

Learning Guide



Banned Books

We hope you enjoyed learning all about banned books, including the reasons some people want to ban certain books and why the right to read freely is so important. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen

Reflect on questions before and after listening to the episode.

Vocabulary

Discussion/Reflection Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1, W.3-8.2, W.3-8.3, W.3-8.4, W.3-8.7, W.3-8.8

Banned Book Report

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-8.2, RI.4-8.1, W.4-8.4, SL.4-8.4, 4-8.5

Freedom to Read Poster Project

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4-8.2, SL.4-8.3, W.4-8.1, W.4-8.4; VA:Cr1-VA:Pr6; Media Literacy Standards

Secret Library Role Play

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4-8.1, SL.4-8.1A-D, SL.4-8.4, W.4-8.2, W.4-8.1; C3 Framework for Social Studies: D2.Civ.6, D2.Civ.10

Additional Resources & Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio

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<https://www.childrenshour.org/banned-books/>



Get Set to Listen

1. Before listening!

Write down your response to the question below. Share with a partner or small group when you are finished.



Have you ever read a book that someone else might find inappropriate? Why do you think some people might find it objectionable?

2. After listening!

Write down your response to the following question. Share with a partner or small group when you are finished.



Do you think banning books protects people or limits them? Explain your thinking.



Vocabulary

Listening for Words

1. Make a four-column chart and label the columns “I don’t know,” “I’ve seen or heard, but don’t know the meaning,” “I think I know the meaning,” and “I know the meaning.”
2. Write the vocabulary word in the column that describes how well you know the meaning of the word.
3. Listen to [the episode](#). Note how the speaker uses the words.

Matching Words with Definitions

1. Print and cut apart the word and definition cards.
2. Spread out the word cards so you can see them all. One by one, attach a definition card to each word card.

Writing with New Words

After working with the words and definitions, write a one-page essay or story that uses at least three of the words.

banned

Not allowed; officially forbidden.

Example: Some schools have banned certain books from their libraries.

censorship

The act of limiting or controlling what people can read, see, or say. Some leaders in history banned books to control what people believed.

Example: Censorship can prevent people from learning about different ideas.



Vocabulary

offensive

Something that upsets or hurts someone's feelings or beliefs.

freedom of speech

The right to express ideas and opinions without unfair punishment. Freedom of speech allows people to share their thoughts openly.

First Amendment

A part of the U.S. Constitution that protects freedoms like speech, religion, and the press. The First Amendment protects our right to read many different books.

access

The ability to get or use something.



Reflection Questions

Reflect

Discuss or journal about the following questions about reading and censorship. Use the discussion strategies listed to share entries in small groups, or choose a prompt to turn into a one-page essay.

1. What does it mean for a book to be “banned”?
2. Why might some people want to ban certain books?
3. Can you think of reasons why a book might offend one person but not another?
4. Have you ever read a book that someone else might find inappropriate? Why do you think some people might find it objectionable?
5. How would you feel if one of your favorite books was banned?
6. Do you think your opinion about a book could be different from someone else’s? Why?
7. Do you think banning books protects people or limits them? Explain your thinking.
8. Should parents, schools, or governments decide what kids can read? Why?
9. What might be lost when a book is banned?



Reflection Questions

10. How does banning books connect to the First Amendment and freedom of speech?
11. Why do some people believe free speech should have limits?
12. What does it mean to have the “right to read”?
13. How can reading different kinds of books help people become better thinkers or citizens?
14. Why is it important to learn about ideas we might disagree with?
15. Why do you think books about topics like race, culture, or history are sometimes challenged today?
16. Do you think banning books is effective in today’s world? Why or why not?

Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner’s answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group’s ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Writing Prompts

Narrative Prompts

1. Imagine a future where books are banned (similar to *Fahrenheit 451*). Tell a story about someone trying to save them.
2. Write a story about what happens when your favorite book is suddenly banned at school.
 - Include dialogue between you and a teacher, parent, or friend.
 - Show your emotional reaction and what you decide to do next.

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. Explain what a banned book is and why books are sometimes removed from schools or libraries. Include at least two examples (like *The Giving Tree* or *Harry Potter*).

Extension: Add a paragraph explaining how banning books affects readers.

