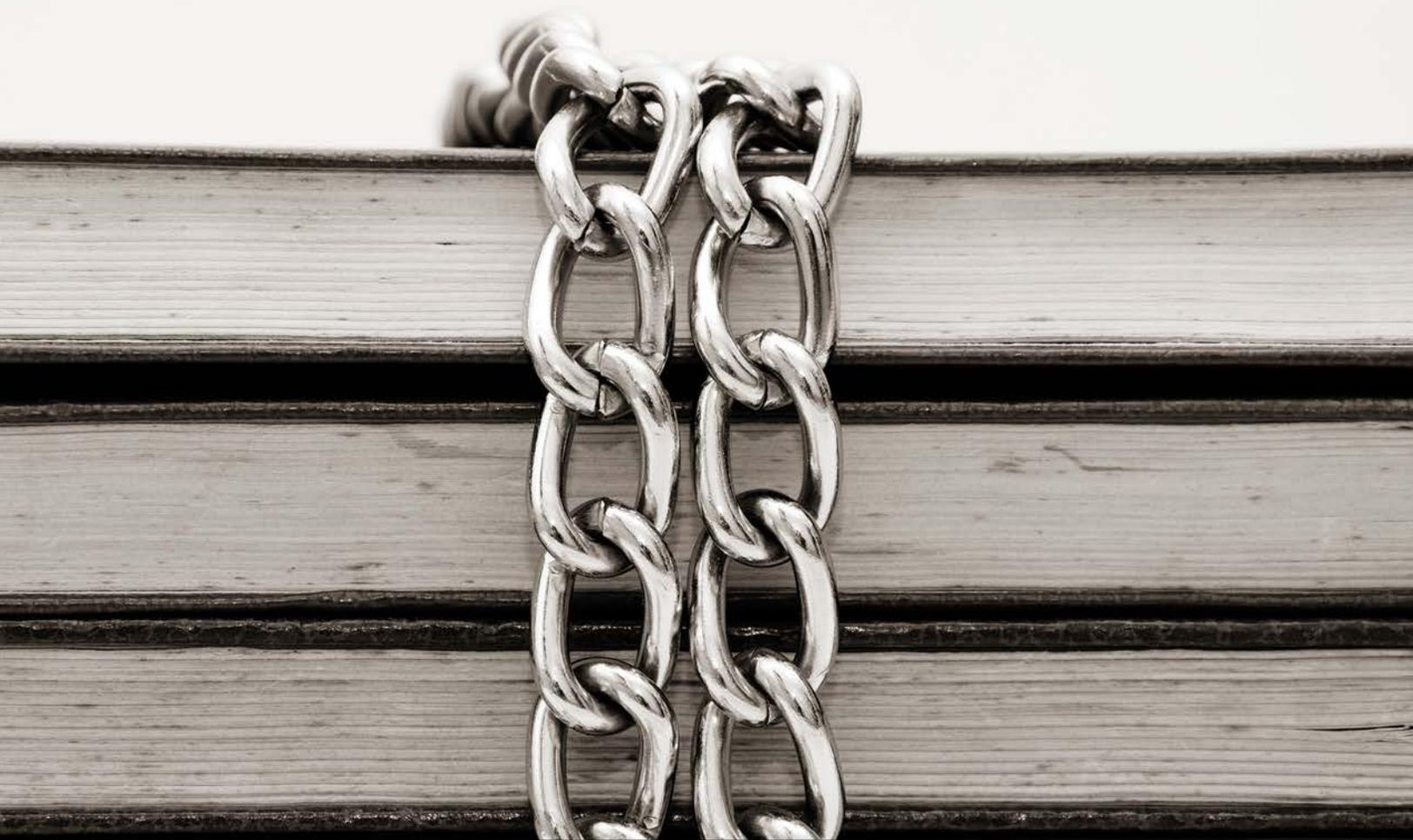


*Support*

# **BANNED BOOKS WEEK**

*with the Random House  
Children's Books*

**FIRST AMENDMENT KIT**



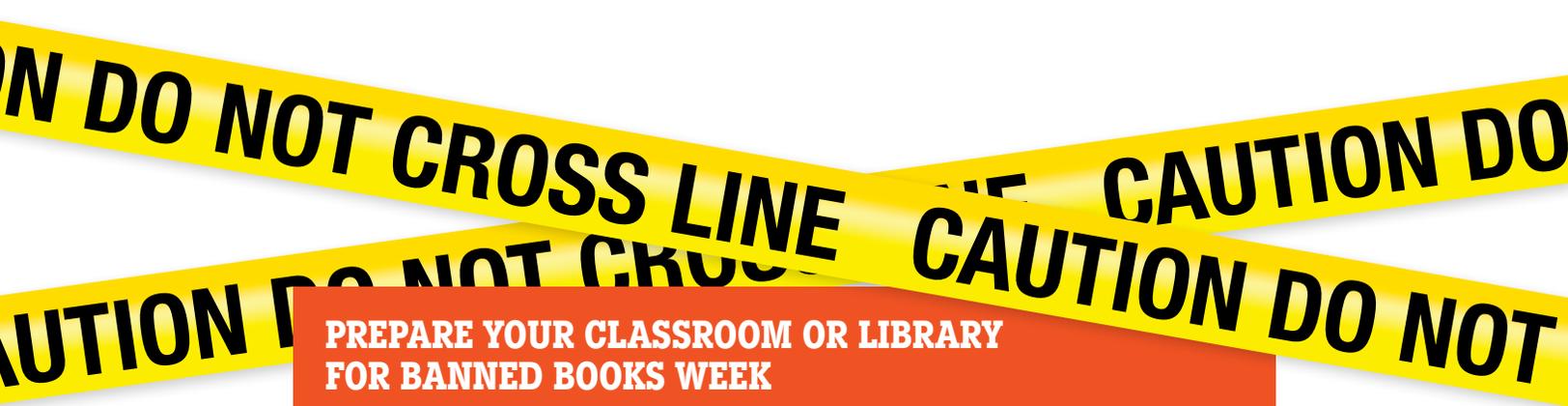
## DEAR EDUCATOR/LIBRARIAN,

Today the fundamental freedom to read is facing more challenges than ever. Children's books, in particular, are constant targets of book-banning efforts in school systems and public libraries.

The year 2015 marks the thirty-fourth year of celebrating Banned Books Week, and Random House Children's Books is committed to those who stand against censorship. Fifteen of our books have appeared on the American Library Association's list of the one hundred most frequently challenged books since the Office for Intellectual Freedom began surveying in 1990. Despite these instances of censorship, we continue to publish books that celebrate the freedom of expression. We are proud to support our authors' right to write and our readers' right to read.

