

Spring 5-2024

## **Banned Books and Educational Censorship: The Necessity of Keeping Queer Books in Schools**

Rebecca Rhodes

*Chapman University*, [rrhodes@chapman.edu](mailto:rrhodes@chapman.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/english\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/english_theses)



Part of the [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Rhodes, Rebecca A. *Banned Books and Educational Censorship: The Necessity of Keeping Queer Books in Schools*. 2024. Chapman University, MA Thesis. *Chapman University Digital Commons*, <https://doi.org/10.36837/chapman.000579>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English (MA) Theses by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [laughtin@chapman.edu](mailto:laughtin@chapman.edu).

Banned Books and Educational Censorship: The Necessity of  
Keeping Queer Books in Schools

A Thesis by

Rebecca A. Rhodes

Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

May 2024

Committee in charge:

Lynda Hall, Ph.D., Chair

Morgan Read-Davidson, MA, MFA.

Ian Barnard, Ph.D

The thesis of Rebecca Rhodes is approved.

*Lynda Hall*

---

Lynda Hall, Ph.D, Chair.

*Ian Barnard*

---

Ian Barnard, Ph.D.

*Morgan Read-Davidson*

---

Morgan Read-Davidson, MA, MFA.

April 2024

Banned Books and Educational Censorship: The Necessity of Keeping  
Queer Books in Schools

Copyright © 2024

by Rebecca A. Rhodes

## **ABSTRACT**

# **Banned Books and Educational Censorship: The Necessity of Keeping Queer Books in Schools**

by Rebecca Rhodes

Despite most parents and students fundamentally disagreeing with the censorship of books, book banning has spiraled out of control in the United States. The number of new book bans rises almost exponentially every school year, and books with queer themes are targeted far more frequently. Pro-ban advocates use deliberately demeaning rhetoric to garner support for their cause, and in doing so, they've managed to take away an educational resource from millions of children in both classrooms and school libraries, because queer-themed books help foster a sense of community for queer children and teens, something that is looked down upon by many ultraconservatives; however, despite the increasing prevalence of queer book bans, these books have great value in an educational setting, with statistical and rational evidence proving they are a beneficial student resource.

This research delves into the content of the most banned queer books, the notable voices behind book bans, student testimony, the proven value of incorporating queer books in an educational environment, and much more. Numerous takes from banned book experts, authors whose books have been banned, nearly 23,000 surveyed students, and even the most notorious pro-ban advocates have been considered to form this analysis, ultimately proving a single fact: queer book bans are harmful to students and challenge their right to a proper education. Statistics prove that queer books help promote a feeling of community in schools and can educate on queer

issues that are typically not discussed in classrooms. This thesis reports on the discriminatory practices used to ban queer books, and argues that teachers and librarians have a responsibility to advocate against book banning in school libraries and classrooms, so that they may provide students with the educational resources they need, and seeks to garner the support responsible educators who are hesitant to take a stand against the book banning controversy.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION: THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF QUEER BOOKS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 THE MOST WIDELY BANNED QUEER BOOKS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 The Disproportionate Number of Queer Book Bans .....	7
2.2 <i>Gender Queer: A Memoir</i> by Maia Kobabe .....	7
2.3 <i>All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto</i> by George M. Johnson .....	9
2.4 <i>Flamer</i> by Mike Curato .....	10
2.5 Notable Trends.....	11
<b>3 THE BOOK BANNING DEBATE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	13
3.2 Arguments for Banning Queer Books from Schools .....	15
3.3 Arguments Against Banning Queer Books from Schools .....	19
<b>4 HOW QUEER BOOKS CHALLENGE HETERONORMATIVE AND CIS-CENTRIC EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 How Queer Educational Resources Benefit Students.....	24
4.2 The Educator's Challenges and Responsibilities.....	26
<b>5 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>34</b>

# **1 Introduction: The Educational Value of Queer Books**

Across the United States, a threat to literature and education has been spreading from schools to public libraries—book banning. Librarians and educators have been grappling with this issue for years, but the number of book bans has quadrupled since 2021, with almost 3,000 bans currently enacted in the United States (Friedman and Johnson). Book bans prevent students who rely on libraries from accessing content that is deemed “inappropriate” for readers, with decisions on what students can and cannot read being decided by a small—but growing—assembly of conservative parents. Based on the current trends in book banning, it seems the thing considered most inappropriate for young readers is any normalization of queer identities or behavior. By banning these books, pro-ban advocates are denying children and teens their fundamental right to learn and seek new knowledge, thus failing to properly educate students. Educators who care about their students’ best interest must not only be aware of the dangers of book banning, but make a notable effort to combat the censorship of these books, particularly titles involving queer themes, which are banned much more frequently than all others.

While the institution of book bans can be frustrating and alarming to many teachers, the students are the ones who suffer the most. All students, particularly those who are part of underrepresented communities, are losing access to a form of media that can satisfy their intellectual curiosity. These books can also help students feel more comfortable discussing complex topics like sexual orientation and gender identity, which are often overlooked or deliberately ignored in the classroom. But with book bans on the rise, many educators are hesitating to speak out against these bans or find ways to connect students with the proper resources they’re missing out on, and pro-ban advocates are becoming more politically powerful



when their influence remains largely unchecked. For educators, particularly K-12 librarians and teachers, this is a serious threat to their students' well-being, one that has culminated from centuries of censorship in America.

The first book ban in the United States came to be in 1637, proposed by Puritan colonists who were upset that they were criticized in Thomas Morton's book *New English Canaan* (Klimek). While the Puritans may be gone, America is still plagued by the trend of banning literature that doesn't appeal to conservative values. The trend picked up in the 1940s and '50s after a Georgia governor requested that books be removed from schools and burned, stating that they were "unfavorable to the South, the Bible, or the state of Georgia" (Tylenda 114). In 1982, after seeing the effects of book banning on school and public libraries, the American Library Association publicly spoke out against book bans and released lists of the most banned books in the United States. As it turns out, the number of challenges and successful bans has been increasing at an alarming rate, particularly since the start of the 2020s, and continuously impacts the nation's schools and school libraries (Klimek).

The process of book banning invades the typical educational status quo. Every year, educators and librarians select books for their curricula and libraries that they believe will be enriching for students to read or study. Despite all of the books in school libraries being hand-picked by those who work with students, a small number of parents have become angered by the content in these books, and have demanded that the books be taken out of libraries and classrooms so that students will not be able to read them. Due to political turmoil, particularly the mainstream rhetoric of "wokeness," conservative advocacy groups have had a great deal of success in banning books, particularly since 2021, when book ban efforts "jumped an unprecedented four-fold" (ALA) from previous years. Concerned parents, politicians,

administrators, and school-sponsoring organizations have been forcing both school systems and public libraries to remove access to various books, because these books provide dissenting ideologies to their own “traditional” values. In the process, the valuable content of these books is completely overlooked, and content discussing sexuality is taken out of context, treated as a form of sexual deviancy.