2. Listen to [The Children's Hour, "Banned Books" episode](#) (segment 11:05-12:24) about the First Amendment. Explain how the First Amendment relates to the right to read books. Include the idea of "limits" to free speech (like the "clear and present danger" example).
3. Explain how censorship (like banning books) can affect education and society.
 - Describe how it might affect students, teachers, and communities differently.
 - Include examples from history (like book burning or censorship in other countries). Why were books banned in these examples?

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

Extension: Turn these prompts into a speech or hold a debate.

1. Is there ever a situation where banning a book might be justified? Write an argument supporting your opinion.
2. Should there be age limits on certain books, or should everyone have access to everything?
 - Address concerns adults might have.
 - Include real-life or personal examples to support your opinion.



Banned Book Report

Investigate real examples of banned or challenged books to understand why they are contested and evaluate different perspectives.

Listen

to [The Children's Hour, "Banned Books" episode](#) (segment 5:03-6:27) to learn what banned books are.

Choose Your Book

Title of Book: _____

Author: _____

Research Your Book

1. What is the book about? Write 3–5 sentences describing the story or main ideas.

2. Why was the book banned or challenged? List the reasons people gave for wanting the book removed.



Banned Book Report

3. Who challenged or banned the book? (Check all that apply or write your answer)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Parents | ☐ Organizations |
| ☐ School officials | ☐ Other: _____ |
| ☐ Government | |

4. Where or when was it banned? (if known)

Your Opinion

Do you think this book should be banned? Why or why not?

Consider another point of view: Why might someone disagree with you?



Banned Book Report

Present Your Report

How will you present your research?

- ☐ Poster
- ☐ Slideshow
- ☐ Speech
- ☐ Other: _____



List 3 key points you will share:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Reflect

What did you learn about banned books from this activity?



Freedom to Read Poster Project

Listen

- the song [“Banned” feat. Regina Carter, Oran Etkin, Cheryl B. Engelhardt, SaulPaul, Divinity Roxx & Joya Barman on Freedom: Songs Inspired by Banned Children's Books](#)
- [The Children’s Hour, “Banned Books” episode](#), (segment 23:35-25:08) about freedom of imagination

Discuss

- *How would you feel if your favorite book was banned because someone didn’t think it was appropriate or didn’t like the lessons it was teaching?*
- *How can reading different kinds of books help people become better thinkers or citizens?*

Create

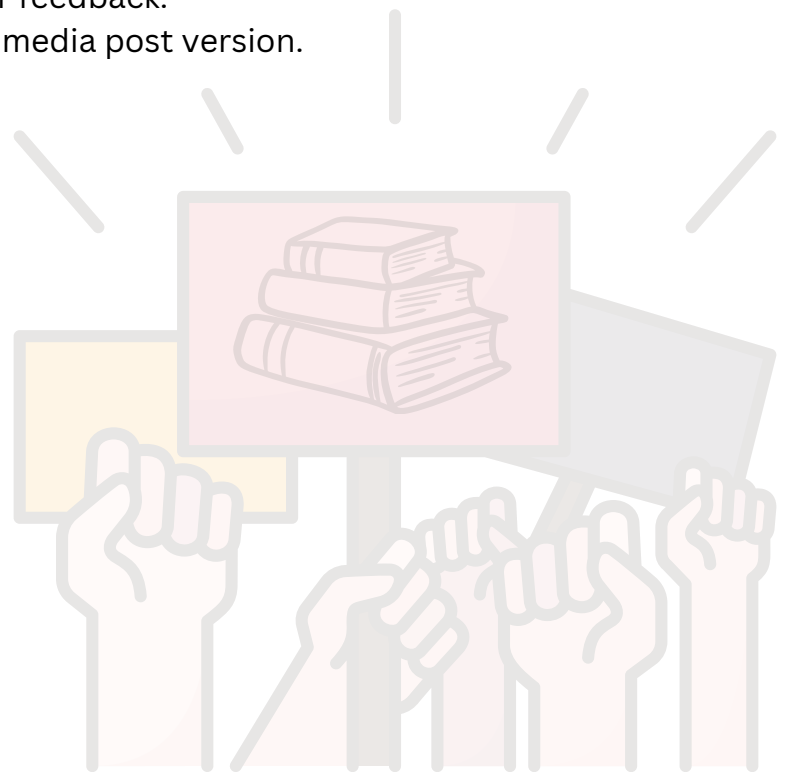
Design a poster encouraging people to read freely and explore different ideas.

