

What Students Are Saying About Banning Books From School Libraries

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Teenagers share their nuanced views on the various book banning efforts spreading across the country. [...]



Last month, a school board in Tennessee voted unanimously to ban “Maus,” a Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel about the Holocaust, from being taught in its classrooms.

We asked students to weigh in on book bans such as this one, happening across the country. Credit...Bertrand Langlois/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

I think the idea of people trying to censor speech is absolutely abhorrent. Right to freedom of speech, religion, peaceful assembly, petition, and press is our 1st amendment and one that we take for granted ...

5 As a teenager I am still trying to find my way in this world; I want to know as many other viewpoints as possible so that I know my thoughts are my own and not just a product of a limited amount of information. Even if these books are not required reading they should be allowed in libraries. Families can decide what books are allowed in their homes but trying to force a community to get rid of a book is a way of forcing one’s beliefs on an entire community. Removing books about issues faced by marginalized groups is a way to ignore them, a way to minimize the issues faced by those groups and allow the banners to not have their opinions challenged. This is a democracy that should be open to discussion and if it is then people will find others who agree and disagree with them.

— Jason, Maine

15 Students need the option to read books they enjoy or want to read. We often enjoy books that
connect to us and sometimes that may be a tough topic such as rape, violence or even gender
identity. Removing books with “inappropriate content” may sound like the right choice until we
20 dive into what was actually deemed inappropriate. A book that has a character who is transgender
may appeal to someone who identifies as transgender, this book may be enjoyable and relatable
for that person. Maybe a student has past trauma that they may struggle to deal with, a book that
has a topic based on their past may comfort them and bring them closure. These books also
inform students on what really happens within the mind and life of someone else. Banning books
is an overall loss for a school or library, it only limits human growth.
— Alex, Reeths-Puffer High School [...]

25 These books are important to both students and teachers alike. They are educational and “The
Hate U Give” by Angie Thomas and “The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian” by Sherman
Alexie should be talked about in schools. They help educate on racism and discrimination. And it
seems to me that the parents and politicians who voted for these books to be banned don’t want
their children to be educated on these subjects. Honestly, it’s a shame that the youth of today
30 can’t get the knowledge they need because of this.
— Cailah, City Charter High School

While it’s reasonable to be concerned about the material your children are reading, as some
material might not be age appropriate, there is almost never - honestly, never at all - justification
for banning a book. When you look at novels like Maus, that was recently banned in a Tennessee
35 school district for nudity and cursing, it becomes increasingly obvious what we are trying to erase -
no history, no matter your opinion or concerns, should be hidden or erased, especially such
horrible events like the Holocaust. If we don’t learn history, we can’t learn from it, and that is the
most essential key to humanity...
Books are the primary way to tell stories, to learn right from the mouths of people who have
40 witnessed things we need to learn and grow from. Our society depends on the idea of future
generations learning and progressing, and with the banning of books all we are doing is going
backwards, not forwards.
— Meghan, Glenbard West High School

Hiding away things that make us uncomfortable doesn’t make them go away. Even if we don’t talk
45 about it, racism, sexual assault, genocide, and many other complex issues will still exist. We have
to face the discomfort to keep it from happening again. While those supporting the book-banning
movement claim that it’s an issue of parental rights, it’s really an issue of people trying to ban
things that make them uncomfortable.
— Deeya, Bryant High School, Arkansas

50 If parents start trying to ban books that are intended to be informational and tell the story of
certain minorities the history can start to slowly fade away. For instance, say parents and
governments can now dictate what we should and shouldn’t learn soon enough as more
generations come there will no longer be the acknowledgement of the Holocaust and the horror
of what Hitler did, he will just be another “bad leader”. This will lead younger minds into believing
55 that no one and no country is capable of such horror like slavery or concentration camps but the

fact is they are.

— Savannah, Gray New-Gloucester High School [...]



Students, parents and educators gathered on Sept. 20 outside the Educational Service Center for the Central York School District to protest the district's banned resources list. Credit...Dan Rainville/ York Daily Record, via USA Today Network

60 I think the attempt to remove books from school libraries is pointless and a waste of time. If a student wants to read a book they can just go to a public library or the internet. The internet makes all of these efforts pointless. There is so much information on the internet that can be considered way more controversial. And the internet is in almost every child's hands.

— Declan, Michigan [...]

65 I think there are certainly better ways for concerned parents to be placated without going as far as banning books in school libraries. They could work to establish systems that flag books that could contain or do contain "sensitive" topics. Then only with parental permission could a student check out a flagged book. It's inconsiderate to take opportunities to read and learn about topics important and sentimental to kids away from an entire school of students just because a few parents don't like their kids reading those same topics.

70 — Arrionna, Michigan

It is essential for students to have relatively unrestricted access to books describing race and LGBTQ issues. However, I think that pledging to represent "all perspectives" of certain topics in libraries creates a slippery slope.

75 Take the book *Maus*, for example. Having read the book in 8th grade, I would strongly recommend it to all students due to its presentation of honest descriptions of the Holocaust in a digestible manner for teenagers, and I believe this book should be kept in school libraries. However, I worry some would attempt to create a "balanced" perspective for students by placing Holocaust-denying books in the library as well, even though the genocide's existence, scale, and horror is indisputable.

80 We should, by all means, allow students to absorb multiple opinions and ideas. We should let students read both Ayn Rand and Karl Marx. But we must not allow this quest for balance, for a holistic perspective, to corrupt our youth with misinformation and flat-out lies.
— Sean, Glenbard West High School

85 The efforts to erase books of certain topics is outrageous. Many of these are removed because of sensitive issues that they are worried will make the reader uncomfortable but the author didn't write these books or topics so that the reader can feel comfortable ... There are regardless going to be stories that are questioned but in most cases, they shouldn't be banned/removed because who has the right to ban literature? And who decides what students can handle with subjects?
— MaRynne, Colorado [...]

90 I feel that by banning books that talk about certain topics you are limiting what a child can think...One of my favorite quotes is by Haruki Murakami. "If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking." I think that this quote is very important, especially now because this is what banning books will do to us. If we ban books that talk about topics but leave only books that talk about one, we can only think about that one topic
95 and we can only think about what they want us to think. By banning books you're banning knowledge, banning opinions, banning our future.
— Ava, J.R. Masterman in Philadelphia, PA [...]

100 If parents want to get rid of any romance books with gay characters, they'd better be prepared to get rid of all romances, because otherwise it's unequal. I think that efforts across the nation to remove books discussing racism and other social issues are essentially efforts to silence the voices of others ... Does *The Hate U Give*, an eye-opening novel about being a young black girl in America, really have to be considered equal to Adolph Hitler's autobiography in the eyes of a school?
— Paulina, Julia R. Masterman Middle School [...]