

Books

US



# Field Report 2020

## Banned & Challenged Books

ALA American Library Association

OFFICE FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM



...They reach across boundaries and barriers, building connections and igniting discussions between readers to share worlds and ideas. Books are an opportunity to not only see a part of ourselves, but also understand our similarities and differences. Reading books—especially books that extend beyond our own experiences—expands our world, making it bigger and more inclusive.

This Field Report compiles public bans and challenges to books, programs, displays, and other materials in libraries and schools that were reported in the news or recorded in public records. Each description includes a citation, and notes, when available, whether the challenged resource was retained or banned.

Since the 1990s, the American Library Association (ALA) has been recording reports of attempts to remove materials and services in libraries and schools. Many of the reports request confidential support, as some librarians and educators fear repercussions for defending the freedom to read. In a time when many libraries and schools closed or moved their activities and services online because of the COVID-19 pandemic, ALA tracked 156 challenges to library, school, and university materials and services in 2020, threatening access to 273 books. The Field Report includes 77 public challenges.

Challenges to books and other resources reveal our society's concerns and issues. In 2020, we saw a rise in requests to remove books that address racism, racial justice, and anti-racism, and books that share stories of people who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). We've also seen communities strive to make their collections and curriculum more inclusive by removing texts with racist language. Attempts to censor materials addressing LGBTQIA+ themes and issues also continued in 2020.

Many challenges targeted more than one title. Some individuals organized campaigns that threatened library funding if libraries didn't comply with their demand to remove books or cancel programs. Some challenges were initiated under the guise of "community values" and failed to recognize that one person's family values may not reflect the values of all families.

You'll see these stories and more in the Field Report. While books can bring us together, censorship can divide us. Removing materials that address racism, gender, politics, and sex doesn't make those issues disappear. Instead, censorship creates barriers, drawing a divisive line between "us" and "them" when we should be celebrating a shared commitment to our communities and honoring each person's unique identity. Libraries provide a place for communities to explore, learn, and discuss, offering materials and resources to discover new ideas, confront the past, and imagine a future.

When we share stories that are important to us, we share a part of ourselves.  
**What book will you open next, and who will you share it with?**

*The Office for Intellectual Freedom thanks James LaRue, former director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, who generously lent his time and expertise to compile the entries in this report.*



OFFICE FOR  
Intellectual Freedom  
American Library Association

# Books Banned or Challenged in 2020

The Field Report is arranged alphabetically by the author's last name. It is not uncommon for challenges to affect more than one book. In these cases, the complete description and source for the challenge is listed under the first author alphabetically; the additional challenged books refer back to that author.

**ACEVEDO, ELIZABETH**

## **THE POET X** (2018)

John and Robin Coble, two parents at the Lake Norman Public Charter School (LNC) in Huntersville, North Carolina, challenged this story of a young woman of color coming of age in Harlem, claiming that the novel is overtly “anti-Christian” and that the school’s use of the novel violates constitutional safeguards against government endorsement of religion. Voting to retain the book, school officials stated, “At LNC, no literary selection is mandatory. If a constituent is not comfortable with the subject matter of a material, their perspective is honored and an alternative selection is offered. The Coble family rejected this option.” Students also spoke up. One said, “It’s just a coming of age book. It’s not anything crazy, it’s just what teenage girls go through. It’s a girl trying to find

her voice.” The Cobles subsequently filed a federal lawsuit asking the court to remove the book from Lake Norman classrooms. The lawsuit was dismissed by the court. The Cobles are appealing the court’s decision.

Source: *The Charlotte Observer*, October 29, 2020

**ANGELOU, MAYA**

## **I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS** (1969)

The Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough School District School Board in Palmer, Alaska, voted 5–2 to remove five books identified as controversial from the school curriculum: *The Things They Carried*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Catch-22*, *Invisible Man*, and *The Great Gatsby*. The board also voted to remove the New York Times Learning Network as a teacher resource. The concern cited by the board members was sexual content that could cause controversy. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was also challenged for “anti-white messaging”; one board member claimed that it could generate an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission lawsuit. The Office for Intellectual Freedom—joined by Alaska librarians, the Freedom

When the Mat-Su Borough School Board voted to remove five classic novels from the 11th grade reading list, the band Portugal. The Man helped provide thousands of banned books to students through their charitable nonprofit, PTM Foundation.

to Read Foundation, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, and the American Booksellers for Free Expression—sent a letter to the Mat-Su school board urging them to return the books to the curriculum. After the community protested the board’s vote, it rescinded its decision and the books remain available in the schools.

Source: *Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman*, April 23, 2020

**BANKS, MAYA**

## **LETTING GO** (2014)

This erotic romance novel recounts a woman’s desire to be dominated. An Oregon public

Students advocated to keep *The Poet X* in the school by speaking at the board meeting and circulating petitions.

library patron submitted a reconsideration request form, alleging “extremely graphic sexual domination/submission.” Retained.

Source: 2020 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

**BECHDEL, ALISON**

### **FUN HOME: A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC** (2006)

Power2Parent, a self-described parental rights organization, complained about this acclaimed graphic novel, which recounts the author’s coming of age as a lesbian. The group protested the book’s alleged drug use, graphic sexual violence, and anti-religious sentiments and demanded its removal from a Clark County (NV) School District high school. The principal immediately removed the book from the 10th grade honors English class reading list.