With this First Amendment Kit, we ask you, the educators and librarians who are confronted with censorship issues each and every day, to join with us in utilizing these resources to put this issue front and center in classrooms and libraries all over the country. By drawing attention to the issue of censorship, we hope to inspire a passion for securing the freedom to read within young readers everywhere.

—From all of us at Random House Children's Books



### PREPARE YOUR CLASSROOM OR LIBRARY FOR BANNED BOOKS WEEK

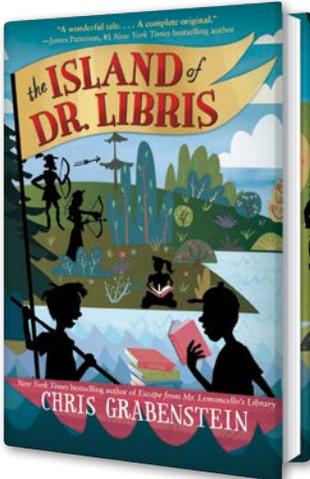
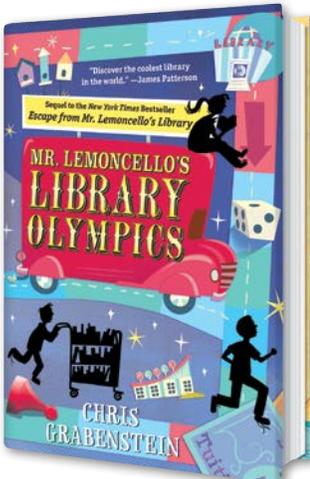
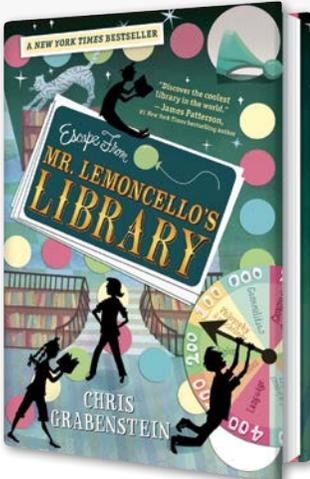
- Create visuals and displays to showcase your involvement in Banned Books Week. Browse Pinterest Banned Books Week boards or visit the ALA's official Banned Books Week display list for more creative ideas: [ala.org/bbooks/bannedbooksweek/ideasandresources/display](http://ala.org/bbooks/bannedbooksweek/ideasandresources/display).
- Distribute a flyer or newsletter to announce your Banned Books Week activities and invite your students/patrons to participate.
- Research lists of most commonly banned books and gather a collection for activities and displays.



