**Book Ban:**

**Possible Angles of Reporting**

-Genres, Topics:

-Compared to the Past:

**Data Visualization:**

**Example:**

**2023-2024:** [**https://pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/**](https://pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/)

**2022-2023:** [**https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/**](https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/)

**2021-2022:**

[**https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/**](https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/)

-2023-2024 School Year: 10046 Book Bans, 4,231 unique titles

-2022-2023 School Year: 3362 Book Bans, 1,557 unique titles

-2021-2022 School Year: 2532/2535 Book Bans, 1,648 unique titles

**Findings:**

[**https://pen.org/book-bans/**](https://pen.org/book-bans/)

In the 2023-2024 school year, PEN America counted book bans in 29 states and 220 public school districts, with Florida and Iowa leading in number of bans.

Of the most commonly banned books in the 2023-2024 school year, 44% featured people and characters of color and 39% featured LGBTQ+ people and characters.

**Unique Title:** <https://pen.org/book-bans-frequently-asked-questions/>

PEN America also tracks the banning of unique titles. **If the same book is banned in 10 school districts, that would count as 10 bans, but one unique title.**

**Nut Graf:**

**Who is behind today’s movement to ban books?**

[**https://pen.org/book-bans-frequently-asked-questions/**](https://pen.org/book-bans-frequently-asked-questions/)

Since 2021, a campaign has emerged in many parts of the United States to advocate for the censorship of books in public schools. This campaign is in part driven by politics, with state lawmakers and executive branch officials pushing for bans in some cases. In Texas, for example, Republican state representative Matt Krause sent a [letter](https://static.texastribune.org/media/files/965725d7f01b8a25ca44b6fde2f5519b/krauseletter.pdf?_ga=2.167958177.1655224844.1635425114-1180900626.1635425114) and [list with 850 books](https://static.texastribune.org/media/files/94fee7ff93eff9609f141433e41f8ae1/krausebooklist.pdf?_ga=2.11573559.2091958781.1635513476-272773625.1635513476) to school districts, asking them to investigate and report on which of the titles they held in libraries or classrooms. Political pressure of this sort in [Texas](https://thetexan.news/texas-lawmaker-challenges-23-frisco-isd-library-books-citing-obscene-sexual-content/), [South Carolina](https://www.wsoctv.com/news/local/mcmaster-requests-investigation-into-obscene-material-schools-after-concerns-local-parents/DZUOQP32VVETXBQ23PEGRD3JAE/), [Wisconsin](https://wisconsinexaminer.com/brief/uneasy-start-to-the-school-year-in-politically-charged-waukesha/), [Georgia](https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/gov-kemp-visits-forsyth-school-amid-book-controversy), and elsewhere has been tied to hundreds of book bans. Another major factor driving this dramatic expansion of book banning has been the proliferation of organized efforts to advocate for book removals. Organizations and groups involved in pushing for book bans have sprung up rapidly at the local and national levels, particularly since 2021. These range from local **Facebook groups** to the nonprofit organization **Moms for Liberty**, a national-level organization that now has over 200 [chapters](https://www.momsforliberty.org/chapters/). Broadly, this movement is intertwined with political movements that grew throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including fights against mask mandates and virtual school, as well as disputes over “critical race theory” that in some states fueled the introduction of [educational gag orders](https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-classrooms/) prohibiting discussion of “divisive” concepts in classrooms. The varied groups involved do not all share identical aims, but they have found common cause in advancing an effort to control and limit what kinds of books are available in schools. While many of these groups use language in their mission statements about [parents’ rights](https://www.momsforliberty.org/about/) or [religious](https://www.frc.org/mission-statement) or [conservative views](https://growingfreedomidaho.com/conservative-agenda/), some also make explicit calls for the exclusion of materials that touch on race (sometimes explicitly [critical race theory](https://parentsagainstcrt.com/about/)) or[LGBTQ+ themes](https://www.massresistance.org/AboutUs.html).

**Is book banning new?**

[**https://pen.org/book-bans-frequently-asked-questions/**](https://pen.org/book-bans-frequently-asked-questions/)

Book banning has a[long](https://www.freedomtoread.ca/resources/bannings-and-burnings-in-history/), global history. The tactic is frequently associated with authoritarian governments who have enacted society-wide bans on particular texts, such as occurred in Nazi Germany or Apartheid South Africa. The United States has also previously banned the import or sale of particular texts, such as Ulysses by James Joyce and Howl by Allen Ginsberg. Although less extreme, there have been efforts to bar and restrict books in public schools going back decades, with notable flare-ups in the [McCarthy era](https://www.washingtonpost.com/made-by-history/2022/09/12/todays-book-bans-might-be-more-dangerous-than-those-past/) and the [early 1980s](https://theconversation.com/battles-over-book-bans-reflect-conflicts-from-the-1980s-177888). At various points throughout the 20th century, certain books have stirred controversy, with titles like Of Mice and Men and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings being some well-known examples.