In the modern day, groups like the Moms for Liberty have organized to prevent content they deem inappropriate from entering school libraries. These groups tend to rely on conservative ideologies and reject the teaching of progressive content in schools, and they demand censorship of the books students are allowed to read both in school and at home. Book ban advocates claim to be protecting children from sexually explicit content and profanity, but in reality, some of their primary targets are books containing portrayals of the queer experience, often without any sexually explicit content or profanity. According to Friedman at PEN America, LGBTQ content is the most prevalent reasoning behind book bans, as of 2023. Despite making up only a small portion of American parents, these book banning advocates have worked with conservative politicians to make sure these queer books are inaccessible to students. These advocates, typically parents who associate with ultraconservative groups like the Moms for Liberty, are undermining the work of responsible educators, which harms the educational development of students.

Year after year, ALA statistics prove that the majority of the top-ten most widely banned books are written by queer authors or contain queer themes. Throughout this paper, “queer” and “LGBTQ” will be used to refer to topics outside a heteronormative understanding of gender or sexuality, regarding topics of same-sex attraction or identifying outside of the cis-centric gender binary. “Queer books” will refer to books that contain these queer themes, like coming out, queer

history, queer lifestyle experiences, or actively promoting widespread acceptance of the queer community, as well as books that contain respectful depictions of characters who identify as LGBTQ or questioning.

These books are often meant to help the teen and young adult audience learn about queer identities and the queer experience, something that is frequently overlooked by the school system. They provide a sense of support for queer students and provide a valuable form of education. Books like these are not typically included in a school curriculum, but according to book banning advocates, even having them in libraries is going too far. For some, acknowledging the existence of queer people is so unfathomable that they can't allow queer authors' books to intermingle among others at a library. Unfortunately, thanks to book banning, these books are often not accessible to students any longer, removing an important component of education.

As children and teens grow up, they begin to seek out knowledge outside of what is provided to them by their immediate communities. Educators and school librarians have a responsibility to ensure students can seek out knowledge freely, and one of the most effective ways to do this is by providing a thematic variety of books for students to read. Books are a valuable and accessible tool for children to learn about many different things, especially those that many of their community members might be reluctant to teach them about. This is particularly relevant for topics such as sexual orientation and gender identity, which are often overlooked or intentionally neglected by the school system. Millions of children look to books to find information, particularly if they identify as LGBTQ or questioning and want to learn more about queer culture outside of a heteronormative school system.

Challengers of queer books often try to remove them from the target audience's reach by labeling them "unsuited for age group," with one example being the insistence that schoolchildren were too young to read *And Tango Makes Three*, a children's picture book that was banned more than any other in the early 2000s (Jones). Children are not too young to learn about queerness; a study by Cedars-Sinai reveals that most transgender and genderqueer children begin to experience feelings of gender dysphoria before the age of seven, and in high schools, the number of students identifying as LGBTQ is estimated to be about 25 percent. These students need to see education and representation for their own identities as well, and this is why so many K-12 educators and librarians want these books available in their libraries and classrooms.

For instance, *This Book Is Gay* is an educational guide for teens who are questioning their identities, discussing important subjects like how to cope with the questioning process, how to come out to those around you, and even basic sex education for same-sex couples. School health teachers and even school counselors are often taught to avoid these subjects, even with the threat of legal punishment. So, if a student seeking guidance on these subjects were able to access *This Book Is Gay* in a school library, they could read about the subjects they otherwise wouldn't learn about. In doing so, they could find a lot of useful information for their health and social well-being, as well as a great deal of comfort.

Sometimes, simply seeing positive representations of queer characters is enough to bring a sense of acceptance to students, but pro-ban advocates have managed to remove every trace of LGBTQ positivity from many schools. Even if a book is intended for entertainment purposes only and will never enter a school curriculum—for instance, the queer romance novel *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston—it is likely to be forced off of library shelves simply because

it contains queer characters and themes. When these books are strictly regulated and removed from library shelves, LGBTQ students are not finding queer representation or acknowledgment in the library materials they can access, and are facing a gap in their cultural education as well. Banning queer books perpetuates an unwelcoming environment for students, which also detracts from the purpose of education, preventing students from learning about tolerance and acceptance of the queer community.

Not all educators have shared their stance on book banning, or taken steps to ameliorate the censorship of knowledge in their own classrooms. On its surface, the book banning debate may seem like a complex issue with lots of support on either side, but in reality, it's a much simpler issue, one with roots in ultraconservatism and harmful rhetoric towards underprivileged communities. When educators remain bystanders, refusing to engage with the banned book phenomenon, they too are helping these ultraconservative groups achieve their goal of limiting access to these books. In order to be a responsible educator, it's crucial to advocate for queer books to be reinstated in schools, because it's in the best interest of students, and the educational rewards outweigh the controversies created by pro-ban advocates.

## **2 The Most Widely Banned Queer Books**

### **2.1 The Disproportionate Number of Queer Book Bans**

The top of the ALA’s banned books list does not change much year after year, because queer books have occupied many of the top seats, particularly since 2021 (Kobabe), earning the honor of “most banned” in the United States. At the top of the banned books list, some books have been challenged over a hundred times, with successful bans resulting from hundreds of filings. Queer books are targeted far more than any others, and in many cases, the number of successful queer book bans has been doubling or even tripling year after year. PEN America reports over 2,500 successful bans between July 2021 and June 2022, with over 1,600 titles affected in less than a year. 641 of these titles address LGBTQ themes and characters (Friedman and Johnson).

To best understand both the motives and the flawed logic of banning queer books, as well as the value each of these books can provide, it’s important to take a look at some of the most widely-banned books with queer themes by LGBTQ authors. Below are the top three most banned queer books in the country, with a breakdown of the number of challenges against them, the official reason for their bans, and why these books should be available to students.

### **2.2 *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe**

*Gender Queer* is a memoir about Kobabe (e/em/eir) exploring eir gender identity and sexuality in high school. It’s told in the form of a graphic novel and narrated by the future Kobabe.

- Official reason for banning: sexually explicit
  - There is sexual content, most often regarding masturbation, but also when the narrator vaguely references sexual fantasies or experiments with strap-ons to seek a sense of

gender euphoria. It is more explicit than many books, but only because Kobabe describes eir younger self's struggle with accepting the body and sex e was assigned at birth. Many opponents claim this book is pornographic, but a character exploring the intersections of gender identity and sexual orientation isn't pornography, as pornography would refer to content that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Many queer books, including *All Boys Aren't Blue*, view sexuality through a much more reflective lens, typically depicting it as an extension of identity.