Photograph © J.J. Moore

# A Word on the FIRST AMENDMENT

from **CHRIS  
GRABENSTEIN**



I've always thought that the First Amendment was the most important of the rights spelled out in the Bill of Rights amended to the United States Constitution in 1791.

That's why James Madison, the guy who wrote those ten amendments, put it first.

The Bill of Rights is, basically, a list of limits on government power that help protect our individual freedoms.

My favorite freedom?

The freedom of speech!

Madison and the other Founders didn't want their brand-new government to stop people from speaking (or writing) what they thought. Thanks to the First Amendment, the government can't throw you in jail (or worse!) for saying what you think—even if what you think (for instance, “The Emperor has no clothes!”) is extremely unpopular with the people in power.

However, the First Amendment doesn't protect you from everybody—just the government. For instance, if you shout, “The New York Yankees are the best team in baseball” in a crowded stadium, people might disagree with you. Especially if that stadium is in Boston.

Another reason I love the First Amendment is that it turned all Americans into medieval court jesters! Did you know that back in the Middle Ages, if you were an official fool wearing motley (an outfit made of multicolored fabric) and a jester's hat with jingle bells on its points, you were given privileges not given to many other people in the king's or queen's court?

- The joker was just about the only card in the deck who could freely speak his mind without having his head lopped off. A fool could use humor to mock, jibe, and jest about the noble lords and ladies of the court. Jesters could even make fun of the king and queen. They had freedom of speech.

- Fortunately, thanks to the First Amendment, Americans don't need to put on a clown suit and a jingle-bell hat to poke fun at people in authority.

- When I first moved to New York City, way back in 1979, I spent five years working with a group called the First Amendment Improvisation and Comedy Company. Nightly, we exercised our First Amendment right of freedom of speech to poke fun at politicians and current events and goofy trends and just about anything that needed fun poked at it.

- I remember back in the 1980s, the president, Ronald Reagan, declared that ketchup was a vegetable. Boy, did we have fun making fun of that. And none of us ended up in jail for doing it. Our zany political opinions were protected by the First Amendment.

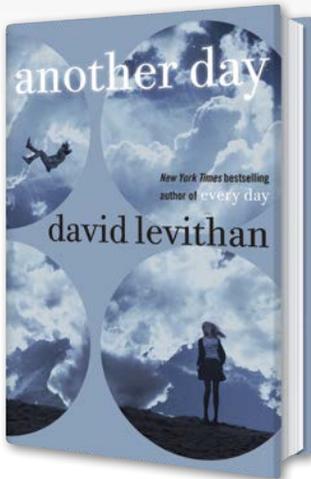
- Now that I am an author, I always feel a small surge of pride when I read that tiny mouse type printed inside the front all of my Random House books: “Random House Children's Books supports the First Amendment and celebrates the right to read.”

- I hope you will always do the same: support and celebrate the First Amendment! Especially during Banned Books Week.



# A Word on CENSORSHIP

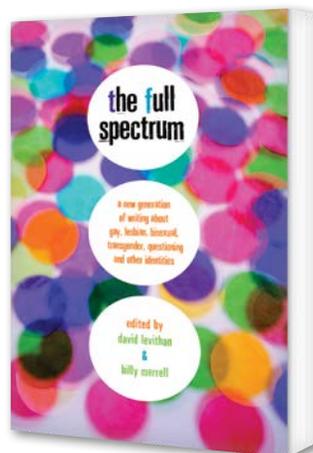
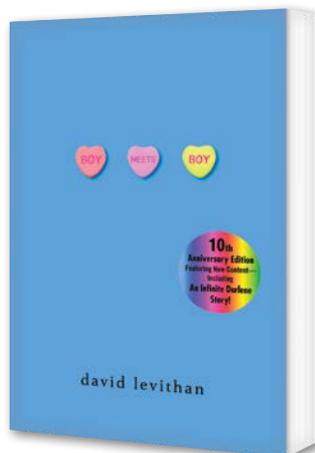
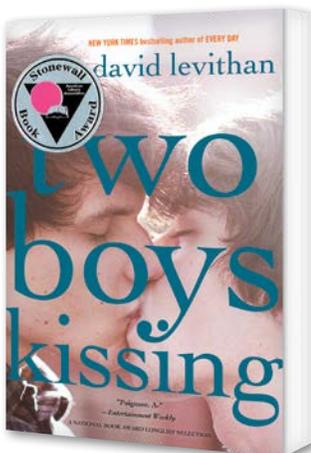
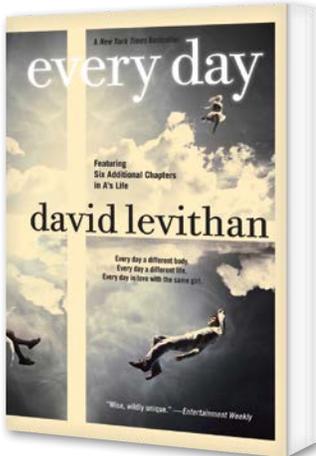
from **DAVID  
LEVITHAN**



