

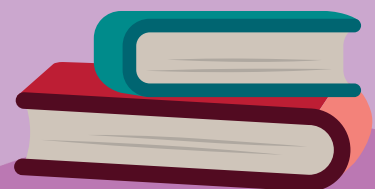
# READING BANNED & CHALLENGED BOOKS

## PET BY AKWAEKE EMEZI

A riveting and timely young adult debut novel that asks difficult questions about what choices you can make when the society around you is in denial.



- Explain what critics mean when they call *Pet* “genre defying.” Others have called the novel “speculative fiction.” What is “speculative fiction”? Discuss the unique characteristics of this genre. To which genre do you think *Pet* belongs? Why do some readers call the book a “parable”?
- Define *utopia*. Discuss whether the town of Lucille is a utopia. Explain the town’s creed: “We are each other’s harvest.” What is the purpose of the revolution that the town underwent before Jam and Redemption were born? Discuss the trial at the end of the novel. How does this force the citizens to come face to face with the evil in their town. Debate whether the trial is step toward healing.
- Jam is selectively nonverbal. How does she communicate? When does she use her voice for the first time? What is significant about the message she delivers to Redemption? Discuss why she withholds “damning” information. Explain Redemption’s reaction when he learns that Jam has omitted information that affects his family.
- What is the role of the library in the story? How is its inclusion a statement on the power of research and fact? Describe Redemption’s thoughts as he uncovers the truth about the monster in his home. Who is the monster?
- Describe the moment when Redemption confronts Hibiscus. What is his uncle’s response when he is called to Redemption’s training room in the middle of the night? Explain what Redemption means when he calls his uncle “a false angel.”



- Discuss the stated purpose of the Innocence Project: “To free the innocent, prevent wrongful convictions, and create fair, compassionate, and equitable systems of justice.” Consider the central focus of *Pet*, and discuss how it relates to the Innocence Project. Think about what is guiding many law makers to ban books from schools including misguided notions about critical race theory. In light of these issues, discuss why *Pet* is targeted by book banners. What does the book reveal that these censors find disagreeable? Why are they so uncomfortable with this story?
- There are parents who are concerned with the language in the novel. Consider the scene when Redemption confronts his uncle. How is this scene more powerful because of the language used? Explain how the language defines the monster within Hibiscus. Hibiscus isn't a role model in the book. Who is the hero of the novel? How is this character a true role model?
- One of the reasons this book has been censored because Jam is transgender. How are censors missing the important message of the book? The novel is about justice. Discuss how it is unjust to label people and books. What nuance is lost when we try to label things?
- What are trigger warnings? Explain why some libraries insist on using such warnings. Trigger warnings for *Pet* include: child abuse, pedophilia, sexual assault, violence. How might these trigger warnings give censors the ammunition they need to lodge a complaint against the book, even without reading it? Make a list of the pros and cons of using trigger warnings, and discuss whether libraries should use them.

**Guide written by Pat Scales, children's literature consultant**

Check out [bit.ly/3Jj5OPG](https://bit.ly/3Jj5OPG)  
or scan the QR code for more  
information about book bans  
and how you can take action.