- Number of challenges reported by the ALA (2022): 151
  - There is sexual content, most often regarding masturbation, but also when the narrator vaguely references sexual fantasies or experiments with strap-ons to seek a sense of gender euphoria. It is more explicit than many books, but only because Kobabe describes eir younger self's struggle with accepting the body and sex e was assigned at birth. Many opponents claim this book is pornographic, but a character exploring the intersections of gender identity and sexual orientation isn't pornography, as pornography would refer to content that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Many queer books, including *All Boys Aren't Blue*, view sexuality through a much more reflective lens, typically depicting it as an extension of identity.
- Educational value
  - *Gender Queer* tells a very real story of questioning one's gender identity, as well as questioning one's sexuality (or, in Kobabe's case, asexuality). This is a topic that is often not discussed in this manner, particularly when it comes to understanding the asexual spectrum. Kobabe's habits as a young genderqueer teen also may be perceived as realistic and easy to relate to for many teens in similar situations, and the graphic novel provides a very genuine glimpse into the mind of a questioning teen. This helps queer and questioning readers feel validated, and also allows students outside of the queer community to learn what this experience is like. In a post on NPR's website, Kobabe discussed the ban, writing:

I am trying, as... advised, to take all of this as, if not a compliment, at least a kind of testament to the strength of my work. Being an author of a heavily challenged book is stressful, and it wastes a lot of my time – but it puts me in very good company.

## 2.3 All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto by George M. Johnson

*All Boys Aren't Blue* is a memoir told in a series of essays by Johnson (they/them), who describes their experiences as a child and teen in New Jersey and Virginia. The book narrates their adolescent self's conflicts with gender identity, racial identity, and sexual orientation, as well as overcoming trauma.

- Official reason for banning: profanity, sexually explicit
  - Throughout the book, Johnson describes several sexual scenarios, but focuses on the emotions surrounding them rather than the explicit events. They discuss being molested as a child and the anxiety it caused them, and also discuss how they overcame the same anxiety when engaging in their first consensual sexual experiences. There is mild profanity, and at some points, Johnson uses African American Vernacular language in italics, including a passage where they discuss the use and misuse of the n-word (without the -er) by peers, but this is not gratuitous, having a specific significance in the narrative.
- Number of challenges reported by the ALA (2022): 86
  - According to the American Library Association's most recent report on the prevalence of book bans, this book was challenged in 86 school districts and public libraries. This puts it second only to *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, though a more recent study from *The Washington Post* claims the book was challenged 13 more times than *Genderqueer* in the 2023 school year (Natanson).
- Educational value
  - *All Boys Aren't Blue* is targeted to a YA audience. While its content likely wouldn't be selected for classroom use, having it available in school libraries would provide an important perspective for teens who are experiencing or witnessing similar issues in their communities. This book is valuable in helping students understand important concepts like identity, consent, social anxiety, and overcoming trauma. While it does deal with concepts that aren't always considered child-appropriate, these things are happening to children and teens everywhere, and silencing the voices speaking out about them only creates a sense of "taboo" and social isolation for adolescents who



are grappling with similar issues. According to the Richland Library (Matthew C.), Johnson responded to accusations of the book being inappropriate, saying,

These things happened to me when I was a child, teenager, and young adult. So as heavy as these subjects may be, it is necessary that they are not only told, but also read by teens who may have had to navigate these same experiences in their own lives.

## 2.4 *Flamer* by Mike Curato

In this graphic novel by Mike Curato (he/him), the 14-year-old character Aiden Navarro is bullied for being biracial, overweight, and perceived as gay. Navarro comes from a Catholic background and struggles with his feelings for another boy at his summer camp. Curato based Navarro's experiences very closely on his own.

- Official reason for banning: sexually explicit
  - It's not clear why this book was labeled as sexually explicit other than the fact that it is about a gay teenager. There is no actual sex or nudity present in this book, and the most "sexually explicit" it gets is some raunchy jokes made by the teen boys at their summer camp. The protagonist does fantasize about his male love interest, but these fantasies are generally pretty innocent. This book is frequently labeled "sexually explicit" and "pornographic," but there's little basis for this, and it's more realistic to believe this book ban was due to parents being uncomfortable with a sympathetic gay teen protagonist.
- Number of challenges reported by the ALA (2022): 62
  - As of 2022, *Flamer* was the fourth most banned book in the country, despite not containing any sexually explicit content. In an interview with KTLA, Curato said, It's funny because back in 2020, when the book was first released, there were no book challenges against *Flamer*. It was a lovely year, year-and-a-half of being in a welcoming environment. And then, in 2021, a Texas lawmaker shared this McCarthy-esque list of over 800 books that he wanted investigated. And that's

really when the ball started rolling. I think this is very politically motivated movement. It's a distraction.

- Educational value
  - This book, based on Navarro's own experiences, provides an insight into the experience of questioning one's sexuality, as well as a take on society's treatment of queer individuals. It also deals with authentic issues of mental health struggles, suicidal ideation, and overcoming bullying. Throughout the book, Navarro is ostracized by others, constantly tries to deny his sexuality, and feels like he's betrayed his faith. In the end, he is able to persevere through the difficulties he faces and move towards a brighter future, despite knowing that life will not be easy for him. Seeing a story like this can be incredibly valuable for students who are feeling similarly disparaged, both by their peers, their communities, or even by themselves. This book can teach readers that it's okay to question one's sexuality, and it normalizes the queer experience by tackling the harsh stigma towards gay people, including tackling religious rhetoric—this may be another unofficial reason for the book's ban.

## 2.5 Notable Trends

Based on these three books alone, some patterns are apparent. First, many banned books are written by authors who identify as transgender or outside of the gender binary, including two out of the top three most banned books. In fact, before the release of *Gender Queer: A Memoir*, the most banned book in the country was written by genderqueer author Alex Gino (Kobabe). The book, called *Melissa*, tells the story of a transgender teenage girl. It seems discussing gender is one of the quickest ways for a book to get banned, regardless of whether or not it's "sexually explicit," and authors who don't identify as cisgender seem to be perceived by conservatives as threats to the norm, making them much more likely to find their books banned.

Second, most of these books are nonfiction. The only book of the three that isn't nonfiction is *Flamer*, and it's still incredibly close to nonfiction, mirroring Curato's experiences directly and even including characters playing the same roles as those in his life. Interestingly, John Friedman at PEN America reports that only 24 percent of banned books are nonfiction, and yet the most widely banned queer books overall happen to be those that depict the real-life struggles of queer people. It seems that the more grounded and informative a book is, the more it's perceived as a threat. Declaring nonfiction books inappropriate is particularly ironic, considering that the very same struggles are happening to teens all over the country. Banning these stories from being shared with their target audience only leaves these queer and questioning teens feeling more isolated and confused about their personal experiences, unaware of how universal some of their struggles may be.

