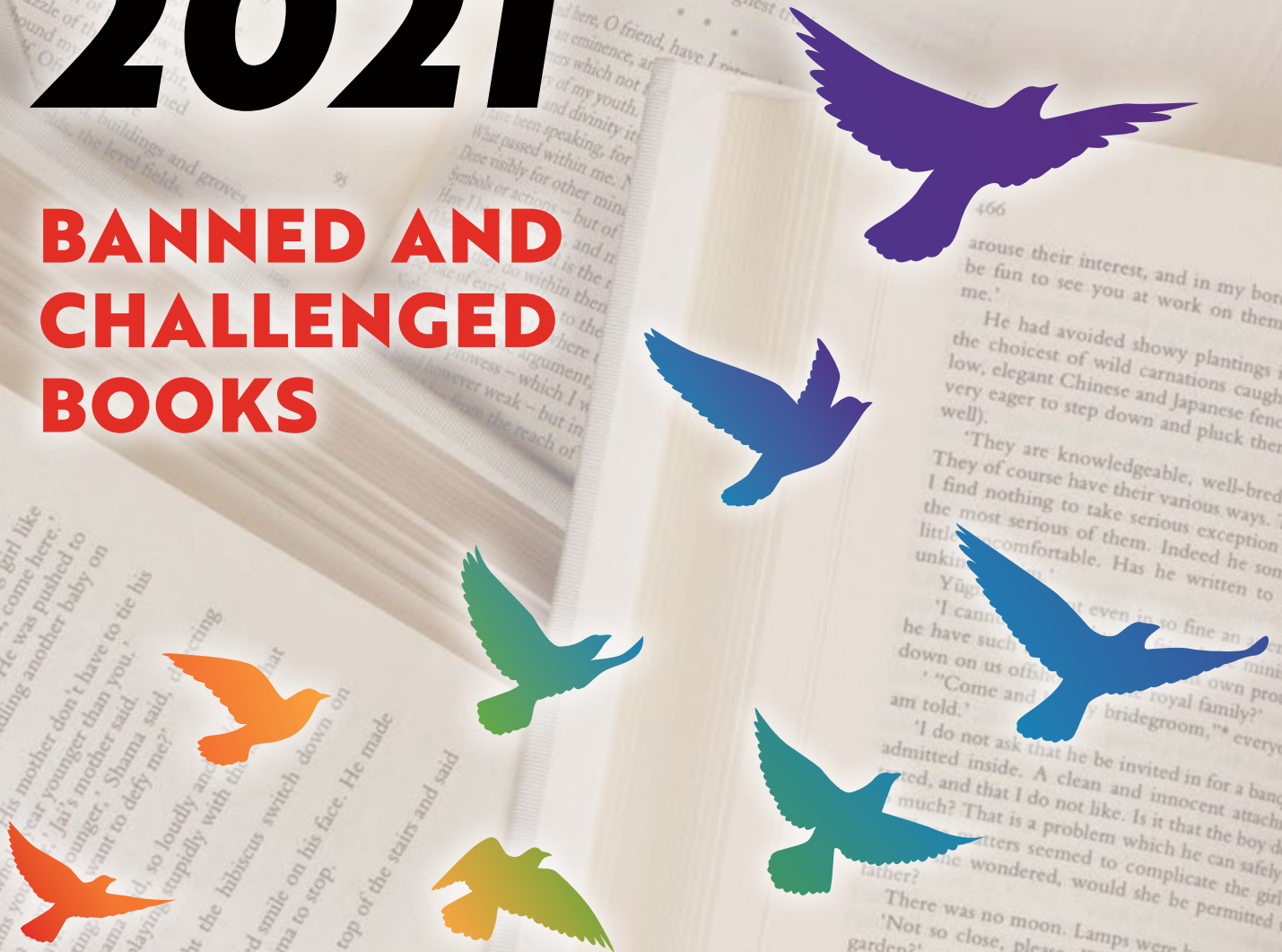


FIELD REPORT 2021

BANNED AND CHALLENGED BOOKS



BOOKS UNITE US



CENSORSHIP DIVIDES US

In 2021, OIF tracked an unprecedented 729 challenges to library, school, and university materials and services, targeting 1,597 unique titles. The information documented here was compiled from reports made to OIF, news coverage, and public records. The scope of this report is limited to the top 20 challenges. Each entry documents the number of known challenges from 2021 and a synopsis of a case or two in which the material was challenged.

Children's and YA books pertaining to race, gender, and sexual identity were those most frequently challenged. In addition to the increase in challenge volume, the scope of challenges also expanded. There were instances where hundreds of titles were challenged at a time and where challenges were made district-wide as opposed to at a specific school. Censorship efforts also grew more vehement and pointed. OIF documented 27 instances where police reports were filed against librarians over books they had on the shelves. Threats against library workers grew more frequent. Proud Boys and armed activists protested at school and library board meetings.

Several related movements contributed to this surge in censorship. Organizations like Moms for Liberty and No Left Turn in Education provided resources including target lists, talking points, and planning documents supporting

book challenges. Conservative think tanks such as the Manhattan Institute and the Heritage Foundation advanced model legislation and policies targeting "divisive concepts" and "critical race theory" in curricula and libraries. Republican PACs supported the election of pro-censorship candidates to school and library boards. Fringe ideas from MassResistance and QAnon were normalized through right-wing media outlets, politicians, and algorithmic elevation on social media sites.

