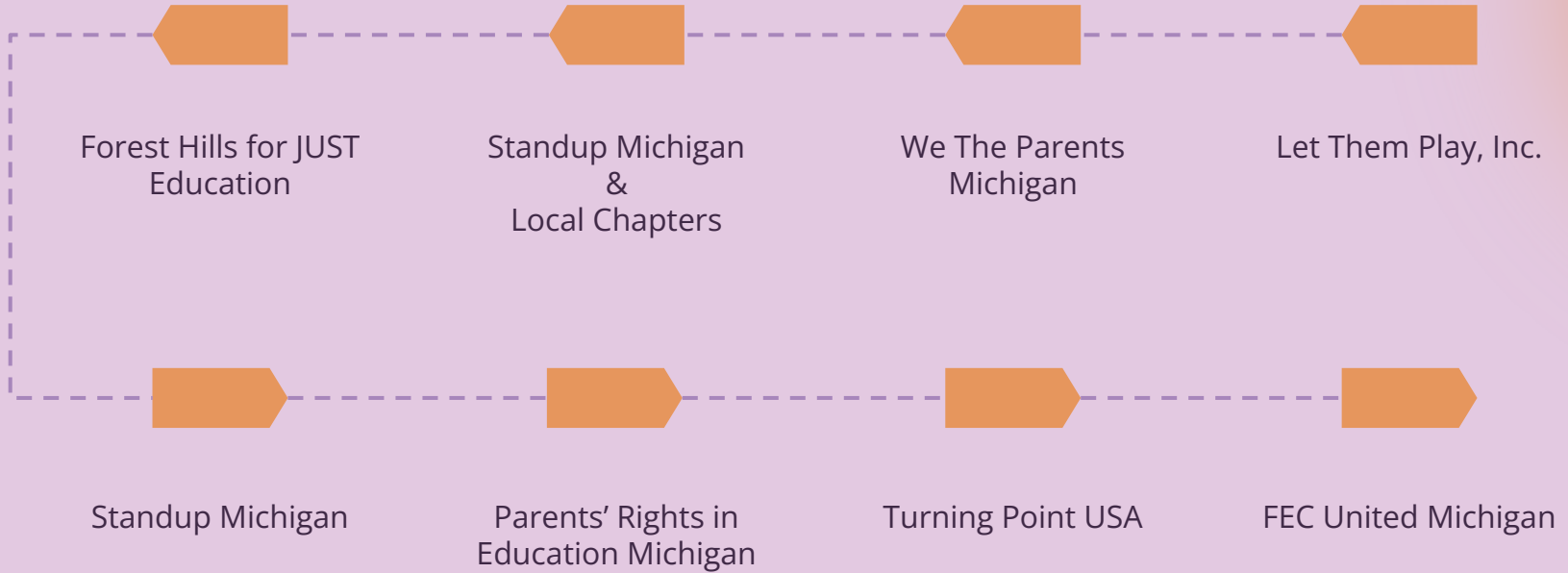
This contains explicit aberrant sexual activities including rape of a minor, prostitution, and explicit violence

- Publisher : Hyperion (April 1, 2008)
- **Book Rating**
Review: <https://tinyurl.com/bddxsp23>
- Slick Sheet: <https://tinyurl.com/z69xw59n>

Thoughts from Rated Books:

While the story provides an unflinching look at the crime of sex trafficking in Nepal and India - a practice that should be condemned and eradicated- the graphic nature of the narrative is inappropriate for children, pre-teens, and teens under the age of 18. The descriptions of the ongoing rape/violation and physical abuse suffered by the girls is emotionally disturbing and traumatic for many younger teens. Additionally, the description of one girl's suicide and the Nepalese mothers drinking the juice from the ink tree so that they will cause themselves to miscarry babies that they do not want to be born only to die later, yields difficult classroom discussions. This is particularly true when the teacher may not be aware of the personal beliefs or opinions of the student's family on such topics. I would strongly recommend that teachers who select this book for whole class guides reading activities first secure the consent of the parents to have their child participate. Encouraging parents to read the book with their child allow them the opportunity to facilitate discussions of the content in a way that they find developmentally appropriate.