One final pattern that seems to stand out is that most banned books were well-received upon publication, and had a multitude of supporters rather than anyone speaking out against them. *Flamer* won the Lambda Literary Award in 2021. *Gender Queer: A Memoir* received a Stonewall Honor and an Alex Award in 2020. *All Boys Aren't Blue* was nominated for several awards for young adult books, and ranks in the top ten of the ALA's Rainbow List. Both Kobabe and Curato have said that their books did not receive negative criticism until the early 2020s (Falcon) (Kobabe). As book bans are gaining more mainstream attention, conservative parents are getting angrier over books containing positive LGBTQ representation, particularly in the last three years. At the same time, politicians are repeatedly targeting queer books as a means of garnering support from their constituents. These once well-received books are now scrutinized so severely that books like *Flamer*, which contain no sexual content, are being banned simply for having queer characters or discussion of queer identities.

## 3 The Book Banning Debate

### 3.1 Introduction

Book banning should not be such a controversial issue, but somehow, it is. The United States is divided on book bans. Conservative states, including most of the Southern United States, tend to favor book bans, particularly banning books containing queer themes. As of 2024, the majority of book bans are in Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina (Meehan and Friedman). These are all conservative states, some of which have passed legislation that makes book bans against queer authors even easier—for example, the “Don’t Say Gay” laws in Florida restrict educators from mentioning queer identities to students, which means any book that could be deemed remotely queer can be banned as soon as someone brings it to the attention of the school board or politicians.

In passing book ban legislation, proponents of the bans don’t want to officially state that the bans are motivated by the work containing queer themes. Instead, they call the content “sexually explicit” or “pornographic.” This is a flimsy argument, especially when many of these books don’t contain sexually explicit content at all. If book bans were truly about keeping sexual content away from children, then there would be no reason to ban *And Tango Makes Three*, a children’s picture book based on the true story of two male penguins who raise an orphaned baby penguin. It’s difficult to argue that a happy family of penguins could be pornographic, but somehow the book was one of the top ten most banned in the country every year from 2006 to 2011, even claiming the number one spot for several years (Jones).

It's unlikely that any books in school libraries and classrooms would ever be truly sexually explicit or pornographic. K-12 educators and school librarians are responsible for choosing the content of the books available to students in the classroom and school library environments. Each book is ordered and stocked in libraries with a purpose in mind, which was carefully considered by the education professional who chose it. Kobabe's *Gender Queer* is probably the most "sexual" of the banned queer books, but Kobabe insists that the book was not intended for all ages. It would not be stocked in an elementary school library, for example, simply because it's not the intended audience. As such, book ban advocates don't have much evidence for their claims, and merely create hysteria by applying the labels "sexually explicit" and "pornographic." Since these terms are so vague, they've successfully applied them to any and all books that encourage students to look at something outside the norms of heteronormative gender and sexuality.

While some would insist banning these books is the desire of a silent majority, ironically, only a small number of people are petitioning to have these books removed from public and school libraries. In fact, only eleven parents are behind sixty percent of US book bans (Natanson). These parents are so offended by certain content that they've filed hundreds of legal complaints against any books with discussions of gender and sexuality. With the support of groups like the Moms for Liberty, they have managed to escalate the book banning phenomenon to politicians, who tend to support bans that target content outside of their political agenda. Thus, a small percentage of parents has been able to dictate the total number of book bans in the United States.

Rather than educators and librarians, the fate of children's education through literature is being decided by eleven naysayers, as well as widespread advocate groups like the Moms for

Liberty. In stocking a school library or choosing books for the classroom, librarians and instructors make decisions based on appropriate age ranges and reading levels. These educators are familiar with the needs and reading comprehension levels of their students, so their judgment should be trusted. Queer books are included in libraries intentionally. The argument that these books expose children to harmful content is not just misinformed, but also insulting to librarians and educators everywhere. Deciding what books are available for students are best left to those who are experts in educating children, rather than the small minority of parents pushing for book bans.

### **3.2 Arguments for Banning Queer Books from Schools**

Book ban advocates will argue to remove books for many different reasons, and some of the logic behind these queer book bans is to purge libraries, schools, and other public forums of content that does not align with their values. For instance, reporter Hannah Natanson of the *Washington Post* followed the story of Cindy Martin, a mother of four, who challenged three books in one year in Georgia's Forsyth County schools. One of these books is a graphic novel about a hockey team, with a protagonist who comes out as gay. In challenging the book, Martin argued that the school board should "remove all copies and burn it," explaining that the book contains an instance of profane language.

Martin's view is shared by others. Though it is a small minority, some parents side with Martin and her reasoning. In fact, Martin has a group of followers, known as the "Mama Bears." Martin's Mama Bears were involved in a lawsuit over First Amendment rights, where they insisted that freedom of speech should not apply to these books. The Mama Bears are surprisingly successful in arguing that these books should not be available to students and should

be removed from existence altogether. This is evident by their attempts to remove books from every available avenue; in 2022, Friedman at PEN America found that bans in public libraries had become almost as prevalent as bans in school libraries. Some parents have gone so far as to sue booksellers like Barnes and Noble for even having these books in stock, which was one early development in the banning of *Gender Queer* (Kobabe).

Georgia's Mama Bears are far from the only group collectively demanding book bans. The largest group is the Moms for Liberty, which was declared an extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2023. This group of conservative parents has been proposing book bans, protesting queer books at school board meetings, lobbying politicians to remove any trace of LGBTQ education from curricula and school libraries, and the group even helped form Florida's infamous "Don't Say Gay" law (Perry). The group emphasizes "traditional values" and insists that American public schools must abide by a heavily sanitized curriculum, one that refuses to acknowledge complex topics like sexual orientation and gender identity. While these parents may insist more liberal schools are "indoctrinating" their children, they are the ones responsible for an educational system that only allows students to learn and think through a very narrow lens.

As of February 2024, the Moms for Liberty organization has 310 chapters in 48 states, adding up to about 130,000 members. While this is a large number, it's still a very small minority of parents, given the NCES's estimate of five million students attending kindergarten through twelfth grade in the U.S. everyday. The group is growing, however, and despite being outnumbered by parents who argue against book bans, there's likely a "Mom for Liberty" in most school districts in the United States. With roughly 13,000 public school districts in the country, some of the more conservative states may have several Moms for Liberty in a single

school. This makes it much more difficult to make queer books available to students, even when it is legal to do so. Despite its small size, the organization has proved itself to be powerful, and many parents who are unsure about their stance on book banning may be persuaded to side with the group, mistakenly believing that the Moms for Liberty are protecting children. In reality, the Moms for Liberty are inciting fear and restricting access to potentially educational materials.