In response to these growing threats to the freedom to read, the American Library Association launched Unite Against Book Bans, a campaign to empower readers everywhere to stand together in the fight against censorship. Dozens of allies, including authors, educators, publishers, and free expression and civil liberties organizations, have joined the campaign. You can join the movement at uniteagainstbookbans.org.

Attending library and school board meetings and speaking out against censorship is another way you can make a difference, especially to the students and community members whose literary representations are in jeopardy. Increasingly, book challenges take place during the public comments section of meetings and include extreme and inaccurate allegations about books and the actions of educators and librarians. These allegations stoke the engines of outrage and spur videos of the encounters to go viral. Elected officials and administrators need to know that community members oppose censorship and cherish the ability to make their own decisions about what they read and what their children read.

Since conservative PACs and book-banning organizations like Moms for Liberty have begun focusing on school and library board elections, it is imperative that those committed to



BOOKS BANNED OR CHALLENGED IN 2021

intellectual freedom do the same. Board members have the authority to change policy and curriculum, and often serve as the ultimate arbiters in reconsideration processes. The smaller the election, the more impactful each vote becomes. Making sure to know the candidates, voting for those who support free and equal access to books and information, and even running for a seat on a board are all important steps to preventing book bans.

Reporting censorship and challenges is vital for OIF's efforts to develop the best tools to defend library resources. If materials, displays, or programs are challenged where you work or in your community, we encourage you to report it to OIF, regardless of whether or not you need their support: ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report.



OFFICE FOR
Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association

ALEXIE, SHERMAN

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

28 CHALLENGES

Bestselling author Sherman Alexie tells the story of a high schooler named Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation, and his decision to go to a nearly all-white public high school away from the reservation. ALA's Young Adult Library Services Association named it one of the top ten books for young adults of 2008.

The **HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON (NY) SCHOOL DISTRICT** halted lessons after they received complaints from an African American student and classmates when an eighth-grade teacher read a passage from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* that included a character's racist joke featuring the N-word. Defenders of the book, including English teachers and faculty department chairs,

students, and the board of the Hasting-on-Hudson Public Library, decried what they called censorship of the book. But the school district administration has said its priority is protecting students, and that schools should be sensitive to the historic marginalization of students of color. A middle school English teacher resigned over the district's handling of the situation. It is unclear whether letters by students and teachers supporting the book will have any influence on whether the book is allowed to be used in the classroom in the future.

The Protect Nebraska Children Coalition brought an extensive list of books to the **WAUNETA-PALLISADE (NE) PUBLIC SCHOOLS** board meeting and wanted the books removed from both the elementary and high school libraries. The list of more than 30 titles included *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin, *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone, *The*

STAY UPDATED ON CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS

Follow the Office for Intellectual Freedom on Twitter (@OIF) and Facebook (@ALAOIF), and subscribe to *Intellectual Freedom News* (<https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/category/intellectual-freedom-news/>).

Color Purple by Alice Walker, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander, *Pink Is for Boys* by Robb Pearlman, and *Harbor Me* by Jacqueline Woodson. The books were removed for evaluation.

ANDREWS, JESSE

ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL (2015)

23 CHALLENGES

This coming-of-age novel is about two outcast high schoolers and would-be filmmakers who befriend a young woman dying of leukemia.

In the HUDSON CITY (OH) SCHOOLS, Moms for Liberty challenged titles for language and “sexually explicit” material. A decision on *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* is pending. *Lawn Boy* by

Jonathan Evison was retained on the school library shelves. *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe remains on the shelves for now but has been sent to a reconsideration committee. *A Girl on the Shore* by Inio Asano was removed by high school administration.

In another challenge to *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, a man showed up at a school board meeting of the SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LANCASTER (PA) to say his 11-year-old daughter had checked it out from a middle school library. He read a section about oral sex from the book aloud and called for the resignation of the superintendent. After public comment, the superintendent apologized and said the book would be pulled for review. Subsequently, school officials learned that the book had not been checked out from any middle school library in the previous year, and became suspicious that the man had no child in the school district and had provided a fake name during the board meeting. The book was retained. The district’s solicitor was consulted after concerns were raised that the book contained child pornography and violated the law; the solicitor said it did not constitute child pornography.

BECHDEL, ALISON

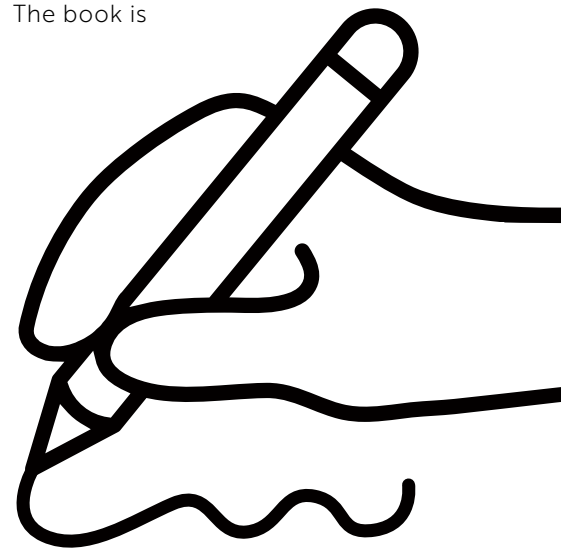
FUN HOME: A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC (2006)

16 CHALLENGES

This graphic memoir chronicles the author’s childhood

and youth in rural Pennsylvania focusing on her complex relationship with her father. It addresses LGBTQIA+ themes, suicide, emotional abuse, and dysfunctional family life.

