Censorship creates obstacles and barriers in our path toward the freedom to read—whether it’s a book hidden on the top shelf, a speaker cancellation, or profanity marked out on a page, censorship will always be around. But it’s how we defeat these barriers to find the freedom to read that is crucial.

The journey toward the freedom to read is never straightforward. When confronted with a challenge or ban, some readers write letters, speak out at board meetings, circulate petitions, and initiate discussions with those who would want to censor. Some of these stories are shared in this Field Report. Each challenge and incident listed in this publication is sourced from public, verified reports from the year 2019, including news articles, meeting minutes, and entries from the Journal of Intellectual Freedom and Privacy (JIFP).

Our office—which has been tracking reports of attempts to remove materials and services in libraries and schools since the 1990s—continues to see an increase in challenges to LGBTQIA+ materials and programming. Among the Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2019 listed on the back of this publication, eight of them were challenged because of LGBTQIA+ content. Other examples of books challenged for LGBTQIA+ content in this report are Hurricane Child (page 6), Fun Home (page 4), and Worm Loves Worm (page 4). Challenges to Drag Queen Story Hours—programs that feature drag queens reading stories to children in libraries—have also been on the rise. We’ve also seen a resurgence of censorship attempts by organized pressure groups and conservative bloggers.

By staying updated about attempts to limit your First Amendment rights, you can break down barriers and overcome obstacles to access more information. One of the best places to celebrate your right to read? Your local library. You can find even more ways to combat censorship throughout this Field Report.

The journey toward your freedom to read takes on many forms. What path will you take?

*We thank speaker and author James LaRue, the former director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, who compiled the entries for this year’s Field Report.*
This Field Report is arranged alphabetically by the author’s last name. It is not uncommon for challenges to affect more than one book. In these cases, the complete description and source for the challenge is listed under the first author alphabetically; the additional challenged books refer back to that author.

**Alexie, Sherman**

**THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN (2007)**

When this young adult novel was used in an eighth-grade language arts class at the North Albany (OR) Middle School, a parent of a student in a different class (not the class reading the book) objected to the language and references to masturbation. The Reconsideration Committee voted to retain the book.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

**Allard, Harry**

**THE STUPIDS DIE (1985)**

A grandparent filed a request for reconsideration at the Hermiston (OR) Public Library objecting to the derogatory last name in the children’s humorous picture book. Retained.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

**Anderson, Airlie**

**NEITHER (2018)**

The superintendent of the school district in Oak Park, CA, announced the introduction of gender identity curriculum for elementary schools to parents, to include the books *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman, *It’s Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr, *Red: A Crayon’s Story* by Michael Hall, *Neither* by Airlie Anderson, and *Jamie is Jamie: A Book About Being Yourself and Playing Your Way* by Afsaneh Moradian. The curriculum sparked strong protests from 300 parents, some claiming that the lessons were “unscientific ideology,” others believing that the parents should decide whether to broach the subject, not the schools.

Following a review by the district curriculum council and parent-teacher organizations at each of the three elementary schools, the Oak Park Board of Education adopted the program.


**Arundhati, Roy**

**THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS (1997)**

An incoming first-year at the Gardendale (AL) High School chose this *New York Times* bestseller from a school-recommended “Advanced World Literature” summer reading list. Set in India of 1969, the book won the Man Booker Prize. The student complained to her father about its “inappropriate content.” The father reviewed it, and claimed the book contained graphic sexual content that he absolutely “didn’t want his children knowing about.”

A school review committee recommended its withdrawal from all schools. The principal, who had immediately removed the list from the school website, will now review all reading lists.


**Asher, Jay**

**THIRTEEN REASONS WHY (2007)**

Parents of the Westwood (NJ) Regional Schools argued that *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, and *Can’t Get There From Here* and *Boot Camp* by Todd Strasser, had the potential to do “irrevocable harm and should be pulled from the school.” Following an author visit from Strasser, all three books were added to the Westwood Regional Middle School language arts classroom library by the principal. After committee evaluation, she replied to parents’ complaints: the two Strasser books would remain in the classroom collections and Asher’s book would be relocated to the school library. The school board voted to retain the titles.

A local police chief, in favor of removing the books, announced that he was running for a seat on the board.

Atwood, Margaret

**THE HANDMAID’S TALE (1985)**

This classic novel was included on a reading list before the beginning of a twelfth-grade advanced placement literature and composition class at a north Atlanta suburb’s high school in Georgia. A student’s mother forbade him from choosing the book. Alleging “porn and gore and cursing,” the mother wanted the book removed from the high school and held prayer circles outside the library while a committee of more than a dozen staff, administrators, and parents discussed the item. Retained.

Source: “Fighting Under His Eye: One High School Teacher’s Tale of Defending Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale,” Writer’s Digest, Sept. 27, 2019.