Cindy Martin, the Mama Bears, and the Moms for Liberty all share the desire to make sure that children are not exposed to queer content in their schools—not only their own children, but all children in the United States. In doing so, they have successfully managed to pull hundreds of thousands of books from the shelves of school and public libraries. These organizations and individuals have had a great deal of success in recent years, leading to a widespread silencing of queer voices. Ultimately, this was an intentional goal, and Martin says she feels Jesus himself has “put this passion in [her] to protect the children.” Hannah Natanson also describes Martin’s reasoning for the ban:

Martin said in an interview that she stands by her call to burn *Check Please!* which she criticized for ‘using the f-word, and it’s in the sexual sense.’ She said titles available in school libraries promote casual sex and degrade women. She predicted letting children read those books will lead to pregnancy, abortion, sexual harassment, rape, and sexually transmitted diseases.

This view that queer books are inherently immoral is shared by many. In fact, Natanson’s article cites a study by the Washington Post that reveals` 8% of challengers of queer books said these books “‘groom’ children, priming them to adopt an LGBTQ identity and/or to become sexually deviant.” A widely-held belief among book ban advocates is that children will replicate the



behavior seen in these books, and that by banning them, they prevent their children from falling victim to the so-called “gay agenda.”

Another notable part of the above quote is the reason Martin cites for her criticism, that the book uses “the f-word, and it’s in the sexual sense.” The use of a single expletive seems like an unlikely reason to ban a book, and it’s very possible that this is being used to cover up the real motivation for the ban being the portrayal of a gay protagonist. The ALA reported that the vast majority of proposed book bans gave the reasoning of sexual content or profanity, with over 2,800 cases in the 2009 school year. Only 500 of these were banned for the explicit reason of “homosexuality,” meaning advocates were not likely to admit that the books they considered sexually explicit or profane were being challenged due to LGBTQ content. Throughout the early 2000s, the ALA continued to label the explicit reason for most bans as “sexually explicit” or “profane,” like Kobabe’s *Gender Queer* or Curato’s *Flamer*. In more recent years, it has become more common to acknowledge queer content as the motivation for a ban. Friedman at Pen America noted that LGBTQ content and characters made up 41 percent of successful book bans or “banned pending investigation” cases involving portrayals of queer issues, proving that queer books are banned at a disproportionately high rate when compared to others.

Since so many parents do not view book bans favorably, it’s more difficult to gain support for a book ban simply by saying the book contains queer themes; by calling the book profane, Martin was able to convince others that the book was harmful to children without exposing the real reason behind the ban. Though the fixation on profanity makes it impossible to prove, it’s more likely that the reason Cindy Martin, the Mama Bears, and others like them want to ban *Check Please!* is because the protagonist comes out as gay. It’s possible they are trying to eliminate positive portrayals of gay characters in books, such as in *Flamer*, where Aiden Navarro

is a realistic character who is portrayed sympathetically throughout his struggle to come to terms with his identity amidst bullying. Other times, it may be because a character who comes out as gay or genderqueer is accepted positively by family and friends instead of facing negative consequences, such as in Kobabe's *Gender Queer*. In all cases, it is more persuasive to say that a book is sexually explicit or profane in order to hide the fact that it's really just about the book's queerness.

### **3.3 Arguments Against Banning Queer Books from Schools**

According to a national poll commissioned by the ALA in 2022, seventy-one percent of American parents are against book banning. The results were also consistent across political lines, showing the majority of voters disapproved of book banning, including Democrats, Republicans, and independently affiliated voters (Meehan and Friedman). But while the majority of Americans seem to favor ending these bans, the bans are only increasing in prevalence due to political polarization and regressive groups like the Moms for Liberty. Pro-ban advocates are in the minority, but they seem to hold the most power, with those most affected by the issue being overlooked; the people most impacted by these bans are not the librarians and educators themselves, nor the authors behind the books. The people who suffer the consequences of book bans are the students, who aren't able to access books with queer content. As such, it makes sense that the most significant opinions to consider are not the parents, the authors, the lawmakers, or the educators, but the students themselves.

Many students read and enjoy these books, and have publicly argued that they shouldn't be banned. Some have even tried to fight back against book bans, joining with adults to contest these bans with public statements and lawsuits, including a Missouri school district in 2022,

which banned a children’s science fiction novel for its mention of a non-binary character on three pages. The book, Margaret Stohl’s *Cats vs. Robots*, was removed without notice after the challenge was made; four students and the ACLU sued, arguing that this book’s removal and its process violated their First Amendment rights (Tylenda 117). Despite students wanting fewer limitations on what they can read, book ban advocates and the Moms for Liberty believe they know what is best for the students, and want to eliminate all books that do not align with their organization’s push for “traditional” values in education. Many students do not seem to agree with these values, and want their favorite books returned to libraries.

In 2022, *The New York Times* posed a question to students– “What is your reaction to the growing fight over what young people can read?” Based on the responses from three schools in Pennsylvania, California, and Illinois, the unauthored article by the *Times* reported that the “overwhelming majority of those who weighed in said they were against outright bans.” NPR’s Elizabeth Blair spoke to four students to get their opinion on the banned book issue as well, finding that all of her respondents were against book bans. In order to best understand the effect that book banning has had on children and teens, the testimonies of students like these must be considered.

Before losing access to these titles, many students have found comfort and meaning in queer books. Now that so many of these books are being banned, that level of comfort and acceptance the book created for them is being challenged. Ellie, a student from Austin, Texas, shared a personal story that highlights the importance that these queer books can have on readers. Here’s what she had to say:

One of my favorite books that I recently found out was banned is *Rick* by Alex Gino. It’s a book about a kid who learns that he’s asexual, which is an LGBTQ orientation. ... I was

just starting to question when I had read that book, and it really helped me sort of figure out that sort of thing. It was really interesting to me that a book that helped me so much and that I love so much would be like challenged or banned. (Blair)

It's disappointing to hear that Alex Gino's *Rick*, the book that helped Ellie through her period of questioning, is now being taken off of shelves in her school district. For Ellie and other students who identified with Rick's struggle, refusing to allow them to access this book anymore is a harsh blow, and could also be perceived as an erasure or denial of the asexual identity.

Banning books allows the Moms for Liberty and other pro-ban advocates to “erase” queer identities from the view of students. Michael Bronski, Professor of the Practice in Media and Activism in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, told Samanta Perfas of *The Harvard Gazette* that he believes the increase in queer book bans is a nationwide push to suppress queer identities in the wake of the progress made for the LGBTQ community throughout the 2010s. Bronski said, “These book bans — along with the bans on drag shows, along with the attacks on abortion, along with the attacks on trans youth — are really a last-ditch effort, almost magical thinking [from conservatives], to stop this push” (Perfas). Book banning advocates are motivated by a fear of queerness manifesting in their own children and members of the younger generation, with homophobia and transphobia permeating through the legislation that bans each of these books. One student who agrees with this take is a high schooler *The New York Times* identified only as “Emma.” Emma digs into the root of the problem:

Books provide perspective, information, escape, context, encouragement, education, and so much more. Censoring books is censoring human history and discouraging freedom of expression and thought—a right granted to all American citizens in the First Amendment

of The Constitution. The challenges posed against books regarding race, gender, and sexuality are built on ignorance and hatred.