A Moms for Liberty parent complained about this acclaimed and award-winning graphic novel, and said he considers an image inside the graphic novel to be pornographic. The book is



If there’s a local challenge reported in the news, write a powerful letter to the editor in your newspaper. The letter could touch on the benefits of unrestricted reading, a defense of the First Amendment freedom to read, or your personal experience with reading the book.

not part of the mandatory curriculum and the **TROY (MI) SCHOOL DISTRICT** library copy has a graphic content warning label. One parent went to the school board, the city council, and the Troy Police Department with concerns claiming that the school library was “distributing pornography to minors.” The district’s reconsideration committee, made up of parents, teachers, students, and administrators, recommended that the graphic novel be retained in the library, but students under 18 years of age will be required to obtain parental permission to check it out.

Fun Home was one of five LGBTQIA+ titles challenged by a parent at the **NORTH HUNTERDON-VOORHEES (NJ) REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**. The other titles were *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison, *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, *This Book Is Gay* by Juno Dawson, and *All Boys Aren’t Blue* by George M. Johnson. The parent read some snippets, called for audits, and threatened criminal charges for those responsible for providing “evil, wicked” content in the school. The school board voted to retain all five challenged LGBTQIA+ titles.

DAWSON, JUNO

THIS BOOK IS GAY (2015)

24 CHALLENGES

A funny, pertinent, star-reviewed, and award-winning book about being lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer,

transgender, or just curious, by acclaimed YA author and activist, Juno Dawson.

The conservative law firm Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty asked the **ELMBROOK (WI) SCHOOL DISTRICT** to remove “sexually explicit materials from its online library” that were “available to all students,” including elementary age students. They cited the books *This Book Is Gay* and *Queer: The Ultimate LGBTQ Guide for Teens* by Kathy Belge and Marke Bieschke as examples of books they wanted the district to remove. The district stated the books in question were never available to the district’s elementary students. Nonetheless, the books were banned from circulation in the school libraries and on SORA, the school’s e-reading platform.

At the **CAMPBELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY IN GILLETTE (WY)**, a months-long protest against the presence of sexual education and LGBTQIA+ books in the children’s and teen sections was led by the Wyoming chapter of MassResistance, a national group headquartered in Waltham, MA. Local members of MassResistance attended county commission meetings and library board meetings for months, calling for the library director to resign or be fired, and for the library board to step down or be removed by the commissioners. Law enforcement became involved when a criminal complaint was filed with the Sheriff’s Office, alleging the library director and library board were committing a crime by distributing obscene material.

The Weston County Attorney ultimately decided not to pursue criminal charges against library staff. In Campbell County, 55 formal challenges have been submitted by 17 different people, covering 29 unique books. *This Book Is Gay* had been challenged by several people, including some county commissioners, for its description of sexual acts. The library staff decided the book should remain in the teen section. When the decision was appealed before the library board, the board voted to keep the book on the teen shelf.

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.

EVISON, JONATHAN

LAWN BOY (2018)

67 CHALLENGES

“Jonathan Evison takes a battering ram to stereotypes about race and class in his fifth novel, *Lawn Boy* . . . full of humor and lots of hope . . . Evison has written an effervescent novel of

hope that can enlighten everyone.”

—*Washington Post*

A parent complained at a public board meeting of the **LEANDER (TX) INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** that this Alex Award-winning and *Booklist* 2018 Editors Choice novel normalized sex acts between fourth graders and constituted pedophilia. Two parents filed complaints with the local police, who announced an investigation. District officials stated that the title was not part of the curriculum and was only available in the high school library. No formal written complaints were received—a step required by their policies to initiate a review—so the book was retained.

Parents of **TYLER (TX) INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** students expressed concern that “something that can be found on Penthouse Forum” and considered “very graphic” is found in district school libraries. Parents submitted a list of 120 “questionable” books. *Lawn Boy* was banned.

How can you and your community unite against book bans? Join the **Unite Against Book Bans Campaign** and use the action toolkit at uniteagainstbookbans.org/toolkit to help you get started.

GINO, ALEX

MELISSA (PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS *GEORGE*, 2015)

18 CHALLENGES

With four starred professional reviews, a Lambda Literary Award, and a Stonewall Award, this debut children’s novel tells the story of a fourth-grade girl who is struggling to be herself to the rest of the world. Alex Gino’s tenderly written story helps kids and adults understand what it feels like to be transgender.

An online petition was directed to the superintendent and board of the **NOVI (MI) COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT** protesting the inclusion of “sensitive materials topics,” defined as “gender identity, sexuality and ideological activist behavior(s).” Titles included *Melissa*, *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman, *A is for Activist* by Innosanto Nagara, *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo, Nicola Yoon’s short story “Super Human,” the poem “The Cost of Being a Girl” by Denise Frohman, and the poem “If a Princess Tries to Kidnap Your Daughter” by Carlos Andres Gomez. Also at issue was a concern about bullying of people who disagreed with each other. Among public comments at the board meetings, several trustees and district officials spoke on behalf of the district’s efforts to be more inclusive. The titles apparently have been retained.

GREEN, JOHN

LOOKING FOR ALASKA (2005)

24 CHALLENGES

Winner of the 2006 Michael L. Printz Award and noted by numerous publications as the best book of the year, including *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews*.