Other Local Michigan Censor-Friendly Groups



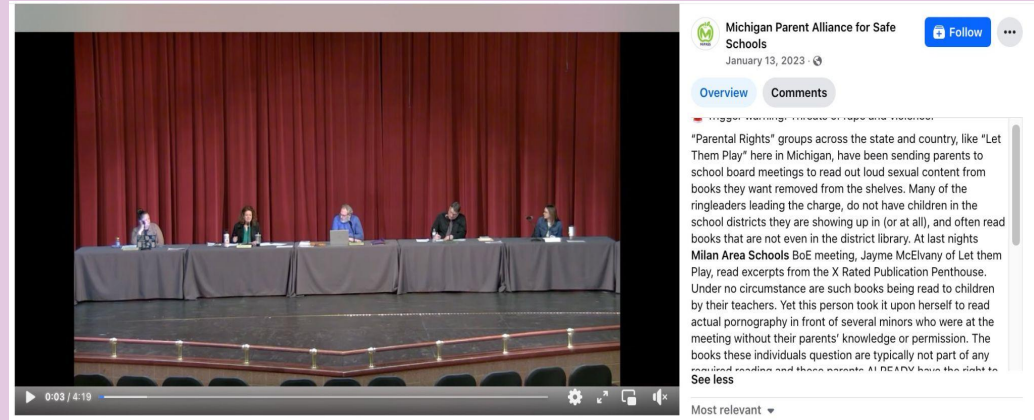
Censorship Stories Across Michigan

- Lapeer District Library saw *Gender Queer* under fire in March 2023 after a complaint from a county prosecutor; title was retained unanimously.
- Chippewa Valley Schools heard months of complaints from a well-coordinated group about “porn” in the school library beginning in August 2022. District created opt-out forms but complaints moved to county to create more drama.
- Ferndale Public Library hit by “Hide the Pride” June 2023.



Censorship Stories Across Michigan

- DeWitt Public Schools canceled an *optional* class in 2024 about pronoun use for first graders because parents complained about the reading choice called *They, She, He, Me: Free to Be!*
- Forest Hills High School administration pulled 6 books from shelves without due process. This led to a lawsuit from the ACLU. The same player causing issues here has been causing issues in Kent ISD and Lowell.
- Brandywine Schools got a conservative majority board and have been banning away–books deemed to have “sexually explicit content” were banned completely for K-6 and required permission for 7-12. They planned at the end of 2023 to implement a ratings system in the library.



Censorship Stories Across Michigan

- Parents claimed a Coloma Community School educator passed out “porn” when sharing *Looking For Alaska*. One parent called the police.
- Portage Public Schools removed *Push* from the school library after a single complaint from someone who had no kids in the district.
- Let Them Play—a Michigan-based “parental rights” group—has been especially difficult toward Milan School District, comparing library books to Penthouse.

“It becomes very difficult though to continue to compromise and have honest discussions about these books when the following language is routinely thrown at you: ‘disgusting, shameful, pervert, groomer,’” said Board Secretary Michelle Heikka. “The playbook seems to be that if I can’t convince you of my point of view, I’ll resort to name calling and try and get you there. And once you reduce someone to something as horrific as a pervert or a groomer, the next step becomes very easy and it incites some to actually resort to physical threats.”

Alpena Public Library

- March 2024: Target of mass disinformation campaign started by the local Salvation Army and church; demand relocation of 14 LGBTQ+ and puberty/sex ed books
- Library was up for millage renewal; millage makes up 3/4 of the library's budget.
- Library director and board of directors followed their process with help from the state library and an attorney.
- While the Mayor agreed with the decision, the County Commissioners didn't. They moved to fire the entire Board if the books were not moved.
- The director resigned days after the County Commissioner's threat.
- At this point, an anti-millage campaign amps up across the county.

Alpena Public Library



This is over 14 books in a library with a 2023-2024 print collection of 54,000. That's .003% of the collection.



Todd Smalenberg for State Representative is in Alpena, MI.

June 30 · 🌐

...

Alpena library is derelict in their duties of protecting our children, pornography of any type does not belong in children or teenage sections. If the commissioners will not fix this then the people can, vote no on the millage. Parents if you child checks out pornography notify the Sherriffs office that an adult allowed them access to pornography, that is a crime. Until people start getting arrested for pushing pornography on our children they will continue with their abhorrent actions. Pornography has no place in our libraries. Facebook will not allow the images on this site, that should tell you all you need to know. Anyone lying about book banning is part of the problem! Truly disgusting and even more so for anyone to defend it!

A public organization is funded by ALL the people and is inherently owned by ALL the people.