Include:

- a slogan
- a quote from the episode or another resource
- [a statistic](#)

Extensions

- Turn posters into a gallery walk with peer feedback.
- Connect to digital media: create a social media post version.





Secret Library Role Play

Are there books that you've read that you've thought to yourself, no one should ever read this book? Well, you might feel that way if a book isn't very good or you don't like it. But, should another person decide for someone else what they are allowed to read, especially if that person is not their child or someone they're in charge of?

In the following activity, you will explore the concept of censorship by experiencing how it feels to restrict or protect access to books, and reflect on fairness, power, and freedom.

Setup

- Select 5–10 books from your collection.
- Label some as “BANNED” and others as “ALLOWED.”
- Prepare simple role cards:
 - Protectors of Books (hide/share banned books)
 - Rule Enforcers (find and restrict banned books)
 - Readers (try to access books)

Listen

to [The Children's Hour, “Banned Books” episode](#):

- What are banned books? (segment 5:03-6:27)
- First Amendment (segment 11:05-12:24)
- Freedom of Imagination (segment 23:35-25:08)
- History of Censorship (segment 27:00-29:12)
- Critical Race Theory and Laurel Goodluck's Forever Cousins (segment 41:37-45:20)

Introduce the Scenario

“In this library, some books are now banned. It is against the rules to read or share them.”
Do not explain why the books are banned—this adds realism and curiosity.

Assign Roles

Divide participants into groups:

- Protectors (hide or secretly share banned books)
- Rule Enforcers (monitor and stop access)
- Readers (try to find and read books)

Role Play

Let participants act out their roles.

- Enforcers may “confiscate” books.
- Protectors may hide or pass books quietly.
- Readers decide what risks to take to access books.





Secret Library Role Play

Reflect

- *How did it feel to be told you couldn't read something?*
- *Was it fair? Why or why not?*
- *Who had the most power in this activity?*
- *What strategies did people use?*

Write

- *What was your experience in your role like?*
- *How did you feel during the activity?*
- *Did you agree or disagree with the rules?*

Optional sentence starters:

- *"I felt frustrated when..."*
- *"It seemed unfair because..."*
- *"If I could change one rule, I would..."*

Extension: Deeper Discussion

Guide a conversation about:

- **Fairness:** *Who decides what is fair?*
- **Power:** *Who gets to make rules about books?*
- **Access:** *Why is it important for people to have access to information?*

Extension: Real-World Connection

Connect the activity to history and real life:

- Discuss how books have been banned in different times and places.
- Mention examples like book burning or removing books from schools.
- Ask: *Is banning books effective today? Why or why not?*





Additional Resources

[Books Unbanned](#)

American teenagers ages 13 to 21 can get a free, unlimited library membership to the Brooklyn Public Library to check out digital books, as part of their Booked Unbanned program.

[Banned Books Week](#)

Find out about this annual event, which brings attention to the value of free and open access to information.

[Top 10 Most Challenged Books](#)

Every year, the American Library Association compiles a list of the books most frequently targeted by censors based on reports from the field and media coverage."

[Banned Books List 2026](#)

This list from PEN America documents the most-banned books in America each year.

Videos

[Dav Pilkey's "Banned Books Week" Video](#)

The hilarious author of Captain Underpants and many other popular children's books encourages us to make a simple change in how we react to books we don't like.

[A History of Book Bans in the U.S.](#)

This 2-minute video provides a quick overview for older students.

[The Fiery History of Banned Books](#)

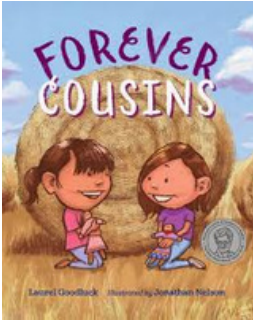
Season 2, Episode 9 from "It's Lit!" on NMPBS: "When we talk about book bannings today, we are usually discussing a specific choice made by individual schools, school districts, and libraries made in response to the moralistic outrage of some group. This is still nothing in comparison to the way books have been removed, censored, and destroyed in the past. Let's explore how the seemingly innocuous book has survived centuries of the ban hammer."

[Why Are People Banning Books](#)

Season 6, Episode 11 from "Above the Noise" discusses how book banning affects LGBTQ youth and the impact of racism, among other things.