A group called Purple for Parents Indiana posted on Facebook that the **BREMEN (IN) SCHOOL DISTRICT** had two “obscene” books in the high school library: *Looking For Alaska*, and *All the Rage* by Courtney Summers. They urged parents to contact them for more information. Status of the titles is unknown.

A written challenge was submitted to the **SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MANAWA (WI)**. The complaint stated that *Looking for Alaska* contains sexually explicit encounters in detail, bad language, and normalizes dishonesty, hazing, underage drinking, and smoking. The book was retained.

HARRIS, ROBIE

IT’S PERFECTLY NORMAL (1994)

18 CHALLENGES

A “caring, conscientious, and well-crafted book . . . a fine library resource as well as a marvelous adjunct to the middle-school sex-education curriculum.” —*Booklist*

A patron of the **CASS COUNTY (MO) PUBLIC LIBRARY** bypassed the library's Request for Reconsideration process and went directly to the county commission (both on social media and at board meetings) to demand the removal of this award-winning nonfiction book for youth. The library had owned the book since 1994. The concerns were pornography, sexual explicitness, and illegality because it showed a man kissing a man, a woman kissing a woman, was "not right," and a five-year-old might stumble across the book. Retained.

LLANO COUNTY (TX) Commissioners forced the library system to remove four books (*I Need a New Butt* by Dawn McMillan, *Freddie the Farting Snowman* by Jane Bexley, *In The Night Kitchen* by Maurice Sendak, and *It's Perfectly Normal*) from circulation. After the commissioners



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

handpicked members for a library advisory board, the library was closed for three days for "inventory and proper cataloging of books." The library staff was directed to conduct a "thorough review" of every children's book in the library and assess their content. Additionally, the online service that provides access to magazines, electronic books, and audiobooks was suspended.

JACKSON, TIFFANY

MONDAY'S NOT COMING (2018)

22 CHALLENGES

"Suspenseful without being emotionally manipulative, compelling without resorting to shock value, this is a tightly spun debut that wrestles with many intense ideas and ends with a knife twist that will send readers racing back to the beginning again."
—*Booklist* (starred review)

LOUDOUN COUNTY (VA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS initiated division-level reviews for two "dirty books," *Monday's Not Coming* and *#MurderTrending* by Gretchen McNeil, whose challengers were praised by Tucker Carlson of Fox News. The titles were retained.

A community member sent emails to library staff, principals, and district administrators of the **SANTA BARBARA (CA) UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT** requesting the removal of *Monday's Not Coming* from junior high school library shelves, noting that the

title had been challenged elsewhere. The book was retained.

Join organizations that defend and promote free access to information. A list can be found at bannedbooksweek.org.

JOHNSON, GEORGE M.

ALL BOYS AREN'T BLUE (2021)

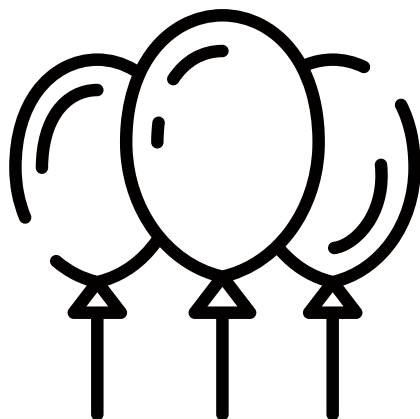
64 CHALLENGES

This series of autobiographical essays about growing up gay and Black deals frankly with sexual abuse. The title has been challenged several times by representatives of Moms for Liberty on the basis of explicit language.

At the **FLAGLER (FL) PALM COAST HIGH SCHOOL**, a school board member filed an obscenity complaint with the Sheriff's Office, which issued a statement that "no crime [was] committed" by including the book in public school libraries. A district committee voted unanimously to retain the title. The superintendent removed it permanently anyhow, although other challenged titles were retained.

Utah Parents United created a post highlighting some pages with sexual content and saying that the book was available at the **ALTA HIGH SCHOOL IN THE CANYONS (UT) SCHOOL DISTRICT**.

Then one person wrote an email challenging eight other titles. The school's reconsideration process called for any challenged book to remain on the shelf during review. However, all nine were removed without any committee input or public discussion. In an interesting follow-up, the ACLU threatened to file suit, and Utah Governor Spencer Cox suggested, "let's pump the brakes on the idea of getting rid of books."



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

STAMPED: RACISM, ANTIRACISM, AND YOU (2020)

14 CHALLENGES

Based on the National Book Award winning *Stamped from the Beginning* by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* is a "remix" for young adults that explores race and racism in America.

At the **CHICAGO LAKES (MN) SCHOOL DISTRICT**, a parent emailed the school principal and superintendent complaining that the book teaches "critical race theory" and is "divisive." The principal, curriculum director, a secondary teacher, and the librarian met with the parent and explained the reconsideration process. A reconsideration request form was submitted requesting the book's removal from all school libraries. A committee including a librarian,

a student, a teacher, and residents was formed to make a recommendation. The outcome is unknown.

The Purple for Parents Indiana pressure group emailed the school superintendent of the **CLARK-PLEASANT (IN) COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION** requesting that a list of 25 books with themes of antiracism, and racial, sexual, and gender identity be removed from school libraries. They were informed of the district's reconsideration policy and referred to the form to request reconsideration of materials. The outcome is unknown.