Any attempt to ban a book is, at its heart, a deliberate act of disempowerment. It is both incorrect and disingenuous to think that censors are merely attacking the words on the page. They are not only attacking ideas; they are attacking the people who have those ideas. They are not only attacking identities; they are attacking the people who have those identities. They are not only attacking words; they are attacking the people who choose to use those words. Whether it comes from fear of the unknown (often the case) or an insidious desire to control other people, especially younger people, censors believe that by restricting other people's access to stories and truths, they can somehow keep their imaginary versions of the world intact. The good news is: This doesn't work. Especially not now.

When my first book, *Boy Meets Boy*, came out, I certainly got to see censorship firsthand—and got to see how essentially stupid and futile it is. The logic seemed to be: If we don't allow books about gay teens in our library, then there won't be any gay kids in our school. As if there was

- any way to control who you were born to
- be. As if a work of fiction could create an
- identity rather than merely mirror one that
- was already there. It's like saying that if we
- pull all the books about the moon from the
- library, then the moon will no longer exist.
- Guess what. Not true.
- Also not true: That censors often win.
- The truth? The mass majority of the time,
- freedom of expression wins. Books remain
- on the shelves. People talk about them.
- Students learn a little bit more about
- themselves, or their world—or both.
- People attack books because they think
- books can't defend themselves. But it
- turns out that books have very good allies
- in readers. Because we know their worth,
- and we know that by defending books,
- we are really defending all of the people
- that the censors are trying to disempower.
- What are censors scared of? They're
- scared of empathy, and the equality that
- empathy brings. But empathy is stronger
- than any book challenge. It's just that
- sometimes we have to stand up and
- support it so it isn't taken away.





# A Word on CENSORSHIP

from **JUDY  
BLUME**



When I began to write, I didn't know if anyone would publish my books, but I wasn't afraid to write them. I was lucky. I found an editor and publisher who were willing to take a chance. They encouraged me. I was never told what I couldn't write. I felt only that I had to write the most honest books I could. It never occurred to me, at the time, that what I was writing was controversial. Much of it grew out of my own feelings and concerns when I was young.

## COMMUNISM?

There were few challenges to my books then, although I remember the night a woman phoned, asking if I had written *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*. When I replied that I had, she called me a Communist and slammed down the phone. I never did figure out if she equated Communism with menstruation or religion, the two major concerns in twelve-year-old Margaret's life.

But in 1980, the censors crawled out of the woodwork, seemingly overnight, organized and determined. Not only would they decide what their children could read, but what all children could read. Challenges to books quadrupled within months, and we'll never know how many teachers, school librarians, and principals quietly removed books to avoid trouble.

## FEAR

I believe that censorship grows out of fear, and because fear is contagious, some parents are easily swayed. Book banning satisfies their need to feel in control of

- their children's lives. This fear is often
- disguised as moral outrage. They want
- to believe that if their children don't read
- about it, their children won't know about
- it. And if they don't know about it, it won't
- happen.

- Today, it's not only language and sexuality
- (the usual reasons given for banning
- my books) that will land a book on the
- censors' hit list. It's Satanism, New Age-
- ism and a hundred other "isms," some
- of which would make you laugh if the
- implications weren't so serious. Books
- that make kids laugh often come under
- suspicion; so do books that encourage
- kids to think, or question authority; books
- that don't hit the reader over the head with
- moral lessons are considered dangerous.