Source: KTNV Las Vegas, September 10, 2020

**BLAKE, ASHLEY HERRING**

### **IVY ABERDEEN’S LETTER TO THE WORLD** (2018)

Three books with LGBTQIA+ protagonists and themes were removed from a 5th grade classroom by the Swarthmore Rutledge

School administration in the Wallingford-Swarthmore (PA) School District (WSSD). None of the three books—*Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World*, *George*, and *When Aidan Became a Brother*—concerned “mature” or violent topics. The books in question were returned to the classroom only after many community members, including students, contacted the WSSD administration about their removal and criticized the decision-making process as not transparent. The district acknowledged that all the books were age- and grade-appropriate.

Source: Wallingford-Swarthmore Board of School Directors meeting, March 9, 2020

**BRUNDAGE, ELIZABETH**

### **SOMEBODY ELSE’S DAUGHTER** (2008)

Complaining about this adult thriller’s “filthy language” and disappointing storyline, a patron of the Columbus (NE) Public Library asked that the library board remove the book from the collection. Following their reconsideration process, the board voted to retain the item.

Source: Columbus Public Library Board Meeting Minutes, August 13, 2020

**CELANO, MARIANNE, MARIETTA COLLINS, AND ANN HAZZARD**

### **SOMETHING HAPPENED IN OUR TOWN: A CHILD’S STORY ABOUT RACIAL INJUSTICE** (2018)

This New York Times and Indie-bound bestseller is written by three psychologists to help parents talk with their children about racial bias and injustice. In a letter to Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, the Minnesota Police and

Peace Officers Association’s (MPPOA) Executive Director Brian Peters requested the state stop recommending the book for instruction to elementary students and asked for a follow-up conversation about the approval process for the book. The book—adopted by various Minnesota state agencies—is intended for children ages 4 to 8 and, according to its publisher, includes an extensive note to parents and caregivers “with guidelines for discussing race and racism with children; and includes child-friendly definitions and sample dialogues.” MPPOA protested such lines as “The cops shot him because he was Black”; “This pattern is being nice to White people and mean to Black people”; and “Cops stick up for each other. And they don’t like Black men.” The state agencies defended continued use of the book, and the governor welcomed further discussions with the MPPOA about police accountability and reform.

Source: Pioneer Press, November 5, 2020

While not seeking to ban this book, a police officer and his spouse challenged how the book was taught in the Springfield (VT) School District, stating that a third grade teacher did not follow the recommendations in the book itself about how to broach the subject of racially motivated police brutality. Those recommendations involved early notification of parents, an invitation to participate in discussions, and the opportunity to opt out from the unit altogether. Teachers announced their intention to continue using the book.

Source: Eagle Times, August 19, 2020

**Contact the Office for Intellectual Freedom** when there’s a challenge or ban at your library, school, or university. You don’t have to be a librarian or an ALA member to get support. Find more ways to reach us at [ala.org/oif](http://ala.org/oif).





**CLINE, ERNEST**

### **READY PLAYER ONE** (2011)

The Hamilton (MI) school board established a book club, featuring some 70,000 books to encourage reading from grade 5 and up. However, a new materials-vetting committee and several district parents expressed concerns about material they believed was not age appropriate. Some books ended up at grade levels younger than the publisher's classification. Superintendent David Tebo said he would be hesitant to "ban" any books from the school, as that would be a "slippery slope" for the district. *Ready Player One* was called out as a problematic title.

Source: *Holland Sentinel*, October 17, 2020

**COLBERT, BRANDY**

### **LITTLE & LION** (2015)

This YA novel, taught in several high schools across the county, features teenagers who think and talk about sex, race, and mental illness. One set of parents announced their intent to formally challenge the book at the Palm Springs (FL) School District because it is "filled with obscenities, sexually explicit scenes and promotes condoms, promiscuity, drinking, bisexuality and lack of respect for the Bible." Residents surveyed by the newspaper on Facebook were sharply opposed to censorship. The newspaper noted that efforts to remove books from Florida classrooms and libraries have gained steam since the Florida legislature passed a law in 2017 allowing any county resident, not just a parent of a school-aged child, to protest classroom materials and petition to have them removed.

Source: *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, January 27, 2020

**COULTER, ANN**

### **HOW TO TALK TO A LIBERAL (IF YOU MUST)**

(2004)

A Chattanooga Public Library employee recorded himself allegedly burning two library books by conservative authors—*How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must)* and *Crippled America*—and posted the recording on Instagram. The employee claimed that the books were set to be removed and that officials told him he could take them. After the library administration investigated the incident for violations of library policy, the employee was fired. Library officials said, "The city of Chattanooga Human Resources Department completed its investigation of an allegation that books were removed from the Chattanooga Public Library's Main Branch on Dec. 1, 2020. The city of Chattanooga has policies in place to protect the public's interest, and we follow those directives."