KOBABE, MAIA

GENDER QUEER: A MEMOIR (2019)

120 CHALLENGES

This illustrated autobiography is a tender, visually complex exploration of gender and family that shows the gifts and challenges of a nonbinary identity. Sexual content supports broader themes of narrative. As a result of organized efforts targeting *Gender Queer* for removal from schools and libraries, OIF has documented more challenges to it than to any other title. Prior to 2021, it had appeared only twice in OIF's database of challenges.

At **McLEAN COUNTY (IL) UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5**, some speakers at a school board meeting called *Gender Queer* pornographic, saying the book is a form of "grooming." In 90 minutes of public comments, some of the most commonly raised concerns related to school library books, diversity, and inclusion. The school board made no decision about the book at this meeting.

In the **HARRISONBURG (VA) CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, several people from outside the school district complained about *Gender Queer* in a school board meeting. The superintendent, acting on his own initiative, removed the book from the high school library. He admitted there has not been a formal challenge to the book, so this is outside the district's procedure for challenges.

Visit your local library to check out a variety of perspectives, attend programs, and take advantage of the library's many resources!

A noncustodial parent of a child attending the **CENTRAL KITSAP (WA) SCHOOL DISTRICT** filed police reports against the high school librarian, principal, superintendent, and school board members alleging they were distributing "pedophilic pornography." Removed, but then a Freedom of Information Act request to determine whether policy had been followed resulted in a committee review, and the decision to restore *Gender Queer* to the shelves. The book was subsequently checked out and not returned. The replacement copy ordered by the school district was also stolen.

In some of the other places across the United States where the book was challenged, *Gender Queer* was:

- Retained in **RICHARDSON (TX) INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**
- Banned in **ORANGE COUNTY (FL) PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
- Retained in the **SHEBOYGAN FALLS (WI) MEMORIAL LIBRARY**
- Banned in **GREENVILLE COUNTY (SC) SCHOOLS**
- Banned in **ANCHORAGE (AK) SCHOOL DISTRICT**

- Banned in **PINELLAS COUNTY (FL) SCHOOL DISTRICT**
- Banned in **WEST CHESTER (PA) AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**
- Banned in **LOUDOUN COUNTY (VA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
- Retained in **BILLINGS (MT) PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

KUKLIN, SUSAN

BEYOND MAGENTA: TRANSGENDER TEENS SPEAK OUT (2014)

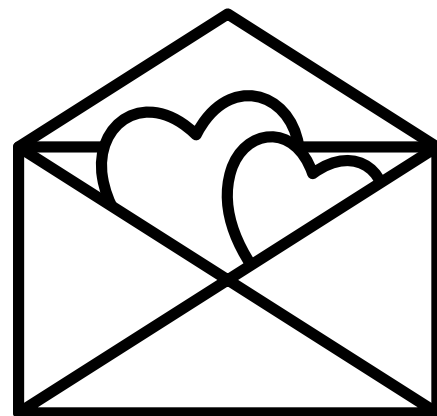
22 CHALLENGES

Author and photographer Susan Kuklin met and interviewed six transgender or gender-neutral young adults. Photographs and words reveal the varied emotional and physical journeys each youth has taken.

At **SILOAM SPRINGS (AR) HIGH SCHOOL**, three parents submitted a formal challenge to remove *Beyond Magenta* from the library. A committee reviewed the challenge and decided that the book should stay. The parents then appealed to the school board, which voted to remove the book from the school's library.

A group of 35 people came to the **VICTORIA (TX) PUBLIC LIBRARY** to demand that a list of LGBTQIA+ titles be removed from the library's collection. They said they believed children's brain development would be damaged

by materials "about gender ambiguity, transgender topics, or books on sexuality." They provided a packet of requests to reconsider 21 titles and said there were at least 126 other items they were "concerned about." The library board voted to retain all challenged titles.



Want to let a banned author know you have their back? Send them a handwritten letter. Find postcards and addresses at ala.org/bbooks/dear-banned-author.

MORRISON, TONI

THE BLUEST EYE

(1994)

25 CHALLENGES

The first novel from an author who later won a Nobel Prize in literature, *The Bluest Eye* examines society's obsession with beauty and conformity,

REPORT CENSORSHIP

Reach out to the Office for Intellectual Freedom (oif@ala.org) when there's a challenge or ban at your library, school, or university. You don't have to be a librarian or ALA member to get one-on-one help. Find more ways to reach us at ala.org/oif.

and raises questions about race, class, and gender.

The **WENTZVILLE (MO) R-IV SCHOOL DISTRICT** created a committee to review challenges to several books, including *The Bluest Eye*; *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson; *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel; *Heavy: An American Memoir* by Kiese Laymon; *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero; *Modern Romance: An Investigation* by Aziz Ansari and Eric Klinenberg; *Invisible Girl: A Novel* by Lisa Jewell; and *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison. Ignoring the committee's recommendations, the all-white school board voted to ban the book. The ACLU of Missouri sued the school district on behalf of two students.

At the **BEDFORD COUNTY (VA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, Moms for Liberty challenged *The Bluest Eye* along with *Beloved*, also by Toni Morrison, plus *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, *#MurderTrending* by Gretchen

McNeil, *Two Boys Kissing* by David Levithan, *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, *What My Mother Doesn't Know* by Sonya Sones, *Rick* by Alex Gino, *Freaky* by Kristin Elizabeth Clark, *Love Drugged* by James Klise, and *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* by Kristin Cronn-Mills. The group said it objected to graphic depictions of sexual acts, violence, substance use, and LGBTQIA+ representation. Board members cited policy, which limited challenges to one book at a time. BCPS administrators and book review committees made the decision not to remove any of the challenged titles from school libraries.