The result is that a public library exists to serve ALL THE PEOPLE.

Serving ALL the people suggests respecting and accommodating many different beliefs, faiths, backgrounds, goals, etc. A thoughtful and respectful management understands that there is always a way to meet such a requirement.

When ONE group of people demands and imposes their particular belief, faith, background, or goal on ALL the people it calls for action by ALL the people to rebalance such a particular unfair action.

In this case ONE group chooses to and does place what is clearly adult (assumed to be 18 years of age or older) literature in the "children's section" of a library that is owned by and exists to serve ALL the people. This is simply unfair to ALL the people who choose to raise their children with respect for God's beautiful simple creation of a man and a woman.

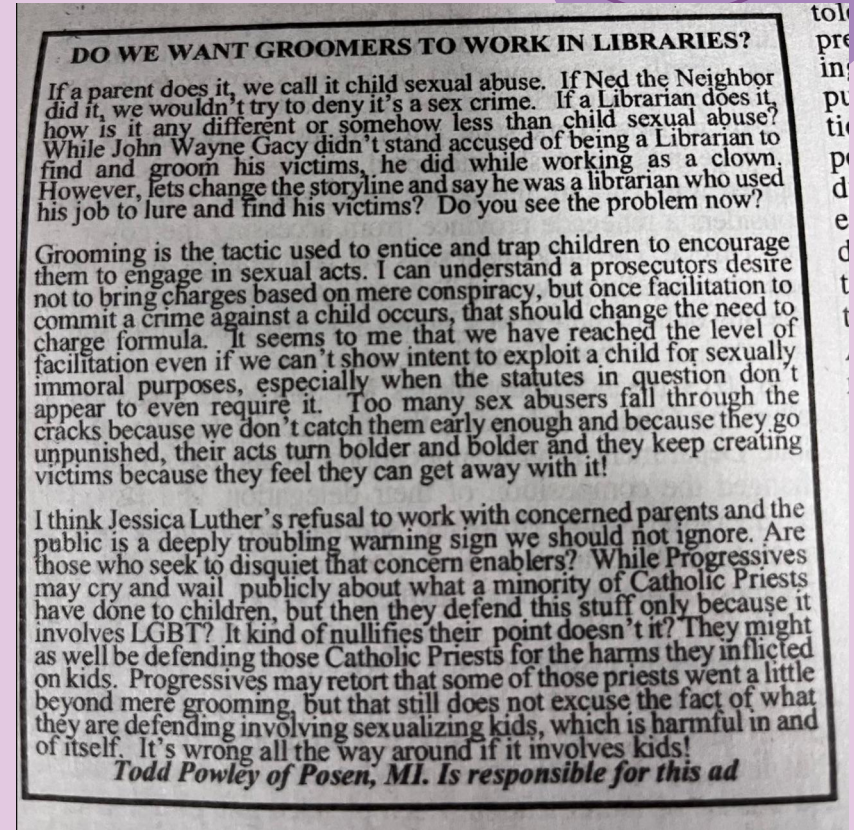


Our County Government has chosen not to correct the unbalanced actions of this ONE group. Consequently, ALL the people must choose to cease funding such an organization until it again respects ALL the people.

Paid for by: NE MI League of Conservative Education

Alpena Public Library

- August 2024: Alpena Public Library wins its millage—just two weeks after promising to fire its board and starting the process.
- One week later, the Alpena Public Library announces moving away from Dewey to a new browsing style cataloging system. The books in question would remain where they are but with new labels for easy identification.
- October 1: The interim director stepped down from the role due to how the nonstop name calling and rhetoric has impacted her health.
- October 8: County Commissioners cancel plans to can Board because of the new labeling system.



Authoritarianism & Paternalism

Contemporary book censorship pushes those
Puritanical values even further.



QENNY, SpookyESQ
@AKBrews

These are the new laws to enter a library in Idaho.



7:24 PM · Jul 1, 2024 · 2.9M Views



3.7K



9.8K



41K



2.7K



03.

What's Next?: The Future of Book Censorship

Elsewhere in the Midwest

Wisconsin

Second highest number of book bans in 2023.

Iowa

“Don’t Say Gay” bill led to over 3000 book bans.

Indiana

HB 1447 forces removal of “obscene” books in schools.

Missouri

Consistently ranks in top for book bans.

Kentucky

SB 5 book banning bill in schools; continued introduction of anti-library bills since 2021.