Emma voices a sentiment that is shared by many, that banning queer books is merely a form of bigotry. While many will debate this, particularly if they agree with a book ban, it's important to remember that LGBTQ authors are disproportionately affected by book bans. Of the 874 book bans enacted in the 2023 school year, more than 26 percent were books involving queer themes or characters. Some book bans have doubled since the year prior, particularly bans on the top queer books, like Mike Curato's *Flamer*, which was banned 25 times in 2023, versus only ten times in 2022 (Meehan and Friedman). Fortunately, some students like Emma are able to identify the potential silencing of queer voices, because a few years from now, these voices will be silenced completely in many school districts.

Students also recognize that these books address topics that they may not be able to discuss with family and friends in their own lives, and can find a sense of comfort in reading about these important issues. In The *New York Times* article, Tamia from Vanden High School describes the value of banned books as a source of solace for students who are facing some "hard topics" in their own lives:

Now of course I can understand boundaries as talking about rape to a class full of 13-year-olds might not be considered appropriate to some, but banning these books that address "hard topics" like LGBTQ+ or racism is doing an injustice to those who might need to hear that story. I think rather than having a conversation about these topics that some may consider uncomfortable it might be easier for them to read about it.

Tamia's sentiment echoes that of George M. Johnson, author of *All Boys Aren't Blue*. As quoted above, Johnson believes that discussing difficult topics is incredibly important, given that

Johnson himself was facing these things as a child and teen (Falcon). Millions of other teens are facing similar experiences as well, making the book a potential source of support for those who want to learn more about the “hard topics” the book discusses.

In a statement to *The New York Times*, Aiden from Glenbard West High School in Illinois provided a unique take on the book banning issue, as he, unlike most other students, did express support for some elements of book banning, using his own experience of reading Sarah J. Maas’s book *A Court of Mist and Fury* at a young age to argue that sexually explicit content shouldn’t be available to children in libraries. However, he too disagreed with the banning of books over queer content:

Overall, I think it is important to have diversity and representation in books and the media especially for minorities. Without the representation in books and the media it shows children these things are not normal or natural and need to be changed. I think some books should be banned for kids of a younger age for explicit content, but no book should be taken from a child just because two gay people kiss in the book because it is no different than if a man and a woman had kissed.

Even though he agrees with some aspects of book banning, Aiden can distinguish a difference between sexually explicit content and queer content, unlike many lawmakers who utilize the label “pornographic” to disparage any queer works. If others feel the same way as Aiden, then it’s likely the general student population does not associate queerness with inherent sexual deviancy the way many pro-ban advocates do. Because of this, it would be very difficult to convince students that a book is truly “sexually explicit” due to its queer themes. In other words, many students see through the rhetoric used by book banners, identifying it as blatant homophobia.

In numerous responses, students also recognize the educational value of these queer books. For instance, in response to the writing prompt from *The New York Times*, York High School student Chris argued that restricting access to these books is counterproductive to education:

People always say that they want students to learn for themselves but are also not giving students access to all knowledge. Teachers want their students to grow and find themselves, but the students cannot when they try to read a book that they think could help them learn and grow, but it is banned.

Where the American school system fails to provide knowledge on queer culture, history, and identities, queer books can fill the educational gaps. With queer books banned, queer and questioning students find themselves trapped in a hostile school environment, and educators have fewer ways to help students learn about themselves, their peers, and elements of queer culture, including queer history.

## **4 How Queer Books Challenge Heteronormative and Cis-Centric Education**

### **4.1 How Queer Educational Resources Benefit Students**

Consistently, queer students are overlooked in the classroom and libraries. Many school systems are influenced by conservative values or a lack of concern for underrepresented populations. As a result, school boards and administrators have consistently been denying queer students the right to learn about their own identities and others like them, often as a result of political influence and lobbying from groups like the Moms for Liberty. Even in 2024, new laws are being passed

preventing educators from even speaking about queer people, lest they face termination of employment and even legal punishment. Banning books is yet another way to ensure that queer children don't receive a thorough education, and that their peers are not taught tolerance and understanding towards the LGBTQ community. For queer students, there is no possibility of acceptance when their own identities are not acknowledged by the school's educational content, whether that be through the curriculum itself or the titles that are accessible in school libraries.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network conducted annual reviews of the United States' secondary school climate until 2021, utilizing responses from nearly 23,000 high school and late middle-school students from all over the country and U. S. territories; GLSEN advertised the surveys to LGBTQ students through outreach groups, and over half of the respondents identify as LGBTQ or questioning (Kosciw et al. 6). Based on survey responses, The GLSEN calculated numerous statistics, and they're very disquieting: 71.6 percent of LGBTQ students reported that no queer topics whatsoever were discussed in the classroom. Only 16.3 percent of students were taught positive representations of LGBTQ topics, including queer historical events and historical figures; 14.4 percent were taught explicitly negative things regarding queer topics. Only 7.4 percent received non-heterosexual sex education, and 48 percent said they could not access LGBTQ resources through school computers due to the content being blocked. And, unsurprisingly, more than half of students said they had no access to queer books in classrooms or libraries, with 57.2 percent saying they could find no books on LGBTQ issues anywhere on school grounds.

While these statistics are bleak, there is a silver lining, at least for the small percentage of students who received an LGBTQ-inclusive education and were able to access books on queer issues in school libraries. According to the same GLSEN study, queer students who had access to



LGBTQ educational resources “Felt greater belonging to their school community, performed better academically in school and were more likely to plan on pursuing post-secondary education,” and “Reported better psychological well-being: higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and a lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year.” Students from school systems that included queer representation in curricula and libraries also were statistically less likely to hear homophobic or transphobic remarks. In addition, queer students “were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (23.4% vs. 34.0%), gender expression (34.0% vs. 54.0%) and gender (29.1% vs 42.6%),” and “were more likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBTQ+ people (66.9% vs. 35.3%)” (Kosciw et al. 11).

These 2021 statistics clearly show a discrepancy in the way queer students are treated based on the level of tolerance promoted by school curricula and library materials; when students have access to queer educational materials, including books, the rates of homophobia and transphobia decrease, and feelings of safety and acceptance increase. The psychological well-being of queer students improves, and their peers are more likely to treat their identities with respect. It’s clear that incorporating queer elements in educational curricula and library resources has benefits for queer students, but more than half of students have no access to either of these.