PÉREZ, ASHLEY HOPE

OUT OF DARKNESS (2015)

36 CHALLENGES

This Michael L. Printz award honor book, a layered love story set in 1937 Texas, is centered around Mexican American and Black American characters striving for dignity at a time when segregation was a matter of life and death.

A parent in **AUSTIN'S LAKE TRAVIS (TX) INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** read a racy excerpt from the title about "cornholing," a euphemism for anal sex. The books were pulled from the Hudson Bend and Bee Cave middle schools for review. Status unknown.

A parent affiliated with Utah Parents United complained to

the **WASHINGTON COUNTY (UT) SCHOOL DISTRICT** about profanity and sexual content in the book. The review committee was evenly split as to whether to retain or withdraw it. The superintendent cast the deciding vote to remove the book because it made him feel "depressed."

In some of the other places across the United States where the book was challenged, *Out of Darkness* was:

- Retained at **ORANGE COUNTY (NC) SCHOOL DISTRICT**
- Retained at the **NORTH KANSAS CITY (MO) SCHOOLS**
- Retained at **LINDBERGH (MO) SCHOOLS**
- Banned, then restored, at the **EISENHOWER (KS) MIDDLE SCHOOL**
- Banned at the **CANYONS (UT) SCHOOL DISTRICT**
- Banned at the **KATY (TX) INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

REYNOLDS, JASON, AND BRENDAN KIELY

ALL AMERICAN BOYS (2015)

14 CHALLENGES

This award-winning YA novel focuses on two young men, one Black and one White, whose lives are changed by an act of police brutality.

Although alternate assignments were offered, parents at **PITT COUNTY (NC) SCHOOLS** challenged three books: *All American Boys*, and two by Sharon M. Draper, *Darkness Before Dawn* and *Forged by Fire*. When the

review committee recommended retaining the titles, the parents appealed the decision to the board. A majority of the board voted to retain the books; however a new parental notification system for book assignments was adopted.

A community member raised concerns about *All American Boys* in the middle school library at **RAYMOND (WI) SCHOOL DISTRICT**. A committee of teachers, community members, parents, and librarians met to discuss it and decided middle school students should be allowed to check out the book. The school board rejected their recommendation and voted to ban this title and all other books with racial slurs or profanity from school libraries. *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie were also challenged and removed

from district libraries without following policy.

**TAMAKI, JILLIAN, AND
MARIKO TAMAKI**

THIS ONE SUMMER (2014)

15 CHALLENGES

This coming-of-age graphic novel tells the story of twelve-year-old Rose, her best friend Windy, and the summer of secrets and sorrow they share at a lake house with Rose's parents, whose relationship is on the rocks.

A group of parents distributed flyers containing excerpts and illustrations from this and other books at a meeting of the **ROCKWOOD (MO) SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD**. After the meeting, they submitted requests for

"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.

reconsideration of *This One Summer*, *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins, *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, *The Haters* by Jesse Andrews, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, *Where I End and You Begin* by Preston

PRIDE DISPLAYS **27 CHALLENGES**

Pride Month is celebrated every June in tribute to those who participated in the Stonewall Riots for LGBTQIA+ rights. Library displays highlight materials in the collection featuring LGBTQIA+ themes, characters, historical figures, and contemporary icons.

Republican congressional candidate Derrick Van Orden yelled that taxpayers shouldn't have to see "disgusting" LGBTQIA+ books and threatened a seventeen-year-old library worker over the **PRAIRIE DU CHIEN (WI) MEMORIAL LIBRARY'S** Pride display. Van Orden then checked out all of the displayed books and submitted a written complaint about *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* by Jill Twiss.

Two Lycoming County (PA) Commissioners reproached the executive director of the **JAMES V. BROWN LIBRARY** for having a "Celebrate Pride Month" sign and display in the children's area, and requested that the displayed books be removed from the children's section. Executive Director Barbara McGary refused to remove the display or relocate the books and informed the commissioners of the library's reconsideration policy.

The **CRAIGHEAD COUNTY JONESBORO (AR) PUBLIC LIBRARY** began receiving complaints about their Pride Month display after state Senator Dan Sullivan shared a post declaring Pride displays inappropriate. One parent objected specifically to the title *The GayBCs* by M. L. Webb. Library Director David Eckert defended the displays and the books in them.

Norton, *Heroine* by Mindy McGinnis, and *The Breakaways* by Cathy G. Johnson, claiming the books were pornographic. A review committee of two teachers, two librarians, a curriculum coordinator, a school board member, four parents, and two high school students voted to retain all challenged titles. However, *The Breakaways* was restricted to students in fourth grade and up.



This powerful YA novel has transformed teen and adult readers with its story of a sixteen-year-old navigating the line between two worlds and how witnessing a White police officer shoot and kill an unarmed Black man during a traffic stop changes everything in her life.

Parents in the **EDGERTON (MN) PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT** objected to the inclusion of *The Hate U Give* in the freshman curriculum, citing concerns over profanity, sexual situations, drinking, and drugs. The curriculum committee voted to retain the title. However, the superintendent tabled the decision until all board members read it. The board then voted 5–0 to remove it from the freshman curriculum citing profanity and its omission of the police officer’s viewpoint.