Source: *U.S. News*, December 5, 2020; *The Tennessee Star*, February 2021

**DIANGELO, ROBIN**

### **WHITE FRAGILITY: WHY IT'S SO HARD FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT RACISM** (2018)

An English teacher at Choctaw High School in Fort Walton, Florida, assigned this book to her senior class students. She had discussed the title and her plans to use it with the principal during the summer. But when the book was taught, parents objected. According to the teacher, "I got a few calls from [parents] who were appalled. 'How dare you read this book?' and 'Racism is not an issue in America and you are making it one.' That, to me alone,

after reading the book, was more of a reason . . . why we need to read the book." The complaints led to the removal of the book, but after the teacher appealed to the board, she was allowed to use excerpts from the book in the classroom.

Source: WEAR-TV, November 13, 2020

**ELLISON, RALPH**

### **INVISIBLE MAN** (1952)

Complete description and source for the Palmer, Alaska, challenge listed under "Angelou, Maya" on page 3.

**EWERT, MARCUS**

### **10,000 DRESSES** (2008)

A parent of a Columbus (WI) Elementary School student requested this picture book's removal from the school library. "My objection to this is not about homosexuality," said the parent, "but on the appropriateness of the subject matter, particularly for children under 8 years of age. Young children have an innocence they cannot regain when exposed to such material. This book not only encourages cross-dressing, it undermines the authority of parents by making the neighbor the hero when parents objected." Other community parents spoke in favor of retaining the book. The superintendent retained the book on the unanimous recommendation of the reconsideration committee.

Source: *Columbus Journal*, February 24, 2020

**FITZGERALD, F. SCOTT**

### **THE GREAT GATSBY** (1925)

Complete description and source for the Palmer, Alaska, challenge listed under "Angelou, Maya" on page 3.

**FOLMAN, ARI**

### **ANNE FRANK** (2017)

This graphic novel version of the unabridged Anne Frank diary was challenged by a parent of the Northwood (NH) School District, who claimed that its content was “inappropriate” for any age level at the school. The reconsideration committee recommended moving the book to the YA section. That decision was appealed to the superintendent, who agreed to the relocation. The superintendent reported in the October 2020 board minutes that the decision was to be appealed to the board, but the parent has accepted the decision. The graphic novel was retained in the YA section.

Source: Northwood School Board Meeting Minutes, October 15, 2020

**GAIMAN, NEIL**

### **SNOW, GLASS, APPLE** (2019)

A patron of the Lake Villa (IL) Public Library District challenged this graphic novel illustrated by Colleen Duran that retells the Snow White story. The patron’s concern was “graphic pictures of sex, self-harm” and that “children might see it.” Following staff review, the item was retained.

Source: Lake Villa Library District Board Meeting Minutes, February 10, 2020

**GEPHART, DONNA**

### **LILY AND DUNKIN** (2016)

Parents with children in the Polo Park Middle School in Wellington, Florida, reached out to WPTV NewsChannel 5 with concerns about this middle-grade novel about a transgender girl and a boy with bipolar disorder. The parents “didn’t want to speak on camera out of fear of retaliation” but said they wish they had been made aware of the classroom

assignment before their students were given the book. They also said “topics like sex education require consent forms and [they] feel topics like mental illness and gender identity should be treated similarly, with notification to parents beforehand.” Retained.

Source: WPTV, January 10, 2020

**Banned Books Week is  
September 26–  
October 2, 2021.**

Find ways to celebrate  
at [ala.org/bbooks](http://ala.org/bbooks).

**GINO, ALEX**

### **GEORGE** (2015)

Several patrons of the Lincoln Parish Library in Ruston, Louisiana, complained about *George* and *Rick*, two books in the children’s room collection featuring gay-positive characters. The identical complaints referenced an upcoming mill levy election for the library. While the patrons agreed that neither book was sexually graphic, they expressed concern that children could encounter a topic the parents didn’t want them to. At a meeting of board members at which a quorum was not present, some board members asked the director to remove the books from open shelves, making them available only to parents who request them, to appease the complaining patrons. The director complied, but protested that the restrictions did not reflect library policy. After the board members reached out to the challengers they added an additional 13 titles to the complaint: *Wings of Fire* (series);

*Mommy, Mama, and Me; My Two Dads; My Two Moms; Real Sisters Pretend; The Great Big Book of Families, A Tale of Two Daddies; Jazz Jennings: Voice for LGBTQ Youth; Snapdragon; and Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy.* News reporters covering the challenge noted that the director was under no legal obligation to follow a non-quorum board decision. Since then, the library’s levy was defeated; many local citizens apparently used the election to protest what they saw as library censorship. The board subsequently voted to abide by library policy and reinstate the books to the children’s collection.

Source: Ruston Daily Leader, December 4, 2020

Complete description and source for the Wallingford, Pennsylvania, challenge listed under “Blake, Ashley Herring” on page 4.

**GINO, ALEX**

### **RICK** (2020)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**HALL, MICHAEL**

### **RED: A CRAYON’S STORY** (2015)

The Charlottesville (VA) City School Board received a challenge to the school’s unit about “how families are different.” The challenger asked that the school stop using the term “non-binary” and remove the picture book about a crayon who—despite his red wrapper—is blue. After internal review, the book, term, and curriculum were all retained.

Source: Charlottesville City School Board Meeting Minutes, October 1, 2020

**“Challenges” are not just complaints about books,** but rather willful attempts to remove or restrict access to library resources or programming. Challenges can be a written complaint, a form submitted to a library, or a call to action on social media.