## **4.2 The Educator’s Challenges and Responsibilities**

Educators in the United States face serious challenges when bringing these books into their classrooms and libraries, even though they aim to provide all possible resources students need to grow and learn. By now, it’s been established that queer books belong on library shelves, despite what groups like the Moms for Liberty may say. With all the legislation in place, as well as

homophobia, threats, and more from angry parents and politicians, there are many potential consequences for providing students with banned books. Many educators face a difficult choice of either being a bystander in the banned books debate, or affirming students' right to read books that involve queer themes. While it may be tempting to avoid this conflict, a responsible educator must be willing to take on some degree of personal risk to protect the well-being of their students. With the students' educational development in mind, the benefits of vocally supporting queer books outweigh the risks of angering book ban advocates.

Over the past few years, the political environment in the United States has become more hostile towards educators who support LGBTQ causes. School faculty who show their support for queer students are personally targeted in many cases. Even if they're not confronted or threatened personally, there is a consistent rhetoric spread by conservative groups and extremist organizations like the Moms for Liberty. These groups create fear towards adult allies of the LGBTQ community by attacking their character. One way they do this is by calling LGBTQ-allied educators "groomers," sparking fear in others. By using rhetoric like this, they can trick millions into believing that queer educators and educators who support LGBTQ causes are trying to "groom" their children into becoming gay or transgender. This "groomers" rhetoric is now so widespread that the state of Missouri is close to passing a law, House Bill 2885, which will categorize any acknowledgment of a student's gender identity, such as using a preferred name or pronoun, as a class E misdemeanor, making these teachers tier-one sex offenders (Monteil).

It's understandable why educators are nervous about making queer books accessible to students. Politically, there is a lot of change that needs to happen in order to reduce the level of censorship school libraries and educators face. According to the Office of Governor Newsom, California has recently passed a law that will prevent books from being banned in the state of

California. This is a huge step, allowing educators and librarians to regain control over what books are chosen for a school's library or curriculum. California is currently the first state to do this, and hopefully others will follow suit. But even in "safe states," book ban advocates are threatening the education system. When a teacher or librarian in a "safe state" is legally able to include some LGBTQ content in their education and book selections, often, they will be challenged. Even if the Moms for Liberty and other groups cannot legally challenge these educators, which is now the case in the state of California, they can still threaten and expose the identities of teachers and librarians; however, this "doxxing" is likely to only be acknowledged within their own groups, such as in the local chapters of the Moms for Liberty. In many states, this will result in nothing more than scrutiny towards the educator's reputation, almost entirely from these ultraconservative groups.

With book bans often being specific to libraries, librarians face an especially difficult challenge in introducing queer books to children. Librarians may find themselves targeted for shelving books that some find inappropriate, whether they're in a school library or a public institution. Even in states where book bans are not as prevalent and librarians retain their ability to select books for their students, adding frequently challenged books to their collection is a high-risk, high-reward gamble. The moment a librarian orders their high school a copy of *Gender Queer*, they're officially making a public statement on several sociopolitical issues. They will likely be scrutinized, and perhaps a parent from their own school will be the one to push for a ban on the content on their shelves. On the other hand, maybe a student who is struggling with their gender identity will come across that copy of *Gender Queer*, find a sense of validation, and learn something important about the queer community.

Some people believe bans can be implemented more loosely in school libraries, but this would not be an ideal situation for students, either. School librarians should not have to hide queer books behind the counter to be available only when requested, because this promotes the erasure of queer content. Having a designated LGBTQ bookshelf won't appease the book-banners either, because the content is still accessible. Moving the books to a higher-level reading section, as many suggest, is typically not possible in school libraries, because these books are already grouped with their target audiences, which is usually "young adult," the highest reading level in school libraries. So, when it comes to the issues of banned books in libraries, there's really no compromising with the demands of the pro-ban advocates. Either the librarian will willingly display a queer book alongside other titles, or they will not. Some librarians worry about their safety and reputation being damaged by providing queer books, so many will not want to tackle this challenge at all.

For teachers, these restrictions apply differently, with the specific level of censorship varying from state to state. Integrating queer content into the curriculum is not always possible; sometimes this is due to laws restricting educators' abilities to do so. Other times, it's because school authorities insist that it is immoral to discuss queer topics in the classroom, or because curriculum planners believe teaching to a "small minority" is a waste of time. American educational curricula consistently fail the one in four high school students who identify as LGBTQ, as well as the rest of students, who have peers who identify as queer or questioning. These students must have the ability to gain knowledge about queer topics elsewhere, and queer books provide a way for students to gain an education on queer topics that their school would otherwise overlook.

Book bans are not as strictly enforced in the classroom as they are in school libraries. Kasey Meehan's 2023 PEN America report found that only 23 percent of books were banned in both classrooms and libraries, and about one percent were banned in classrooms alone; this means that providing banned books in classrooms is legal in approximately 76 percent of cases. This may not apply to all districts in states with the highest number of book bans, like Florida, Texas, and Missouri, but in many states, so long as the material is not directly connected to the course itself, banned books can technically be mentioned on recommended reading lists and stocked on classroom shelves without penalty. This way, queer books can be used in the classroom to supplement students' learning and ensure they're able to find the knowledge they're looking for. For example, in high school health classes, students are typically taught some form of sexual education. In almost all cases, school-run sexual education programs exclude valuable information about sex and STD prevention for queer students, sometimes by law. Adding a copy of *This Book Is Gay* to the classroom shelf could help students to fill that educational gap, especially if the teacher lets students borrow and return that copy of the book.

Whenever possible, teachers should provide these resources to students. For now, these banned books can still be purchased in stores by adults; in fact, while they're widely inaccessible for minors, adults are purchasing them at a greater rate than they were prior to the bans. Though little data is available on whether or not these books are being distributed to their target audience of children and teens, the increasing circulation of these books seems to suggest that this may be happening in some places. Based on the ALA and PEN America's list of the top 25 most banned books, the circulation of banned books actually increased by 12% on average, including an increase of over 11% in states that did not institute the same book bans (Ananthakrishnan et al. 2). If a teacher were to buy a copy and have it available in the classroom, it could avoid

curriculum restrictions but still allow the students to have access to these books, allowing the book to circulate amongst its target audience, who would not be able to access them elsewhere.

In cases where educators can't stock the books in classrooms and can't explicitly recommend these books, simply discussing the banned books issue with students can be very beneficial. For instance, having students write a debate paper or "current events" report about the book banning phenomenon could introduce them to the biases behind these book bans. Simply starting a classroom dialogue about these bans can help students gain awareness of the situation, too. With the increasing circulation of books after their bans, it's reasonable to believe that people are more interested in certain titles after they have received public backlash. If students are made more aware of these books, they may be more likely to seek them out on their own whenever possible, and if it's not possible, they will still become more aware of the local political controversies that caused these books from being taken away.