Ohio

Introduction of several anti-library, pro-book ban bills

Book Ban Bills in 2024

Idaho

HB 710 allows parents to file complaints about books they deem “inappropriate”; books must be relocated or removed w/in 60 days or the library can be sued.

Alabama

State funding tied to removal of books deemed “inappropriate” in public libraries.

Utah

One provision in law is that books banned in 3 districts in state would need to be pulled from all. Thirteen books are on a state-sponsored ban list.

South Carolina

State may remove any books from schools for “sexual references”; state education board can make unilateral decisions on books in schools. Public libraries are also under additional scrutiny.

Book Ban Bills in 2024

STATEMENT FROM LIBRARY BOARD CHAIR ON BEHALF OF THE YORK COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES - OCTOBER 11, 2024

On behalf of the York County Library (YCL) Board of Trustees, we wish to inform the public of an important decision made by the YCL board at its October 10, 2024, meeting. The board voted to place a moratorium on purchasing any materials for minors (17 and under) until further clarification and guidance is received from the state regarding Proviso 27.1 and until the Attorney General makes a ruling providing libraries with guidance for collection development.

The motion passed with a 4-3 vote. Those in favor were Dennis Getter, Carol Herring, Susan Piening, and Tim Steele. Those opposed were Wendi Michael, Charles Robinson, and Anne Witte.

This moratorium is in effect immediately and will be in place indefinitely as we work to ensure we are in full compliance with any new regulations or requirements or until the board chooses to dissolve the moratorium. The motion and resulting action refer to information in a memorandum issued by the State Library to SC library directors regarding State Aid which reads: "The State Library is in the process of requesting an attorney general's opinion on the matter related to authority of collection development in public libraries."

The memorandum also outlines the requirements the State Library determined for compliance with Proviso 27.1 to receive State Aid. York County Library meets all the requirements, and the YCL board signed the Certification Form in June of 2024.

Please know that we understand the impact these changes will have, and we are committed to working diligently to find solutions that address the needs of our community while meeting the requirements set forth by our state legislature.

In Service,
Dr. Anne Royal Witte on behalf of the York County Library Board of Trustees

 QENNY, SpookyESQ
@AKBrews

These are the new laws to enter a library in Idaho.



7:24 PM · Jul 1, 2024 · 2.9M Views

3.7K

9.8K

41K

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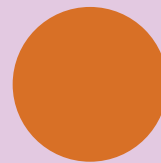
State Bills Attempted To



Criminalize Librarians

States tried to remove provisions exempting libraries from obscenity law exceptions. Some also tried to make it possible to sue library workers over books deemed “inappropriate.”

Among the states: Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming.



Ban The ALA

One way to destroy a profession is to delegitimize its professional association. Several states and municipalities have tried—and in some cases, succeeded.

Among the states: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, several counties in Florida, Texas, Montana, and more.

What's Next?

- **Wholesale Thematic Bans:** Libraries—school and public—will ban and/or label books falling within a certain theme, such as “trans” or “gender fluidity.”
- **Book Fairs:** We’ve seen a rise in censorship of book fairs, including the creation of “alternatives” to Scholastic, like SkyTree.
- **Higher Education:** This has already been happening, but it will escalate in pushes against higher education. Community colleges especially vulnerable.
- **Dissolutions by Boards Themselves:** They might not be able to ban books in some places but they can make buying materials + hosting programs impossible. See: St. Charles Public Library in Missouri.
- **Events From Outside Groups Intended to Create a Scene:** For the last two summers, Kirk Cameron and right-wing publisher Brave Books hosted “See You at the Library.” It’s now annual. While public libraries welcome groups in to use their rooms, this is blatant propaganda + advertising.

What's Next?

- **Targeting Book Displays and Programming:** Book bans will continue to increase, but targets in public libraries will grow toward programming and toward book displays.
- **Movement Between Institutions:** What happens at the schools will happen at the public library and vice versa.
- **More Groups and “Resources” About Books:** Moms For Liberty & BookLooks, as well as LaVerna/Mary in the Library & RatedBooks are templates, not conclusions.

States like Alabama have several anti-library, anti-book laws already pre-filed for the next legislative session.



