

Banned Books Hurt Everyone

Who should decide what people can read? What makes a book appropriate? Censorship has been a battle fought for decades. From classics being banned for racial slurs to brand-new books being banned for sexual content, book banning is a topic that affects people around the world. People against censorship, specifically in school libraries, claim that parents have no right to dictate what other children have access to. However, groups working to ban books say there are some books that are not appropriate for everybody, challenging several books at once. In 2022, the number of challenges skyrocketed, almost doubling to 1,269 from the 729 challenges in 2021. The number of books challenged also increased, from 1,858 unique books in 2021 to 2,571 unique books in 2022 (“Censorship by the Numbers”). Books are powerful tools to change the world; how better to understand what it is like for somebody else than to see their experience? Every book is important to share an experience of somebody around the world, hence, banning books will remove somebody’s story from the shelves. Books should not be banned in public and school libraries as it removes access to a story that is important to understand the world.

A group called Moms for Liberty works to ensure parental rights in the classroom. They believe that parents should have more control over the materials their children have access to. A Spokesmom for the Moms for Liberty spoke at a press conference in Florida. She stated, “When you go to a movie theater, you have to be 18 to watch a rated-R movie, right?” (🔥 Exposing" [00:04:54]). A main point brought up is that there are books inappropriate for children that should not be accessible. However, these books can contain important morals and ideals that children need to grow up empathetic and understanding. Furthermore, what makes a book inappropriate can differ based on age and the child's maturity. Banning books from an entire

library because they are inappropriate for one child deprives the book of other people who need to learn the values the book brings up. *It is parents' responsibility to ensure their children do not read anything the parent believes is inappropriate.* Placing this responsibility on the librarian is irresponsible as it will deprive books from other students who have interest in reading them.

There is a great history with censorship and book banning. In 1873, the United States passed the Comstock Act. This was used to ban books that referred to topics such as premarital sex and birth control. In 1983, Supreme Court declared the Comstock Act to be unconstitutional ("Book Banning"). This precedent continued with the case *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico by Pico* in 1982. High school students fought against the removal of books from their school library. The Supreme Court ruled that banning these books was a violation of the students' First Amendment Rights ("Book Banning").

NARRATION/DESCRIPTION. These precedents show that banning books removes freedom of speech. They prohibit students from learning about different topics that are issues in the real world.

In general, people in Michigan are opposed to book banning as well. It is a small percentage of people who actively seek banning books. The Michigan Library Association did a survey with 800 Michigan residents about the materials in public libraries. 70% of people said that they trusted librarians to decide which books were included in their libraries ("Book Bans"). This shows that librarians know the general audience of their books and can accurately make a decision that affects everyone. A library is a shared resource and so books should be available for every demographic that uses it. In addition, 75% of people said that young people's access to books should be protected so they can understand several perspectives ("Book Bans"). This shows that most people are against censorship. As a part of a democracy, the majority will get to

make the decisions, and most Michiganders are against book banning. *Librarians cannot cater to a small portion of the population and ignore the needs of the majority.* Doing so would be unfair to the people who require their library to access titles that they need.

Banning books will prevent kids from reading as much since they have fewer books that could interest them. If a student is interested in fantasy with intricate magic systems, for example, but in his/her school district, the *Harry Potter* series is banned, (s)he will be unable to read a series that (s)he might enjoy. This lack of reading can hurt children's development. The National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance states, "Books help children and adults to open up, to move beyond self-absorption and connect to other people" ("Why Do Kids"). This is because books are told in several perspectives so children can step into somebody else's shoes and understand the world from another perspective. Reading books about divorce, for example, will make a child more aware of the issue so (s)he will have compassion for a friend whose parents are going through a divorce. Without books about these topics, children lose the ability to easily learn about somebody else to empathize with others. In addition, the same website states, "Books help us to understand ourselves, to find out who we are" ("Why Do Kids"). This is especially the case for marginalized communities. As an Indian girl, I look for books that represent my culture in a unique way that makes me feel validated and understand the complexities of my culture. When I find a book that explains something that I have experienced, I feel like an important part of this world and like there is someone else who has my experiences. According to the American Library Association, in 2022, "...the vast majority [of the challenged titles] were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community or by and about Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color" ("Censorship by the Numbers"). Book banning

removes people's cultures from shelves, specifically targeting those who need it the most. It prevents people like me from seeing ourselves in books and feeling like we are not alone.

Even just one book can hold an immense amount of power. I was wandering around the library, as usual, when a book caught my eye. It was a science fiction story about aliens and the end of the world, so I thought, *Why not?* While I waited in line to check it out, I started reading it, and it sucked me into the story. I could not stop reading until I had finished the entire book that same day. While I could not relate to what any of the characters were going through from personal experience, everybody's struggle felt real. The side characters were emotionally and morally complex and there was a beautiful blend of sadness and joy. I could relate to the main character's internal ideas and his frustration. As I read, I felt shocked at the atrocities he and his family are subjected to, and I quickly realized that while this was just a story to me, this was the real life of people in the world. It forced me to be empathetic towards other people because they could be secretly struggling inside. This book should be available for everyone. It changed my life, and I would not hesitate to recommend it to anybody. However, this is not the case. In the 2021-22 school year alone, the book *We are the Ants* by Shaun David Hutchinson was challenged in five school districts and banned in two of them ("PEN America"). This book was challenged because parents were concerned with explicit content ("23 Banned"). This means thousands of children who cannot find this book at their school library. Thousands of children who have no way to read this book and gain the knowledge and maturity this book gave me. Thousands of children, some who may be going through similar things and want to feel safe. None of them have access to this book.

Censorship removes access to books that are necessary to teach people about the world and help them become empathetic and self-confident humans. There are books not appropriate

for a certain age group, but there are strict rules in place so that the general population of the library has access to books appropriate for them. Books are important for so many people to see themselves in the real world, however, censorship specifically targets those in marginalized communities who need to see themselves the most. Books are important for children to engage with their world, and banning these books removes ways that they can learn in a meaningful way.

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