**HARRINGTON, CLAUDIA**

### **MY TWO DADS** (2015)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**HARRINGTON, CLAUDIA**

### **MY TWO MOMS** (2015)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**HELLER, JOSEPH**

### **CATCH-22** (1961)

Complete description and source for the Palmer, Alaska, challenge listed under “Angelou, Maya” on page 3.

**HOFFMAN, MARY**

### **THE GREAT BIG BOOK OF FAMILIES** (2010)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**JENKINS, STEVE, DEREK WALTER, AND CAPRICE CRANE**

### **THE TRUE ADVENTURES OF ESTHER THE WONDER PIG** (2018)

This nonfiction picture book concerns a supposed mini-pig purchased by a gay couple. As the pig grows (and grows and grows), the couple finally moves to the country and starts an animal rescue farm. An Oregon public library patron was concerned about “homosexual content” and “how it would impact young readers.” Retained.

Source: 2020 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

**KOBABE, MAIA**

### **GENDER QUEER** (2019)

A patron asked the staff of the Huntington Beach (CA) Public Library for this graphic novel memoir about growing up non-binary. She filled out a request for re-evaluation form, then posted out-of-context images from the book on Facebook, leading to many negative and inflammatory posts advocating for the destruction of the book and challenging library staff. The patron also contacted the library director, city manager, and other members of the city council. The book was moved from the teen to the adult collection.

Source: Huntington Beach Public Library Board Meeting Minutes, February 19, 2020

**LAMBERT, MEGAN DOWD**

### **REAL SISTERS PRETEND** (2016)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**LEE, HARPER**

### **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD** (1960)

After parent complaints about the use of racist epithets in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; *The Cay*; *Of Mice and Men*; and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Burbank (CA) Unified School District Superintendent Matt Hill issued a statement removing the books from the district’s required reading lists for its English curriculum and banned the use of the N-word in all school classes. The books will be allowed in classroom libraries, but no student can be required to read them. At a board meeting, Hill stated, “This is not about censorship, this is about righting the wrongs of the past.”

Source: *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 2020

**LEYH, KAT**

### **SNAPDRAGON** (2020)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**LITHGOW, JOHN**

### **DUMPTY: THE AGE OF TRUMP IN VERSE** (2019)

A patron at the Messenger Public Library in Aurora, Illinois, challenged this satiric volume of verse about former president Donald Trump written by actor John Lithgow. The patron complained that “the picture on the front cover, the title of the book itself and the introduction are all political and extremely offensive.” Retained.

Source: Messenger Public Library of North Aurora Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, March 12, 2020

LUKOFF, KYLE

## WHEN AIDAN BECAME A BROTHER (2019)

Complete description and source for the Wallingford, Pennsylvania, challenge listed under “Blake, Ashley Herring” on page 4.

MORRISON, TONI

## THE BLUEST EYE (1970)

Following the complaints of several parents about sexual violence and child sexual abuse, this novel was removed from the Colton (CA) Joint Unified School District’s core and extended reading list for English Language Arts classes during Black History Month, while remaining available in school libraries. Following pushback by other parents and some national press attention, the school board reversed its decision, restoring Morrison’s book to the curriculum list and adding five other books. The book selection committee reported that it had refined its selection process, increased parent representation, improved the opt-out process, and added more diverse authors.

Source: *The San Bernardino Sun*, February 11, 2020

MYERS, WALTER DEAN

## MONSTER (1999)

After some parental complaints about the maturity of language and sexual content in some 7th grade reading club selections, a teacher at the Signal Mountain (TN) Middle-High School contacted parents to inform them that she was removing *All American Boys* and *Monster* from the reading list. Both books feature protagonists who are Black, and both recount the protagonists’ experience of police violence. While remarking on the value of

each title, the teacher encouraged parents to choose other books. In a follow-up statement, the principal indicated that the books were high school reading materials, not 7th grade, and affirmed the school’s commitment to diversity. Also removed from the reading list was *My Sister’s Keeper*. The 2004 novel follows the story of 13-year-old Anna Fitzgerald, who sues her parents when she discovers she is supposed to donate a kidney to her dying older sister.

Source: *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, September 9, 2020

NAPIER, SUSAN

## ANIME FROM AKIRA TO HOWL’S MOVING CASTLE: EXPERIENCING CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ANIMATION (2005)

The freshman composition class at Kent State University in Ohio allows some high school students to take classes, but the university requires parents to sign off on the course instructional materials. One high school parent objected to this academic text, which explores the social, artistic, and economic history of the anime genre. Dr. Susan Napier focuses a chapter of this 2005 book on pornography in anime. The parent persuaded two state legislators to demand that college-level content stop being assigned to minors. One legislator threatened the university’s funding, saying the book was unacceptable. Kent State issued a statement asserting that it defends the principles of academic freedom and free expression.

Source: FOX19, October 7, 2020

NEWMAN, LESLÉA

## MOMMY, MAMA, AND ME (2009)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

O’BRIEN, TIM

## THE THINGS THEY CARRIED (1990)

Complete description and source for the Palmer, Alaska, challenge listed under “Angelou, Maya” on page 3.

OELSCHLAGER, VANITA

## A TALE OF TWO DADDIES (2010)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

PAULSEN, GARY

## BEET FIELDS: MEMORIES OF A SIXTEENTH SUMMER (1998)

This reworked memoir from popular YA author Gary Paulsen details a young man who runs away from alcoholic parents, works as a migrant laborer, joins a carnival, and falls in love. After a parent complained about “incest, sexually explicit, violence” as issues, the book was recataloged from juvenile to YA nonfiction at an Oregon public library.