New “Solutions” To The Manufactured Crisis

SkyTree Book Fairs

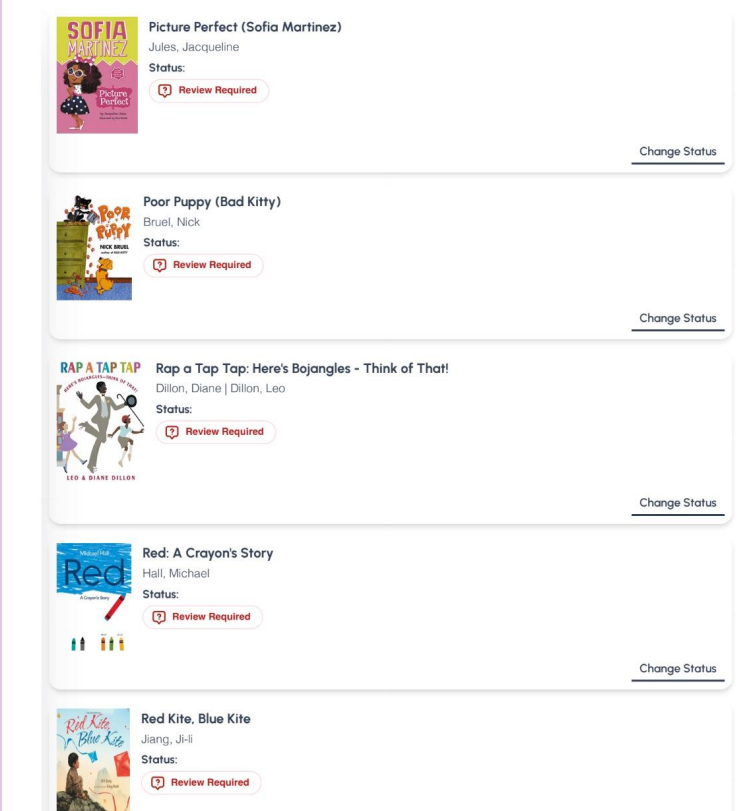
- An “alternative” to Scholastic Book Fairs
- Mostly Brave Books titles
- Pushed by Kirk Cameron and other far-right celebrities
- Claiming to be in 150 schools this fall
- Have played a role in getting books banned in Texas through omission and deceit



New “Solutions” To The Manufactured Crisis

BookmarkED/OnShelf App

- Developed by an educational technologist who also testified in support of Texas’s school book ban bill
- App scans material in a library collection and identifies books that have been challenged or banned
- Zero transparency on where this data comes from and overrides professional expertise of library workers
- In several Texas districts but expanding nationwide



The screenshot displays a list of five books in a mobile application interface. Each book entry includes a small cover image, the title, author information, and a status indicator. The status for all books is 'Review Required', shown in a red pill-shaped button with a question mark icon. A 'Change Status' link is visible at the bottom right of each book's entry.

Book Title	Author	Status
Picture Perfect (Sofia Martinez)	Jules, Jacqueline	Review Required
Poor Puppy (Bad Kitty)	Bruel, Nick	Review Required
Rap a Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles - Think of That!	Dillon, Diane Dillon, Leo	Review Required
Red: A Crayon's Story	Hall, Michael	Review Required
Red Kite, Blue Kite	Jiang, Ji-li	Review Required

The Mental Health Reality

Overlooking mental health and trauma in libraries means creating a toxic work environment, translating to a toxic space for community users

A lack of support leads to burnout and the loss of vital voices in the community

A field seeking to be more representative of the diversity of our world loses those staff members and perspectives.



[More: a toolkit to understanding and mitigating trauma in the library](#)

Trauma

An emotional response to events outside of a “normal” experience.

Trauma

Your body recognizes a threat, so:

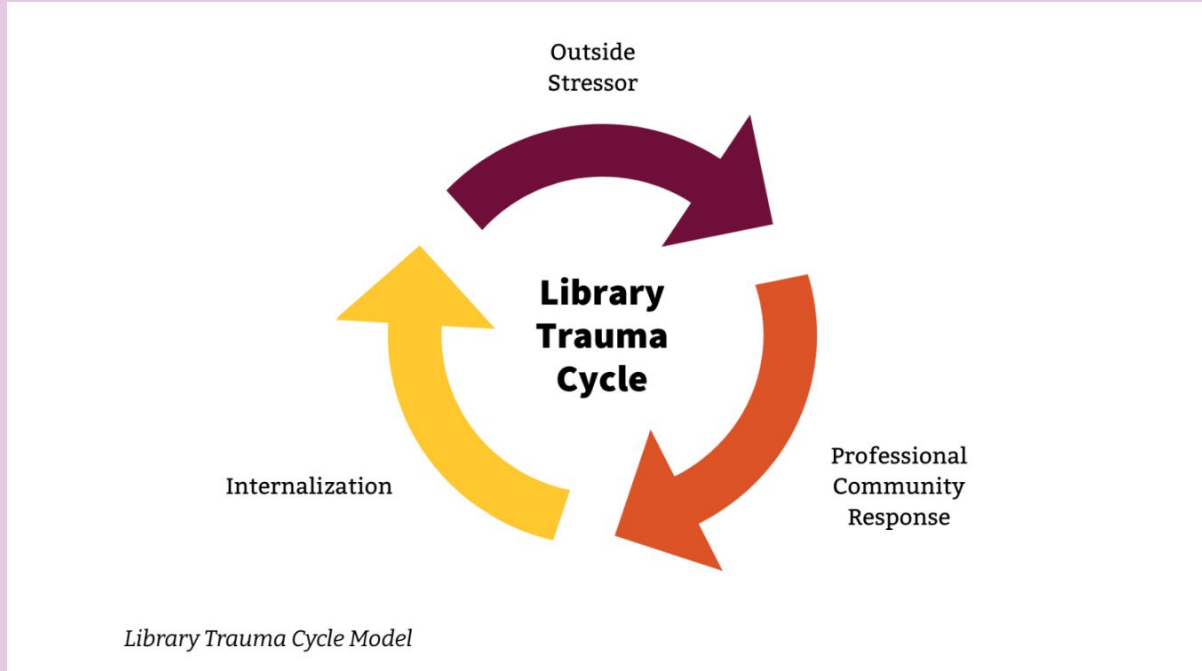
- A natural response kicks in
- Fight-Flight-Freeze

Physically:

- Brain + Autonomic Nervous System begin producing hormones
- Your body prepares to address the threat

Some people have much more active trauma responses due to experience

The Library Trauma Cycle



From the [Urban Library Trauma Study, 2022](#)

Potential for Trauma in Public Libraries Experiencing Book Banning and Material Challenges

Jieun Yeon & Leah Therese Dudak
School of Information Studies
Syracuse University

What do we mean by “censorship”?

Banning	Restricting
Relocating	Avoiding

Then what is “trauma”?

“When something happens to the body that is too fast, or too soon, it overwhelms the body and can create trauma” (Menakem 2017, 7).



Fight

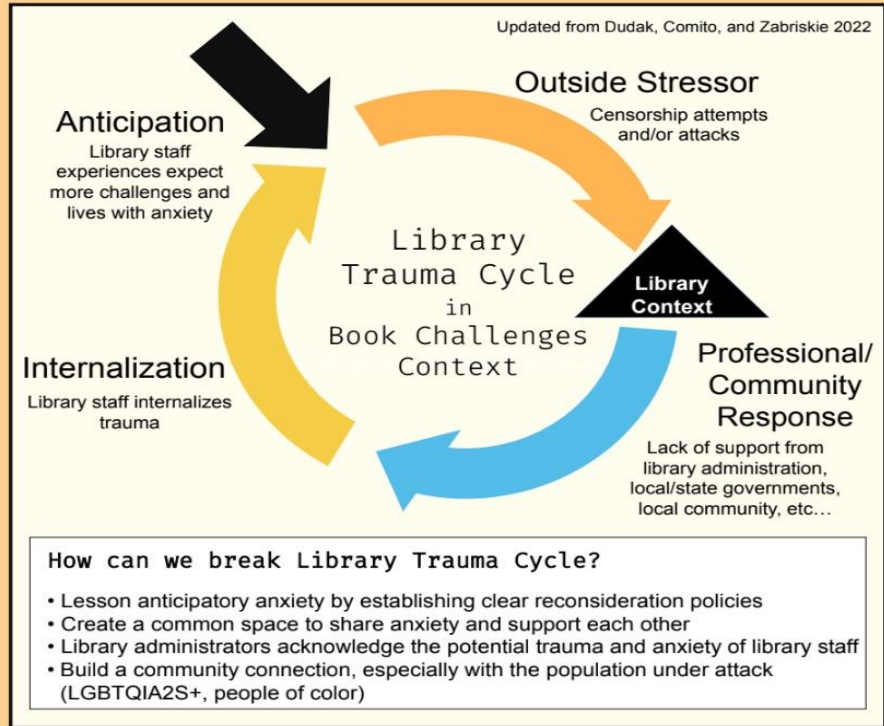


Freeze



Flight

Overwhelming incidents at public libraries cause trauma to library staff (e.g., violent behaviors, threats...and **copyright attempts!**)



Menakem, R. 2017. *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.