- Censors don't want children exposed to
- ideas different from their own. If every
- individual with an agenda had his/her way,
- the shelves in the school library would be
- close to empty. I wish the censors could
- read the letters kids write.

*Dear Judy,*

*I don't know where I stand in the world.  
I don't know who I am. That's why I  
read, to find myself.*

*Elizabeth, age 13*

- But it's not just the books under fire now
- that worry me. It is the books that will
- never be written. The books that will
- never be read. And all due to the fear of
- censorship. As always, young readers will
- be the real losers.

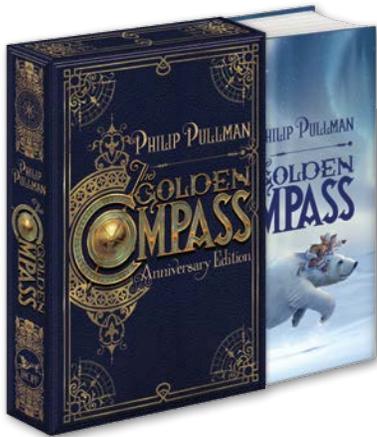
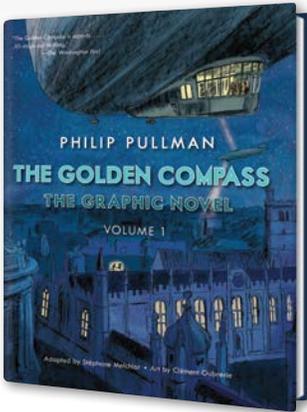
(Source: [www.judyblume.com](http://www.judyblume.com))



Photograph © George Frazee/Oxford Times

# A Word on CENSORSHIP

from **PHILIP  
PULLMAN**



**Q: We know that *The Golden Compass* has faced controversy after controversy in terms of censorship and book banning since it was published in 1995, especially from the religious right. Do you recall the first time it was banned, and what ran through your mind at the time? Were you surprised? Do you think it has affected your readership?**

**A:** I think the first time the book was actually banned, in the sense of being withdrawn from school libraries, must have been sometime in the late '90s, when it became clear what the religious tendency of the whole work was going to be. But what do we mean by “banned,” really? I don't think any bookstores were forbidden by law to sell it, were they? A ban could only be enforced at school-library level. And surely the only effect of that would be to make the book an object of greater curiosity to those who were forbidden to read it—and that's why I've never understood the psychology of banning anything: it must make the thing you want to ban even more popular, give it much more publicity, and so on. I wasn't entirely surprised, because people have been trying to ban things through the whole of human history, with a completely uniform lack of success. If anything, my readership must have increased because of that sort of thing.

**Q: You have said on occasion that the people who decry your work and wish it banned are part of the very problem you wrote about in the series. Can you expand on that?**

**A:** Well, I mean, of course, the cast of mind that seeks to control what other people

• can read, or think, or say, is a dangerous  
• one, and ought to be resisted vigorously.

• **Q: Censorship generally grows out  
• of fear. In your opinion, what do you  
• think people fear about your work in  
• particular or about the books that are  
• so often banned?**

• **A:** It's hard to say, because I simply don't  
• understand or share the psychology of  
• those who want to ban books. I suppose  
• what they fear is that the control they think  
• they have over other people's minds is  
• less complete or less firm than they think  
• it is. It's possibly less about the content  
• of the books they're seeking to ban than  
• about the fact that they're in a position of  
• control, and they like that, and want it to  
• continue as long as possible.

• **Q: Will you share some of your thoughts  
• on censorship and the importance of  
• freedom of speech?**

• **A:** My thoughts on this subject are by  
• no means original. I share the belief of  
• those who framed the First Amendment  
• to the Constitution of the United States,  
• which says, “Congress shall make no  
• law respecting an establishment of  
• religion, or prohibiting the free exercise  
• thereof; or abridging the freedom of  
• speech, or of the press; or the right of  
• the people peaceably to assemble, and  
• to petition the Government for a redress  
• of grievances.” These are noble words.  
• A people cannot be truly free if their  
• speech and writing are subject to the  
• censorship of any body, whether political  
• or religious (or, increasingly these days,  
• commercial). Freedom of expression is  
• truly fundamental.

*"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."*

*—The First Amendment*

## UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

Talking about censorship and specific book challenges is important for adults and young readers alike, whether in a book-group setting at a library or in a classroom.