Source: 2020 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

PICOULT, JODI

## MY SISTER’S KEEPER (2004)

Complete description and source for the Signal Mountain, Tennessee, challenge listed under “Myers, Walter Dean” on page 8.



**PITMAN, GAYLE E.**

### **THIS DAY IN JUNE** (2014)

A patron at the Huntington Beach (CA) Public Library asked for, then complained about, this picture book describing a gay pride parade. Her objection was “the idea of imposing the [LGBTQIA+] lifestyle upon little kids,” saying that the pictures and language were not appropriate for ages 3–6. Retained.

Source: Huntington Beach Public Library Board Meeting Minutes, February 19, 2020

**REYNOLDS, JASON, AND  
BRENDAN KIELY**

### **ALL AMERICAN BOYS** (2015)

A parent formally challenged this 2016 Coretta Scott King Author Honor book and winner of the Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children’s Literature for its alleged “anti-police” bias. The book features two teens, one white and one Black, who deal with the racial repercussions of an act of police violence. The Rangeley Lakes (ME) Regional School District reminded the board that the district had a policy to consider challenges. Retained.

Source: Regional School Unit 78 School Board Meeting Minutes, October 8, 2020

Each summer, students in the Sewanhaka (NY) Central High School District are required to read one book from the district’s summer reading list, which is selected by the English chairs in each of the district’s five schools. Some parents objected to *All American Boys*, in which a police officer beats a Black teen. “The schools should be a neutral place where kids get to be kids, and not a place where we train and brain-wash new generations,” said one mom. “I don’t want my son to read a book where, especially now, the

police are trashed and blamed for what’s going on.” Others praised the relevance of the book. Its status, including others on the list dealing with the same general topic, is unknown at this writing.

Source: liherald.com, July 28, 2020

Complete description and source for the Signal Mountain, Tennessee, challenge listed under “Myers, Walter Dean” on page 8.

Despite being taught in Somerset County Public School in Westover, Maryland, since 2016, *All American Boys* was challenged by a parent at a board meeting for its “foul and vulgar language” and “divisive topics.” The parent also challenged Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynold’s *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*. As of November 2020, the district’s reconsideration process was incomplete.

Source: Somerset County Public School Board Meeting, September 15, 2020

**REYNOLDS, JASON, AND IBRAM X.  
KENDI**

### **STAMPED: RACISM, ANTIRACISM, AND YOU** (2020)

After a new teacher received approval to teach this book to 8th grade students in the Berlin (NJ) Borough School District, a group of parents sought its removal from the school. Parents harassed the teacher by email and phone, which led to the teacher resigning. The New Jersey Library Association and New Jersey Association of School Librarians wrote a letter in defense of the book and the teacher. According to Board President Jocelyn Lewis, there has been no discussion of pulling the book from the school’s curriculum, and an additional text is currently

being reviewed by the board for possible inclusion. Retained.

Source: *The Sun Newspapers*, January 8, 2021

Complete description and source for the Westover, Maryland, challenge listed under “Reynolds, Jason” on page 9.

**RHODES, JEWELL PARKER**

### **GHOST BOYS** (2018)

The Kingsburg (CA) Elementary Charter School District removed this book from its curriculum after a parent complained about the political views expressed in the book. The novel concerns a Black boy who is killed by police while playing with a toy gun. The district removed the book without going through a reconsideration process.

Source: NCAC.org, October 13, 2020

**RODGER, ELLEN**

### **JAZZ JENNINGS: VOICE FOR LGBTQ YOUTH** (2017)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under “Gino, Alex” on page 6.

**STEINBECK, JOHN**

### **OF MICE AND MEN** (1937)

Administrators in the Henry Sibley High School in Mendota Heights, Minnesota, have “paused” teaching two novels after community complaints about the books: *Of Mice and Men* was challenged for its use of the N-word, and *Montana 1948* was challenged because of “concerns about the content . . . from our American Indian community.” In *Montana 1948*, the protagonist’s uncle sexually assaults, and later murders,



the family's Sioux housekeeper. These challenges against the use of racist language prompted the district to seek out and adopt protocols for challenging instructional materials.

Source: *Pioneer Press*, December 22, 2020

Complete description and source for the Burbank, California, challenge listed under "Lee, Harper" on page 7.

**SUTHERLAND, TUI T.**

### **WINGS OF FIRE SERIES** (2012)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under "Gino, Alex" on page 6.

**SUTTON, BENN, AND DAN PINTO**

### **HEDGEHUG: A SHARP LESSON IN LOVE** (2011)

This picture book tells the story of a hedgehog whose Valentine's Day quest for affection results in a series of unintentional injuries to others, before finally ending happily. An Oregon public library patron complained about a "narrative [that] encourages assault" containing "incel themes." Retained.

Source: 2020 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

**TAYLOR, MILDRED D.**

### **ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY** (1976)

Complete description and source for the Burbank, California, challenge listed under "Lee, Harper" on page 7.

**TAYLOR, THEODORE**

### **THE CAY** (1969)

Complete description and source for the Burbank, California, challenge listed under "Lee, Harper" on page 7.