There have also been parallel efforts to pass state laws to prohibit and control what can be discussed in public schools and textbooks, most notably in the 1920s, with bans on the teaching of Darwin’s theory of evolution. These efforts mirror the significant wave of educational censorship we see today, including efforts to pass legislation that PEN America has called educational gag orders, and to enact book bans in schools. PEN America calls this the ‘[Ed Scare](https://pen.org/ed-scare-faq/),’ paralleling the ‘Red Scares’ which followed the First and Second World Wars. While there are historical parallels, the growing movement since 2021 to censor books in schools is unique, in both the scope and scale. Lists of books hundreds long have been assembled with demands that they be purged from school libraries by an expanding array of groups and individuals.

Whereas past censorship in schools focused on particular topics, the ‘Ed Scare’ is also notable in the way it is increasingly focused on an evolving array of subjects, themes, and identities — including U.S. history, race and diversity, social emotional learning, LGBTQ+ identities, and sex education. This is also continuing to shape the kinds of books that are being targeted for removal in schools.

**Graphics:**

<https://www.ala.org/bbooks/dear-banned-author>

<https://www.ala.org/bbooks/bannedbooksweek/ideasandresources/freedownloads>

Pulled off School Book Shelves: the Sweeping Book Removal Wave

The past academic year has seen an unprecedented surge in book bans, reaching the 10,000 plus springboard for the first time, a significant jump from the 3,362 records of the previous year. This at the same time tripled the number of banned book titles, per annual Index of School Book Bans data collected by PEN America, a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of free expression in the United States.

“It’s important to know that we don’t always have control as the people who have the control. I think that it is important to see what could happen because [some books] seem dystopian, but then, when you really look at it, some of them are very possible,” said Emma Saylor, a full-time staff at Book Culture on 112 Street.

A reason she considered banning books like *1984* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* is that they highlight what could happen to the government and what it could do to the people.

“They are not anti-government, but I think the people in charge see it as that, and they don’t want that warning. They don’t want that message shared; they don’t want us to know,” Saylor said.

Along with the rising number of book bans is the unchallenged prominence of Ellen Hopkins, who, in three consecutive years, is related to the most book ban instances across the country. The 2023-2024 school year stranded Hopkins with the most bans, over 500. Her novel *Crank*, a drug addiction tale of a 17-year-old girl, remained two years on the top ten banned books list.

Last year, the book-ban championship (victim) landed in the hands of Jodi Picoult. The title —*Nineteen Minutes —* repeated itself 98 times as it ranked first among all banned book titles.

“Having the most banned book in the country is not a badge of honor – it’s a call for alarm. *Nineteen Minutes* is banned not because it’s about a school shooting, but the because of a single page that depicts a date rape and uses anatomically correct words for the human body,” Picoult said.

“In fact, hundreds of kids have told me that reading *Nineteen Minutes* stopped them from committing a school shooting, or showed them they were not alone in feeling isolated.”

Also frequently appearing on the banned books list for at least two years in the top ten are Looking for Alaska, Sold, and Thirteen Reasons Why, with their controversial subject matter often keeping them out of reach from readers.

Books with sexual content and abuse themes, followed by substance use or abuse and violence or racism concerning topics, tended to be under major censorship effect. The rest banned content targeted LGBTQ+ people and characters and mental illness-related narratives.

State-wise, Florida and Iowa turned out with the most bans in the 2023-2024 school year. Book bans in these two states reeled from state legislation, taking together effect with initiatives from local districts.

Florida’s HB1069, which came into force in July 2023, requires the removal of books challenged for “sexual conduct” during the review process. The Florida Freedom to Read Project, a parent and advocacy organization, coupled with local book-challenging individuals and groups, sharply raised the book bans in Florida.

The same month in 2023, SF’s 496 went into effect in Iowa. The law asks all books to be “age-appropriate”, and this entails content of sex-act. Also part of the law keeps “Don’t Say Gay” copycat provisions, posing strict restrictions on class discussions of LGBTQ+ identities.

“A good way to go about explicit content or something that might not be age-appropriate at the stage of someone’s development is to have trigger warnings that go along with the book or a little card explaining what happens in the book, read at your own risk. Some young adult books contain sexual assault or abuse, but I don’t think they should be banned just because of that,” Saylor said.