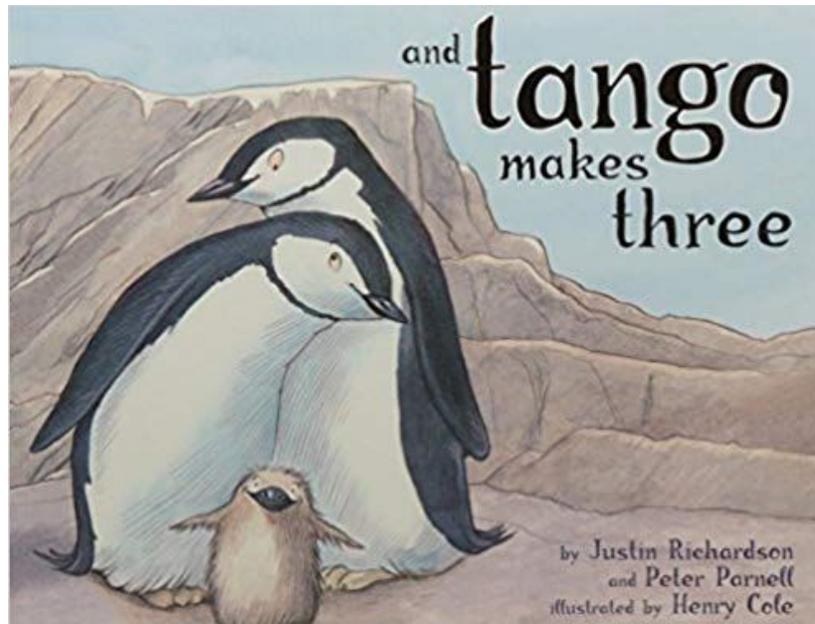


Banned Books: Are Students' Rights Being Limited?

By Katelyn Carbajal



Usually, when people think of the rights of students, especially of those in elementary and middle school, dress code is the first thing that comes to mind. Rightfully so. When dress codes are enforced upon students, their First Amendment right to freedom of expression is denied. However, dress code is only one of the factors in schools that is limiting the rights of students. What many fail to consider when they think of student rights and the limitations brought on by school officials is the right to read. You might be thinking, “What do you mean? Students do practice their right to read.” Essentially, yes. Students do have the ability to read in schools and are actually encouraged to do so. But, do students have the freedom to choose what they read? In reality, many young students don’t. This is the result of book banning, a form of censorship. Censorship, in this sense, is “when private individuals, government officials, or organizations remove books from libraries, school reading lists, or bookstore shelves because they object to their content, ideas, or themes” (Webb).

Book banning has been a problem for several years now, dating back to the mid 1900s. Despite push back, popular titles such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Hate U Give*, two of the ten most challenged books of 2017, are still being kept from libraries across the country. This basically goes without saying, but the continued practice of book banning ultimately limits the freedom of students to choose what books they get to read as well as limits their access to information. As the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] (2018) expresses, “One of the foundations of a democratic society is the individual’s right to read, and also the individual’s

right to freely choose what they would like to read.” I agree. Students should not only be able to read essentially what interests them but they should also not be kept from experiencing books that present real-life issues or topics, despite the controversy around them. Nonetheless, I can understand the process of selecting age-appropriate books for a classroom library that may limit student options. For instance, a sexually explicit book that is meant for an older audience, in my opinion, does not belong in an elementary classroom. However, there are so many books that are banned and/or are constantly being challenged that present reality in an appropriate manner, that can and should be included in an elementary classroom. Take, for example, the children’s book *And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson, which has been a part of the American Library Association’s top ten challenged and banned books list a total of eight times. The book, which highlights the romantic relationship of two male penguins at the Central Park Zoo who adopt a penguin egg, presents the topics of homosexuality and adoption in a manner that is suitable for children. This book is one of many books that “keep[s] students in touch with the reality of the world outside the classroom” (NCTE, 2018). After all, we go to school in hopes of becoming educated.

The last thing we need as students is to be kept ignorant and close-minded. Banning books and censorship in general can put students at risk of that. As stated by NCTE (2018), “English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not hide, or lie to the young, about the perilous but wondrous times we live in, books which talk of the fears, hopes, joys, and frustrations people experience, books about people not only as they are but as they can be.” Students have the right to be kept in the loop and should be given the opportunity to read an uncensored version of the world they live in. I ultimately believe that any and every book has the potential to be criticized and deemed inappropriate by someone. Nonetheless, I do not believe the school should be the one determining what books students can and cannot read. It is the right of students to be educated on topics that exist in real life. Students should not be “denied the freedom to explore ideas and pursue truth wherever and however they wish” (NCTE, 2018).

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