**TERCIERO, REY**

### **MEG, JO, BETH, AND AMY** (2019)

Complete description and source for the Ruston, Louisiana, challenge listed under "Gino, Alex" on page 6.

**TRUMP, DONALD**

### **CRIPPLED AMERICA: HOW TO MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN** (2015)

Complete description and source for the Chattanooga, Tennessee, challenge listed under "Coulter, Ann" on page 5.

**TWAIN, MARK**

### **THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN** (1884)

Complete description and source for the Burbank, California, challenge listed under "Lee, Harper" on page 7.

**VONNEGUT, KURT**

### **SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE** (1969)

A parent at Cienega High School in Vail, Arizona, complained about this classic science fiction book's language and references to sex, and the district is considering whether to remove it from the approved reading list. It is currently taught in Advanced Placement English classes.

Source: NCAC.org, December 22, 2020

**WATSON, LARRY**

### **MONTANA 1948** (1993)

Complete description and source for the Mendota Heights, Minnesota, challenge listed under "Steinbeck, John" on page 9.

# Beyond Books

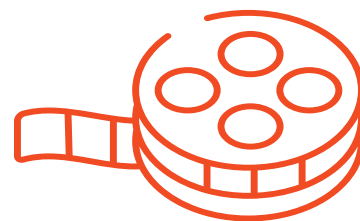
The following are 2020 public challenges to library or school services and resources that aren't books.

## Films

### THE UNGOVERNABLE FORCE (2015)

*Ungovernable Force*, a “punxploitation feature film,” was challenged at an Oregon public library because of concern about sexual content. After following their reconsideration process, librarians retained the film.

Source: 2020 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon



## Programs and Meeting Rooms

**Two professors of the San Francisco (CA) State University** organized a virtual roundtable discussion on Palestinian rights featuring Leila Khaled, a “Palestinian feminist, militant and leader” who is also one of two terrorists who hijacked TWA flight 840 from Italy to Israel in 1969, in affiliation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The planned discussion was

condemned by dozens of pro-Israel organizations, including the Zionist Organization of America, which urged that the “program be canceled immediately, since a violent terrorist has nothing of value to offer your students.” While the university president issued a strong statement indicating support for academic freedom, and assurances that the event would continue, the videoconferencing company Zoom refused to carry the stream, claiming a violation of its anti-violence policies. When the organizers moved it to Youtube, Google interrupted the stream after 20 minutes. Facebook also removed information about the discussion. Many free speech advocates criticized claims made by pro-Zionist groups that falsely alleged that the professors’ discussion of political issues was illegal.

Source: *Inside Higher Ed*, September 25, 2020

### The Norwalk (CT) Public Library has offered Drag Queen Story

Times at least twice, pulling in as many as 300 attendees for the voluntary event. Thirty out-of-state protesters showed up at the second event, largely from MassResistance, a self-described “leading pro-family activist” group identified as an anti-LGBTQIA+ group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The group distributed fliers falsely claiming that the library event was pushing “lies,” including the idea “that biological sex means nothing, that sex is just ‘assigned at birth,’ that people can be any gender they want, and that ‘It’s OK to be gay.’” The group’s flier claimed this was child abuse. A group called Free Mom Hugs responded by organizing volunteers who welcomed and escorted children to the program.

Source: *The Hour*, January 27, 2020



**A patron of the Marshall Public Library in Pocatello, Idaho, organized a reading program, “Reading Time with the Queens,” in 2017, using the library’s community room for each event. The program typically pulls crowds of 5 to 20 children and their families. Eventually, some community residents protested the events, arguing that because the library is a publicly funded city department, groups with political affiliations or associations should be prohibited from using the library; in their view, the “Reading with Queens” program promotes LGBTQIA+ ideals, which they associate with a liberal political agenda. The library continued to provide space to the program. Library staff emphasized they were not affiliated with the event and that the library offers meeting space to groups of any and all perspectives. “We definitely haven’t heard any complaints from the public from people who have actually attended,” said the associate director of the library.**

Source: *Idaho State Journal*, February 7, 2020

**As part of its Community Voices program, which features speakers reading to 6- to 12-year-old children curious about diversity and inclusion, the Morrisson-Reeves Public Library in Richmond, Indiana, invited Sweet T, a drag queen, to read as part of the series. The programs, which have included a person who is disabled, an anti-bullying advocate, and other community members, are entirely voluntary, and set up so that patrons are aware of the programs before choosing to attend them. The library experienced both support and vitriolic**

opposition to booking Sweet T as part of the series. The event took place and the series continues to be presented by the library.