Dudak, L. T., L. Comito, and C. Zabriskie. 2022. "You can't self-care your way out of a broken system": The 2022 Urban Libraries Trauma Forum. *Public Library Quarterly* 42(6): 650-664. doi: [10.1080/01616836.2022.2148826](https://doi.org/10.1080/01616836.2022.2148826)



04.

The Good News in This Moment

Anti-Book Ban Bills Passed, Too!

Colorado

Public records on books banned and challenged; names of challengers public

Maryland

Requires robust collection management policies.

Minnesota

Requires reporting challenges and bans to state education authority for record.

California

School boards barred from banning books or initiating removals; public libraries must commit to not banning books

Washington

School boards cannot initiate or create policies that encourage book banning.

Vermont

A well-rounded bill protecting libraries, establishing librarians as professionals. A result of state-level work *by* librarians.

New Jersey + Massachusetts bills still in play

Several States Considered Anti-Book Ban Bills.

Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas,
Missouri, New Mexico, Oregon, and
Wisconsin.

Virginia's governor vetoed a bill that passed in both chambers.



Active Lawsuits

Settlement in Nassau

Nassau School Board (FL) sued over removal of 36 books by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson; settled out of court with board admission of wrongdoing.

Crawford County, Arkansas

Patrons sued the library over relocation of 130-some books. They won the lawsuit and the library must return the books to their appropriate shelves.

Texas READER Act

State-wide book ban law is still in the courts. As of April, parts of the law are effective but others are not.

+ Many More

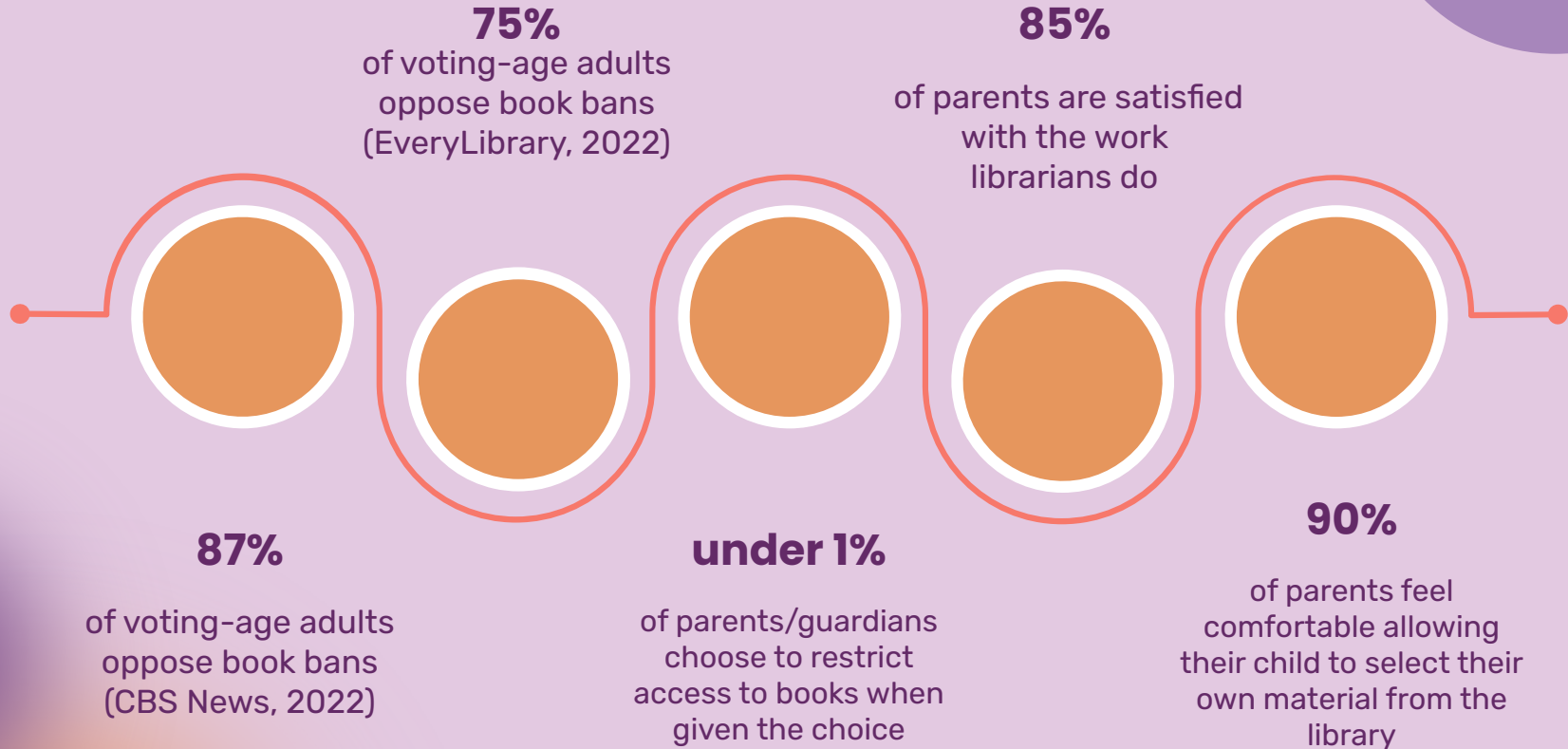
There are close to, if not more than, a dozen current lawsuits challenging state laws and local-level book bans and censorship.