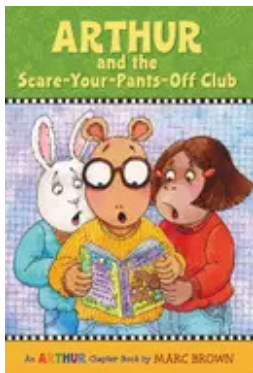
Book List



Forever Cousins

by Laurel Goodluck

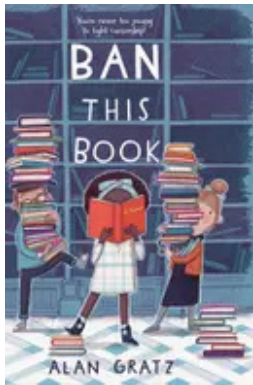
This book tells the story of two young cousins who live far apart, but who delight in getting together in the summertime, as they attend a ceremony on the reservation where their grandparents live.
ages 4-8



Arthur and the Scare-Your-Pants-Off Club

by Marc Brown

After a group of parents removes a series of scary books from the local library, Arthur and his friends come up with a plan to bring them back.
ages 7-9



Ban This Book

by Alan Gratz

A group of kids fights to bring back their favorite books after they are banned from the library.
ages 7-12



This Book is Banned

by Raj Halder, illustrated by Julia Patton

A humorous story shows how trying to erase ideas only makes people more curious about what's being hidden.
ages 7-12



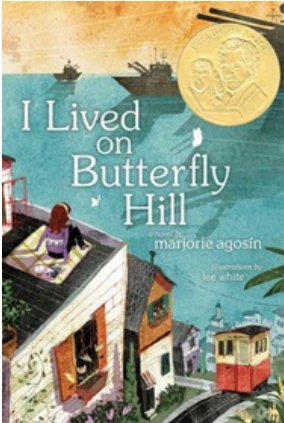
The Book Tree

by Paul Czajak; illustrated by Rashin Kheiriyeh

A boy named Arlo inspires a mayor to realize that even if books are destroyed, stories and imagination cannot be stopped.
ages 4-9



Book List

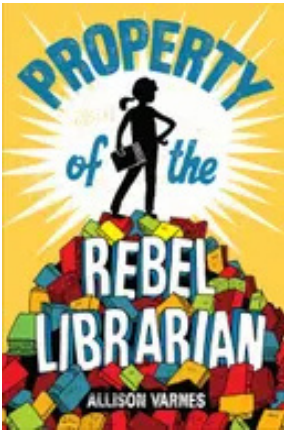


I Lived on Butterfly Hill

by Marjorie Agosin, illustrated by Lee White

Books were banned in this story, and in real life Chile at that time, but the grandmother ("Abuela") character saves books by hiding them. After the dictatorship in Chile ended, the books Abuela saved helped preserve the written legacy of the nation.

ages 10-14

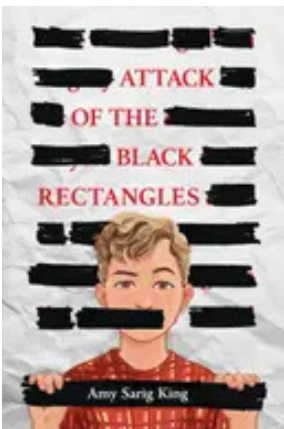


Property of the Rebel Librarian

by Allison Varnes

Twelve-year-old June Harper is stunned when her parents try to remove certain books from her school library, so she secretly creates her own banned books library in an unused locker.

ages 8-12

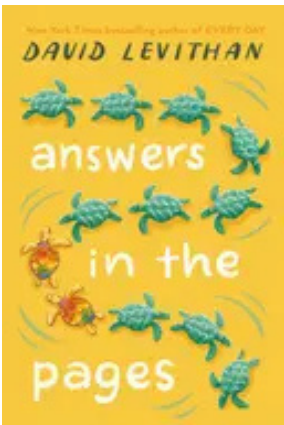


Attack of the Black Rectangles

by Amy Sarig King

When Mac discovers that words have been blacked out in his classroom copy of a book, he decides to speak up and take a stand against censorship and intolerance.

ages 9-12



Answers in the Pages

by David Levithan

A boy challenges censorship in his school when a book is called offensive and potentially banned, forcing him to decide whether to stay silent or speak up for the right to read.

ages 8-12

For more book recommendations for kids and teens about protecting the freedom to read, visit [this NYPL list](#).