Source: *Kicks* 96

**Citing active interference with library programs and grants by county officials, particularly criticism directed at proposed Pride Month programs and a potential Drag Queen Story Time, the Wicomico Public Library (in Salisbury, Maryland) director resigned.**

Source: *The Dispatch*, October 8, 2020

**The advocacy group Liberty for Maine planned to sponsor a showing of the film *Vaxxed* at the Vose Library in Union, Maine. The library board of trustees canceled the showing. The library president issued a statement to explain why the board canceled the program: “When the Vose Library canceled the *Vaxxed* program, we received a number of messages expressing disappointment that we had done so. Some of those messages also claimed that we had been pressured to take this action. In reality, there was no pressure. Instead, upon conducting our own research into the message of the film, we learned that it promoted the findings of a 1998 study that was later determined to be fraudulent and had been widely discredited by the medical and scientific community. Based on this analysis, the library board agreed that we did not wish to be (mistakenly) perceived as promoting or spreading misinformation.”**

Source: *Penobscot Bay Pilot*, March 3, 2020

**The Minnesota Democratic–Farmer–Labor Party had been meeting at the Columbia Heights (MN) Public Library, but was**

informed just ahead of a primary election that political groups could not meet at the library’s meeting room. While admitting that the timing was unfortunate, the city’s lawyer said that the rules were clear, even if they hadn’t been enforced before. City Council announced that it intended to review the policy.

Source: *Star Tribune*, February 25, 2020

**A parent of a second grader at the Rockwood School District in Wildwood, Missouri, complained about *Ron’s Big Mission*, written about Astronaut Ron McNair—the only Black member of the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger crew. The book focuses on his childhood fight to get a library card in segregated South Carolina in the 1950s. The principal responded to the parent’s complaint by reading the book aloud to the entire elementary school.**

Source: *NewsRadio 1120 KMOX*, September 4, 2020

**The public library of Rye, New York, indefinitely postponed a Drag Queen Story Hour after strong condemnation by a local newspaper. An online petition calling for the reinstatement of the event exceeded 1,000 signatures, to no effect.**

Source: *The Advocate*, January 31, 2020

**Following the cancellation of the Drag Queen Story Hour in Rye, New York, protesters attempted to shut down another Drag Queen Story Hour scheduled to take place at the Putnam (NY) Valley Public Library. A Catholic priest in the community sent a letter to his congregation encouraging them to contact the library to oppose the event, writing that**



the event would “promote gender confusion in innocent children and spread immoral disordered ideas among children and adults.” The library held the event despite the protests, simply making room for the protesters. After the event sold out, the director remarked, “I wish all my library programs had such a good response from the community.”

Source: *Lohud*, February 1, 2020

**The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of the Clinton Elementary School** in Columbus, Ohio, planned to host an after-school Drag Queen Story Hour based on Disney characters. Despite local and administrative support for the event, it was cancelled because of threatened harassment of employees and volunteers on social media, and public opposition to the event, largely from people who did not live in the Columbus area. The PTA cited safety concerns in canceling the event.

Source: *The Columbus Dispatch*, February 9, 2020

**A group organizing against a sales tax levy to fund construction of a new jail in Greene County, Ohio,** was turned away from the Yellow Springs (OH) Community Library’s meeting room because the library’s meeting room policy expressly prohibited “political campaign meetings.” In the view of the library’s legal counsel, the library needs to be as neutral as possible. A representative of the American Library Association, responding to questions from the local press,

said that libraries were free to host political discussions and events without offending the First Amendment. The group found an alternative meeting venue in Yellow Springs.

Source: *Yellow Spring News*, March 1, 2020

***Rigged: the Voter Suppression Playbook* is a 2019 documentary** that “examines how, since 2008, right-wing groups have worked with certain states to make it harder to vote, particularly for minority groups and young people.” When an Oregon public library announced its screening of the film, they received a voice-mail from a patron threatening to “get a group together to storm the library and remove all the staff.” The screening proceeded without incident.

Source: 2020 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

**When the Fairfax Republicans publicly opposed four bond issues** that included \$90 million for local libraries, they cited the library’s hosting of a Drag Queen Story Hour as reason to defeat the levies, describing the event as “sexually charged.” Despite the criticism, all of the bonds passed by at least two-to-one margins.

Source: WMAL DC, September 25, 2020

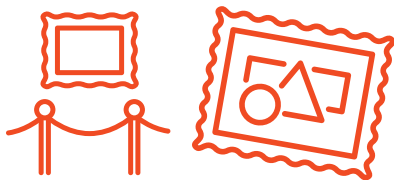
**The group Gender Critical Vermont booked a meeting room** at the Fletcher Free Library Public Library in Burlington, Vermont, for a discussion among those “who oppose the subversion of Women’s Rights by the transgender agenda.” Members of

the public protested the event, and the library director issued a statement saying that the city attorney advised the library that the event fell within the library’s room-use policies and thus would continue. “To bring civility, interrogation, and fervor for facts on these topics is very challenging, but should not be shied away from if we are to grow as a society,” the director said. The meeting organizers, however, canceled the meeting, announcing their intent to reschedule the meeting at a bigger venue with security. The executive director of Outright Vermont, a queer advocacy group, argued that protecting the transgender community takes precedence over arguments about free speech. He felt the threshold around controversial speech often revolves around violence. But “there are lots of forms of violence,” he said.

Source: *Burlington Free Press*, January 28, 2020

A “ban” is a removal of materials. Sometimes the ban is a decision made by a committee, and other times an administrator or staff member removes resources without following a library’s policy. **A ban can also be the cancellation of a program or display.**

## Displays and Artwork



**In a District of Columbia exhibit called “Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote,”** the National Archives displayed a large image of the January 2017 Women’s March. But the protest signs in the photo referencing then President Donald Trump had been blurred to remove his name, including a poster reading “God Hates Trump” and another reading “Trump and GOP, hands off women.” After a *Washington Post* article highlighted the changes in the photo, the Archives issued an apology. The Archives had sought “not to engage in current political controversy,” an aim incompatible with the preservation of history.