When beginning any discussion on censorship, it is a good idea to be familiar with the terminology and issues:

### **What is censorship?**

Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons—individuals, groups, or government officials—find objectionable or dangerous.

### **What is the difference between a challenge and a banning?**

A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based on the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove materials from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others.

### **What is intellectual freedom?**

Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored.

### **Why are books challenged?**

Books usually are challenged with the best intentions—to protect others, frequently children, from difficult ideas and information. Censorship can be subtle, almost imperceptible, as well as blatant and overt, but, nonetheless, harmful.

—American Library Association



## TIPS FOR DISCUSSING ISSUES OF CENSORSHIP

- Invite discussion about the various themes of the chosen book. Remind readers to look at the full work and not to take challenged information out of context.
- Ask readers to consider the author's meaning—to think about what the author might have meant when he or she wrote the book. For instance, why might the author have chosen to include particular language?
- Stress the importance of freedom of choice—to pick up a book or reject it. Most readers will innately reject what they aren't ready for.
- Opposing viewpoints or healthy discussion? When there are conflicting opinions about the book being discussed, it is important to encourage opposing viewpoints so that all understand that their views count. This is the very basis of the First Amendment!

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM OR LIBRARY

**Challenge vs. Censorship**—Have the class discuss the difference between a book challenge and censorship. How might a book challenge cause school officials to ultimately censor a book? Ask students to find out the school district’s policy regarding issues related to questionable books and materials. Invite a school board member or a district official to speak to the class about local challenges.

**Dramatic Presentations**—Stage a talk show featuring a parental challenge to one of the books shown on the poster. The host or hostess of the show should give a brief synopsis of the book and an overview of the challenge. Guests should include parents who oppose the book, parents who support the book, a school or public library board member, a librarian, and several young adults who have read the book. Ask students in the audience to be prepared with pertinent questions. A Banned Books Week theme is “Let Freedom Read: Read a Banned Book.” After the class has participated in a thorough discussion about the First Amendment and the freedom to read, ask them to prepare a dramatic interpretation of the Banned Books Week theme. Encourage them to perform for a PTA group and other classes in their school.

**Banned Books Trivia**—Create a display with popular banned books. Research each title, and on individual index cards, write down the reasons that each book was banned. Tape the reasons to the back of each book, and have students try to guess why the book was banned.

**Essay Writing**—Contrast the meaning of intellectual freedom and censorship. Have students write an essay that explains the thought that intellectual freedom is about respect, while censorship is about disrespect.



**Let the Press Know!** Encourage students to write an editorial for the local newspaper about Banned Books Week and the freedom to read.

**Participate in the Banned Books Virtual Read-Out!** Readers across the nation and around the world can virtually celebrate the freedom to read, by uploading videos of themselves reading from their favorite banned or challenged book: [youtube.com/user/BannedBooksWeek](https://www.youtube.com/user/BannedBooksWeek).

**Host a screening of a film adaptation of a popular banned book.** After watching, lead a discussion with the attendees about the act of depicting a banned book on screen. Did the filmmakers emphasize or diminish elements of the plot that caused the book to be challenged?

## FURTHER RESOURCES

**American Library Association  
Office for Intellectual Freedom**  
50 E. Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
(312) 280-4243  
[ala.org/offices/oif](http://ala.org/offices/oif)  
[ala.org/bbooks](http://ala.org/bbooks)

**American Booksellers  
Foundation for Freedom  
of Expression**  
333 Westchester Avenue,  
Suite S202  
White Plains, NY 10604  
(800) 637-0037  
[bookweb.org/abfe](http://bookweb.org/abfe)

**American Civil Liberties Union**  
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004  
(212) 549-2500  
[aclu.org](http://aclu.org)

**First Amendment Schools  
Association for Supervision  
and Curriculum Development**  
1703 N. Beauregard Street  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
(703) 575-5475  
[firstamendmentschools.org](http://firstamendmentschools.org)

**International Literacy  
Association**  
PO Box 8139  
Newark, DE 19714-8139  
(800) 336-7323  
[reading.org](http://reading.org)

**National Coalition Against  
Censorship**  
19 Fulton Street, Suite 407  
New York, NY 10038  
(212) 807-6222  
[ncac.org](http://ncac.org)

**National Council of  
Teachers of English**  
1111 W. Kenyon Road  
Urbana, IL 61801  
217-328-3870  
[ncte.org](http://ncte.org)

**People for the American Way**  
1101 15th Street NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 467-4999  
[pfaw.org](http://pfaw.org)