In a Facebook post, a group of parents challenged the use of *The Hate U Give* at the **NORTH ALLEGHENY (PA) HIGH SCHOOL**, citing vulgar language and drug use. Several students and parents stepped forward at the next North Allegheny School Board meeting to defend its inclusion in the ninth grade English curriculum. The novel remains in school classrooms.

Parents of students at the **PUTNAM VALLEY (NY) CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT** objected to “Critical Race Theory” and an alleged “anti-cop” bias in this title after it appeared on the district’s ninth grade optional summer reading list. The book was retained. ■

TELGEMEIER, RAINA

DRAMA (2012)

18 CHALLENGES

A *Booklist* Editors’ Choice, this award-winning graphic novel opens a window to a day in the life of a middle school theater crew and their experiences with friendship, growing up, and self-discovery.

At a **SALMON RIVER (ID) JOINT SCHOOL DISTRICT 243** board meeting where school library policy was being discussed, parents objected to the “vile filth” reflecting a “liberal bias” of the title. One claimed she checked out the book from the school library and burned it. She removed her student from the class and filed a grievance about the book.

A parent of a student at the **COLUMBIA COUNTY (GA) SCHOOLS** led a campaign and started a petition to remove *Drama* and all books with themes of “sexuality, homosexuality, or transgender ideology” from school



and classroom libraries. *Drama* was retained at most locations, although Euchee Creek Elementary restricted access to fifth graders after another challenge by the same patron.

THOMAS, ANGIE

THE HATE U GIVE

(2017)

32 CHALLENGES

The Hate U Give received eight starred reviews and numerous awards including the Goodreads Choice Awards Best of the Best.

MASS BOOK CHALLENGES

THEATER OF OUTRAGE: THE 2021 CENSORSHIP SURGE

By James LaRue, LaRue & Associates

In 2021, a surprisingly consistent and coordinated campaign of censorship resulted in the greatest surge of challenges since the founding of OIF. That also presents some challenges for this year's Field Report. So many titles are mentioned in passing that detailing each one of them obscures the pattern and the meaning of the phenomenon. So this printed report focuses more on highlights: the top challenges.

But it's worth unpacking the pattern.

First, the primary target is public schools, including reading lists, classroom resources, and library holdings. Florida's new "Don't Say Gay" law may bring the focus all the way down to conversations that some parents might find "age inappropriate," and over which they are now empowered to sue the school district at taxpayer expense.

Second, using various online lists, individuals claiming to be parents (some of whom don't have children in the school) show up at public comment sessions of school board meetings and read salacious snippets from various books. The reasons they give for their outrage are usually "sexual explicitness" or "profanity." But more important and fairly obvious is that almost all the books fall into one of two categories: books by or about people of color, or books by or about LGBTQIA+ people. Sometimes, the books are not even part of the formal curriculum. Challengers characterize literary works' serious consideration of child abuse and rape as "grooming," and "normalizing," or depictions of violent responses to racially motivated police brutality as "promoting" or "endorsing" these behaviors, even when, especially when, the full context of the works as a whole is decidedly different and in opposition to the claims of those seeking to ban the books.

Third, the challengers often sidestep school and libraries' Request for Reconsideration policies by relying on social media and email to call for the immediate banning of not just one or two titles, but 20–30 titles at a time. The intent, again, is to "cancel" entire categories of books dealing with race, gender, and sexual identity.

Fourth, in addition to seeking broad censorship of particular topics or ideas, some of those challenging books have adopted tactics of intimidation, threatening board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, and librarians with recall, firing, and, increasingly, criminal prosecution for distribution of materials alleged to be "obscene," "harmful to minors," or "pervasively vulgar." This reflects an attempt to reframe the provision of books as a criminal enterprise by misinterpreting and misusing the language of previous US Supreme Court decisions addressing First Amendment protections for speech. In at least three cases, challengers (including sitting board members) have actually reported their schools to local law enforcement. To date, neither local prosecutors or law enforcement agencies have pursued these complaints, on the grounds that, in fact, no crimes were committed.

But the effort to ban ideas and criminalize the provision of information is reflected in the laws forbidding the teaching of critical race theory in Texas or banning discussion of gender identity and sexual orientation in Florida under the guise of “parental rights.”

Fifth, there’s a renewed call for so-called parental notification, up to a year in advance, of any materials with “sexual content” (often utilizing a deliberately vague definition that sweeps in any books describing non-straight families, or that address the lives and concerns of nonbinary persons). Often, this call is made in the name of “transparency.” The effect is both to stigmatize and trivialize the content of important books and to scare off librarians and teachers from making such books available or even mentioning them.

Sixth, it continues to be the case that one of the best defenses against censorship is the presence and use of materials selection policies, and a robust reconsideration procedure in which the challenged materials (or services, because it’s not just about books) remain available while under thoughtful review that is shared with the community. Far too often during the current campaign to remove books and ideas from schools and libraries, principals, superintendents, and school boards bypass their own policies to enable arbitrary and immediate book bans that violate the right of parents and students alike to make their own choices about what to read, and prevent the community from weighing in on the vocal minority’s effort to censor books. There is a growing climate of embattled fear in many public institutions.

EXAMPLES

Following challenges to books that some parents alleged promoted critical race theory, socialism, and communism, the all-White board of the **CENTRAL YORK (PA) SCHOOL** “froze” access to a series of titles, including *A Big Mooncake for Little Star*; *A Bike Like Sergio’s*; *All Are Welcome*; *Alma and How She Got Her Name*; *Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*; *Full, Full, Full of Love*; *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story*; *Mae Among the Stars*; and others. Almost a year later, following widespread student-led, parent, and media protests of the decision, the district rescinded its ban and reinstated access.