Source: *Washington Post*, January 18, 2020

**A Gay Pride display created by a staff member of the Eckhart Public Library in Auburn, Indiana, was taken down by**

the library administration. A different staff member resigned after learning that the library had removed the display and others like it. The staff member then wrote a Facebook post alerting the community about the removal and expressing concern for the state of intellectual freedom in the library. The library claimed that the issue was the specific space in which the exhibit was placed, and that “the books originally on the Pride display have been moved (to) the area originally slated for the display, on a custom piece of furniture on the historic side of the main level of the Main Library.” The former staff member disputed that claim on social media, posting that she had been told that the community’s conservative electorate would be offended by the display, which could affect the library budget. The library subsequently apologized on Facebook “for the pain that this caused,” but asserted, “We take pride in celebrating intellectual freedom and making sure our collection represents experiences beyond our own.”

Source: KPC News, June 10, 2020

**During a publicly broadcast meeting, the Sullivan County (PA) School Board discussed a library display about LGBTQIA+ terms, with several board members objecting to the display.** One board member advocated for the immediate removal of the display, stating that it was objectionable. “Suppose that I feel we should have KKK Month or I feel we should have White Supremacist Month, and I’m not saying I support those things, I’m just going to extremes here. This is how I feel or somebody did with the rainbow organization or whatever you want to call it.” Parents and members of the community protested in support of the display and the school’s diversity initiatives. One parent commented, “To say promoting inclusivity for students who are LGBTQ is the same as having to allow white supremacists to have their say? That’s complete nonsense.” The school superintendent and board president jointly called for sensitivity and diversity training for the board. The display was retained.

Source: Fox 56, November 11, 2020

## Online Services and Resources

### New York Times Learning Network

Complete description and source for the Palmer, Alaska, challenge listed under “Angelou, Maya” on page 3.

**A political cartoon that compared law enforcement to slave owners** and the KKK was removed from the Wylie Independent School District’s (Abilene, Texas) website after the National Fraternal Order of Police criticized it, calling the comparison “abhorrent and disturbing.” The cartoon was part

of an assignment for the 8th grade social studies class.

CBS DFW, August 20, 2020

### During a Fairfax County (VA) Library Board of Trustees

meeting, a board member made controversial comments about diverse resources highlighted on the library’s website. The Northern Virginia Equity Coalition sent a letter to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the board of trustees of Fairfax County’s libraries asking for the board member’s resignation or removal. The Virginia Library Association



Executive Committee sent a letter to the members of the Board of Trustees with the reminder, “A library’s mission is that diverse, inclusive, and equitable materials are available to all.” The online resources were retained.

Source: NBC Washington, August 21, 2020

## Social Media



**An Advanced English teacher at Roma (TX) High School set up a virtual classroom during the pandemic.** Among the graphics

were a Black Lives Matter poster, a rainbow flag, and a phrase written in Spanish that highlights solidarity between Black and brown people. On the digital chalkboard, she asked students to put their names and preferred pronouns. Then, she posted a screenshot of her classroom on her social media. On the Sunday before she was to welcome back her students, school officials told her to take down the graphics, claiming that they had received several complaints from parents. When the teacher

refused, she was placed on paid leave. Eventually, the school told her she could return and retain the posters as long as they did “not come to overly disrupt or detract from the educational process or the learning environment.” The teacher said she won’t return until the district commits to tangible change and supporting “anti-racist policies and tolerance in our classrooms.”

Source: Texas Tribune, August 26, 2020

# Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2020

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 156 challenges to library, school, and university materials and services in 2020. Overall, 273 books were targeted. Here are the “Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2020,” along with the reasons cited for censoring the books.

## #1 GEORGE

by Alex Gino

Challenged, banned, and restricted for LGBTQIA+ content, conflicting with a religious viewpoint, and not reflecting “the values of our community”

## #2 STAMPED: RACISM, ANTIRACISM, AND YOU

by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

Banned and challenged because of author’s public statements, and because of claims that the book contains “selective storytelling incidents” and does not encompass racism against all people

## #3 ALL AMERICAN BOYS

by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely

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”

## #4 SPEAK

by Laurie R. King

Banned, challenged, and restricted because it was thought to contain a political viewpoint, it was claimed to be biased toward male students, and it depicts rape and profanity

## #5 THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN

by Sherman Alexie

Banned and challenged for profanity, sexual references, and allegations of sexual misconduct by the author

## #6 SOMETHING HAPPENED IN OUR TOWN A CHILD’S STORY ABOUT RACIAL INJUSTICE

by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin

Challenged for “divisive language” and because it was thought to promote anti-police views

## #7 TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

by Harper Lee

Banned and challenged for racial slurs and their negative effect on students, featuring a “white savior” character, and its perception of the Black experience

## #8 OF MICE AND MEN

by John Steinbeck

Banned and challenged for racial slurs, racist stereotypes, and their negative effect on students

## #9 THE BLUEST EYE

by Toni Morrison

Banned and challenged because it was considered sexually explicit and depicts child sexual abuse

## #10 THE HATE U GIVE

by Angie Thomas

Challenged for profanity, and it was thought to promote an anti-police message