It's crucial for educators to speak out on the issue and support queer books. The voices of educators who want to be allies for the LGBTQ community and other students have not all been heard yet. At the same time, there are teachers and librarians who support banning queer books and have even censored books themselves, doing their students an educational disservice. If more educators take steps to support queer books, this hostility can be replaced with voices of compassion towards queer issues, providing students with a more positive environment that is conducive to a healthy education. Despite the risk of angering a few conservative parents, most educators took on these positions because they have a true passion for teaching and guiding the younger generation, and for some, incorporating queer books is an easy choice—book bans teach students that there is only one correct way to think and act, and that being queer is a violation of these moral values.

The goal of schooling is to help students seek out knowledge, and removing books from schools and school libraries only ensures that their intellectual curiosity is heavily censored. In cases like these, information is unfairly controlled by conservative groups like the Moms for Liberty, which blocks students from important resources and knowledge. But since these groups are a small minority of the population, if the larger majority against book banning spoke out, they would have much more influence. It is not unreasonable to think that educators and parents could work together to counter any book bans that are proposed in their school districts, and ultimately succeed in reducing the number of book bans happening in their areas, particularly those motivated by a harmful rhetoric towards queer themes, targeting them through more mature rhetoric than the opposite side. While the pro-ban advocates' reasoning is based in logical fallacies, more reasonable arguments would insist that these books are valuable to education and student well-being.

## **5 Conclusion**

Banning books from school libraries restricts what students are allowed to learn, often in the hopes that they will take on conservative ideologies. Conservative book-banning advocates hope their work will convince young people that queerness is morally wrong or too “sexually explicit” to even be considered as their true identities. Many authors who have had their queer-themed books banned, including Mike Curato, agree that this is a political agenda, one that can be incredibly harmful to students. When book bans teach students that there is only one morally correct way to read and learn, the value of American students' education is at risk. If book bans are not challenged, the younger generation will be forced to grow up with a limited education,

believing that there is only one “correct” way to think. Responsible educators must advocate against the bans on queer subjects in schools, and can challenge “anti-woke” legislation and bans by insisting that queer books are valuable in education. They have a duty to make students aware of the books that are being censored, and in school systems where it is legal, to help students access these resources.

Students need queer books in the classroom because they provide an educational benefit that they otherwise will not receive, since there are statistically very few school curricula that provide even a small positive glimpse into the world of the LGBTQ community. However, based on trends of the past decade, book bans will continue to increase in prevalence. Though many educators, lawmakers, parents, and even students have all spoken out against book banning, groups like the Moms for Liberty currently have significant control over the educational restrictions in the United States, despite making up a small portion of the population. The banning of queer books will not slow down or stop until something is done at the legal level to prevent it, but the more these book bans are challenged, the better, because it shows students that it’s okay to be queer, and that topics like these should not be censored to appeal to a political agenda. Book bans teach students that people should be silenced; when the resources available to students exclude queer voices, school is not very educational at all.



## Works Cited

- Ananthakrishnan, Uttara M and Basavaraj, Naveen and Karmegam, Sabari Rajan and Sen, Ananya and Smith, Michael D. "Book Bans in American Libraries: Impact of Politics on Inclusive Content Consumption." Donald G. Costello College of Business at George Mason University Research Paper, 23 June 2023.
- Blair, Elizabeth. "Adults Have a Lot to Say about Book Bans - but What about Kids?" *NPR*, 4 Oct. 2023.
- C., Matthew. "I'm With The Banned: *All Boys Aren't Blue*." *Richland Library*, 24 June 2022.
- "California Bans Book Bans and Textbook Censorship in Schools." *Ca.Gov*, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 26 Sept. 2020.
- Curato, Mike. *Flamer*. St Martin's Press, 2020.
- Falcon, Russell. "His LGBTQ Teen Book Is One of the Most Banned in the U.S. Here's Why He Keeps Writing." *KTLA, NEXSTAR*, 24 June 2023.
- Jones, Barbara. "*And Tango Makes Three* Waddles Its Way Back to the Number One Slot as America's Most Frequently Challenged Book." *ALA News and Press Center*, American Library Association, 27 Dec. 2012.
- Klimek, Chris. "A Brief History of Banned Books in America." *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Magazine, 5 Oct. 2023.
- Kobabe, Maia. "Author Maia Kobabe: Struggling Kids Told Me My Book Helped Them Talk to Parents." *Banned and Challenged*, NPR. 4 Jan. 2023.
- . *Gender Queer: A Memoir*. Oni Press, 2019.

Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). *The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of LGBTQ+ Youth in Our Nation's Schools*. New York: GLSEN.

Johnson, George M. *All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020.

Lavietes, Matt. "Over Half of 2022's Most Challenged Books Have LGBTQ Themes." *NBCNews.Com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 25 Apr. 2023.

"LGBTQ+ Titles Targeted for Censorship: Stand Against Book Banning." *The New York Public Library*, 23 June 2023.

Meehan, Kasey. "Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools." *PEN America*, April 20, 2023.

Meehan, Kasey, and Friedman, Johnathan. "2023 Banned Books Update: Banned in the USA." *PEN America*, 20 Apr. 2023.

Monteil, Abby. "A Missouri Bill Would Put Teachers Who Support Trans Kids on the Sex Offender Registry." *Them*, 5 Mar. 2024.

"Most Gender Dysphoria Established by Age 7: Cedars-Sinai." *Cedars-Sinai*, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, 16 June 2020.

Natanson, Hannah. "Objection to Sexual, LGBTQ Content Propels Spike in Book Challenges." *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2023.

Neilson, Sarah. "Book Bans Are Meant to Erase Us. Fight Back By Reading These World-Affirming Texts." *Them*, 16 Mar. 2022.

Perfas, Samantha Laine. "LGBTQ Book Challenges Are on the Rise. Here's Why." *Harvard Gazette*, 9 Nov. 2023.

Perry, Mitch. “Moms for Liberty Now Has 310 Chapters in 48 States; What Will They Do Now?” *The 74 Million*, 6 Feb. 2024.

“Research Guides: Banned Books: What Is a Banned Book?” *Research Guides at Harvard Library*, 18 Sept. 2023.

Top 13 Most Challenged Books of 2022.” *Banned and Challenged Books*, American Library Association, 31 Jan. 2024.

Tylenda, Megan M. “Banned Books & Banned Identities: Maintaining Secularism and the Ability to Read in Public Education for the Well-Being of America’s Youth .” *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality*, vol. 12, no. 1, Jan. 2024, pp. 109–138.

“What Students Are Saying about the Growing Fight over What Young People Can Read.” *The New York Times*, The Learning Network, 22 Sept. 2022.