

The Power of Literature: Why Books are Banned and What it Means for Us

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What is a banned book? A banned book is a book that has been challenged or removed from schools, libraries, or bookstores. People such as parents, school districts, or organizations oppose certain ideas in these books due to their content which can lead to a decision to ban the book altogether. There are a variety of reasons for book banning such as the language, or themes related to race, gender, mental health, etc. Books that take on social issues or controversial topics on race or the LGBTQ+ community tend to get the most pushback.

A number of the books commonly assigned in classrooms have been banned at different points for different reasons. Classics like *The Giver* and *The Bluest Eye* have been challenged for their language and themes like sexuality, violence, and racism. As for more recent pieces of literature, books like *The Hate U Give* and *Heartstopper* have faced bans for discussing racial injustice or gender identity. The big question is: Are these bans protecting students, or are they limiting us from learning about the real world?

Books are often banned because parents or school boards believe the material is inappropriate for students. Sometimes it's about violence, drug use, or sexual content, but the majority of the time it has more to do with how books handle race, gender, or politics.

The American Library Association explains "The number of titles targeted for censorship surged 65% in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching the highest levels ever documented by OIF in more than 20 years of tracking: 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for removal from schools and libraries."

As a common example, *The Hate U Give* is a book that handles themes of police brutality and systemic racism. This book has been challenged because some believe it promotes anti-police sentiment. On the other hand, supporters of the book argue that it helps students, especially those in high school, better understand the issues facing people of color today; similarly, *Heartstopper*, the popular graphic novel series about LGBTQ+ relationships, has been banned in some places for its portrayal of non-straight and non-hetero love stories.

The truth is that book bans often reflect the fears and values of various societal groups. Some people want to protect younger readers from ideas they see as controversial, but there are others who feel that hiding these issues is only making it harder for students to understand the world.

Most importantly, when books are banned, it's not just about losing access to a few pages of literature. It limits students' exposure to different viewpoints and ideas, which are crucial for growing as critical thinkers. High school is a time when students are figuring out who they are, what they believe, and where they stand on important issues. So the reality of it all is that books are a major part of that journey.

When schools ban books that tackle challenging topics with the intention of protecting students, they could actually be doing the opposite. When students are not allowed to engage with books that challenge their thinking, they miss out on opportunities to have meaningful discussions and learn about experiences that are different from their own.

Imagine if a school were to ban books that discuss mental health topics because they're seen as "too dark." For students struggling with their own mental health, those books could provide an outlet or a sense of connection. Consider a book that deals with racial identity—it could give students of color a voice or a connection to their own experiences. Taking these books away isn't just about protecting people; it's also about preventing students from growing and relating with others.

High school students are in a unique position to push back against censorship, and not to mention they are the future in today's world. So, the next time you hear about a book being banned, ask yourself if you agree with the reasons behind it. Don't be afraid to talk to your teachers and classmates about why certain books are considered controversial. You can also participate in events like Banned Books Week or suggest diverse books to your friends, family and more!

By taking action, we can promote a culture where students have the freedom to read, think critically, and explore different ideas. Books are like windows into different worlds, helping us see things from new perspectives or for some reading is their safe place. Even when a book gets banned, its message is still out there, waiting for someone to turn the page. When it comes to books, the more we read, the more we lead. Happy reading! :)