After a parent raised concerns about finding LGBTQIA+ fiction in the high school library, the **SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY (VA) SCHOOL BOARD** directed district librarians to use keywords to search the library catalog to identify books with what the board members claimed was “graphic sexual content” and remove them. Two board members said they would like to see the removed books burned. One hundred forty books were identified as needing to be further reviewed per their criteria. Later the board rescinded the vote to remove the books, after receiving a legal opinion from its attorney finding the vote unconstitutional, and after school community members spoke at a meeting for four and a half hours, nearly all opposed to removing books. Board members opposed to rescinding the removal expect the issue to resurface at a time when a majority on the school board will support removing the books.

One of the largest school districts in Texas, **NORTH EAST INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (NEISD)** in San Antonio, pulled more than 400 books from its shelves for review after a Republican state lawmaker flagged them as inappropriate via a letter of inquiry. The book titles were removed from the NEISD online catalog and a digital app available to students. Boxes of books being removed by hand trucks ignited outrage among students and community members who said the censorship marginalized minority and LGBTQIA+ students. An online petition opposing the removal has almost 15,000 signatures. Four months later, the district returned 311 books to the school libraries. Additionally, NEISD parents may now access their students’ library book checkout histories.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING NOW?

There are two broad dimensions of this moment in time. The first is personal. As I've written elsewhere, historically most material challenges fall into those offered to children between the ages of 4 and 6 (picture books) and 14 and 16 (YA novels). These are times of transition in their lives, and some parents become overprotective of their children's innocence, reflecting their own insecurities and fears. It's an emotional reality amplified by current fears and concerns related to the pandemic.

The second is political. Many of the challenges to materials are directly linked to the talking points of today's conservative movement. According to those leading these political movements, critical race theory (taught in no public school in the United States) is part of a "woke" and "divisive" threat, mask mandates are intolerable restrictions on personal liberty, parental rights are sacrosanct, and public institutions and credentialed experts are fundamentally suspect. One wonders if the timing of these legislative and anti-institutional efforts, especially given the dissemination of lists by politicians (such as the 850 titles [bookriot.com/texas-book-ban-list] disseminated by Texas state Rep. Matt Krause), isn't primarily intended to rouse a base and win midterm elections. Informing that political push is a demographic shift. After a period marked by liberal social change—the election of a Black president, the Black Lives Matter movement, the legal and public acceptance of same-sex marriage, the greater visibility of LGBTQIA+ people—certain groups fearful of a loss of privilege and status are engaged in a moral panic.

It may also be that too much time in social isolation has made us all more stressed and less civil.

AND YET

As noted in the article *New ALA Poll Shows Voters Oppose Book Bans: Majority of Survey Respondents Support Librarians and Oppose Banning Books from Public and School Libraries* [americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/new-ala-poll-shows-voters-oppose-book-bans], published online on March 24, 2022, "seven in 10 voters oppose removing books from public libraries, including majorities of voters across party lines. In addition, 74% of parents of public school children expressed confidence in school libraries and librarians to choose which books are available to children and said books that have been contested should be available on an age-appropriate basis." Even with the current surge, challenges make up a tiny percentage of the still staggering number of books checked out by Americans.

So these attacks against intellectual freedom are still the work of a vocal minority. On the other hand, the estimated population of the United States today is just over 334 million. Twenty-six percent of that is almost 87 million people. The numbers in support of censorship appear to be growing. The need to fight censorship is more urgent than ever. Visit uniteagainstbookbans.org to learn how you can unite against book bans. ■

TOP 10 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2021



1
GENDER QUEER
By Maia Kobabe

REASONS: Banned, challenged, and restricted for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to have sexually explicit images



2
LAWN BOY
By Jonathan Evison

REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



3
ALL BOYS AREN'T BLUE
By George M. Johnson

REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, profanity, and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



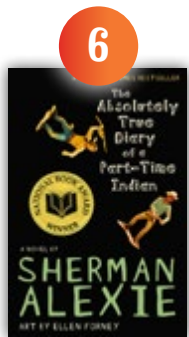
4
OUT OF DARKNESS
By Ashley Hope Perez

REASONS: Banned, challenged, and restricted for depictions of abuse and because it was considered to be sexually explicit



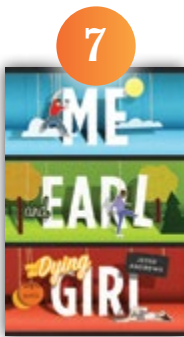
5
THE HATE U GIVE
By Angie Thomas

REASONS: Banned and challenged for profanity, violence, and it was thought to promote an anti-police message and indoctrination of a social agenda



6
THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN
By Sherman Alexie

REASONS: Banned and challenged for profanity, sexual references, and use of derogatory terms



7
ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL
By Jesse Andrews

REASONS: Banned and challenged because it was considered sexually explicit and degrading to women



8
THE BLUEST EYE
By Toni Morrison

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



9
THIS BOOK IS GAY
By Juno Dawson

REASONS: Banned, challenged, relocated, and restricted for providing sexual education and LGBTQIA+ content



10
BEYOND MAGENTA
By Susan Kuklin

REASONS: Banned and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to be sexually explicit