On The Ground Action

- Pro-library, anti-book ban groups are proliferating on the ground
- Parents, non-parents, library advocates, and even—especially!—young people are showing up in support of their libraries.
- Libraries are mobilizing their power users with reminders to vote, to show up to board meetings, and to become part of the library's board.



Book Bans Are Not Popular



Book Bans Are Not Popular

82%

of parents trust librarians to recommend age and content appropriate books and materials

Top 5

Public & school librarians are among the top 5 most trusted professions

80-92%

of parents trust librarians to select appropriate materials for the school or public library

Book bans offer something librarianship has not put enough time or consideration into: how to adequately care for, support, and accommodate the mental health and safety needs of its most valuable asset: its people.



Thank You!

Slide Deck: <https://tinyurl.com/MLA24-Keynote>

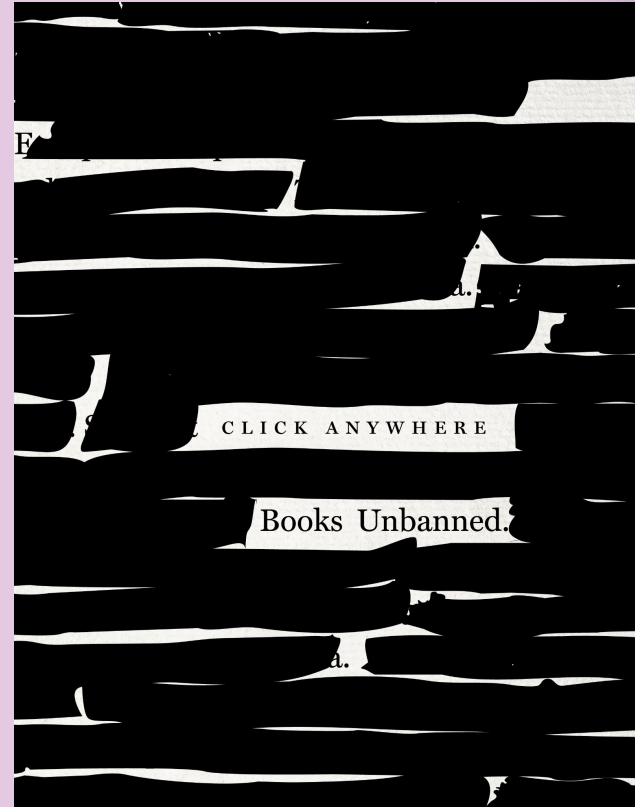
Contact Information

Follow My Work

- [Literary Activism](#)
- [Well Sourced](#) Substack

Be In Touch

- Email: kelly@riotnewmedia.com
- Twitter: [@veronikellymars](https://twitter.com/veronikellymars)
- Website: kellybjensen.com



I'm working with Brooklyn Public Library on a *free* program to help teens learn to be anti-censorship advocates. Want more info? Send me an email and I'll add you to the mailing list from BPL!