Austrian, J.J.

**WORM LOVES WORM (2016)**

A parent complained that the book was “sexually graphic . . . explicit . . . very suggestive and encouraged sexual experimentation.” In accordance with library policy, the director of the Mt. Angel (OR) Public Library met with the patron and addressed the challenge. The book was retained in the junior nonfiction section. The patron chose not to appeal the decision to the library board.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Bailey, Jacqui

**SEX, PUBERTY AND ALL THAT STUFF: A GUIDE TO GROWING UP (2004)**

A parent complained that the book was “sexually explicit . . . very suggestive and encouraged sexual experimentation.” Retained.


Barker, Pat

**REGENERATION (1991)**

A committee submitted a list of supplemental novels recommended for reading in English courses in Columbia County, GA, high schools and were specifically asked in an email the day before school began to provide a list of page numbers of any sex or rape scenes, graphic depictions, or profanity other than “hell” or “damn.” The superintendent said that she was unwilling to approve Regeneration, Mark Haddon’s


Bechdel, Alison

**FUN HOME: A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC (2006)**

Administrators from two New Jersey high schools in the North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District reviewed a single page of this graphic novel that has a lesbian protagonist. Finding the images on a single page of the 233-page book objectionable and in “violation of district policies,” administration restricted the book’s circulation to students with explicit parental permission. Earlier in the year, a new state law had been passed requiring boards of education to include instruction, and adopt instructional materials, that accurately portray political, economic, and social contributions of LGBTQIA+ people. Following a letter from ALA-OIF, the books were restored to open circulation.


Bond, Victoria, and T. R. Simon

**ZORA AND ME (2010)**

Parents and teachers disagreed over the presence of LGBTQIA+ books that were purchased for a “diverse classroom libraries”

Source: “LGBTQ School Book Controversy in Loudoun County,” FOX 5 DC, Nov. 12, 2019.

**Brennan-Nelson, Denise**

**WILLOW AND THE WEDDING (2017)**

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

**Brothers, Meagan**

**WEIRD GIRL AND WHAT’S HIS NAME (2015)**

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

**Brundage Jr., Vernon**

**SHOOT YOUR SHOT: A SPORT-INSPIRED GUIDE TO LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE (2018)**

The interim superintendent of a Providence, RI, school district directed the purchase of 16,510 copies of the basketball-related motivational book as mandatory reading for all middle and high school students. Following concerns by district teachers that the books were overtly religious, the superintendent withdrew the requirement. The books remain, but reading them is voluntary.


**Butler, Paul**

**CHOKEHOLD: POLICING BLACK MEN (2017)**

The Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) informed the publisher of the book, which was authored by a former prosecutor, that the book would no longer be allowed in Arizona prisons. Following a 2019 decision by the Arizona Supreme Court that the book would no longer be allowed in Arizona prisons. Following a 2019 decision by the Arizona Supreme Court that found the ADC had unconstitutionally violated prisoner rights through the previous censorship of books on sexual themes, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the censorship of *Chokehold*. While the book calls for significant change in the criminal justice system, it does not threaten “to disrupt the facility’s ability to maintain

**Stay updated on censorship attempts by following the Office for Intellectual Freedom on Twitter and Facebook and subscribing to Intellectual Freedom News.**

Source: ACEFI News on Twitter and Intellectual Freedom News on Facebook.
security and order,” stated the ACLU. The ADC said it will review the ACLU request. 

Callender, Kacen
HURRICANE CHILD (2018)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Carrère, Emmanuel
THE KINGDOM (2017)
Citing parental, donor, and alumni concerns about “scandalous” materials, the Franciscan University of Steubenville (OH) demoted the English department chair who recommended the book for an advanced English class. The university at first defended the book, which speculated that the Virgin Mary might have had sex and masturbated. Later, the president apologized for the book, which he described as pornographic and blasphemous, and called on professors to take an Oath of Fidelity, pledging support for the Catholic Magisterium. The book is no longer available at the campus bookstore.

Cooper, Steven
OFFICIAL OVERSTREET INDIAN ARROWHEAD IDENTIFICATION AND PRICE GUIDE (2018)
A Harney County, OR, patron with an archeological background registered a complaint that the library’s copy of this encyclopedic guide was an affront to Native Americans and could encourage people to loot native sites. Retained.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Corinna, Heather
S.E.X.: THE ALL-YOU-NEED-TO-KNOW SEXUALITY GUIDE TO GET YOU THROUGH YOUR TEENS AND TWENTIES (2016)
The California Board of Education voted to adopt a Health Education Framework and sex education curriculum using LGBTQIA+ inclusive language and that provided information about HIV prevention, safe sex, human trafficking, and gender identity. While praised by some parents, the suggested curriculum was protested by other parents and conservative groups. Teachers were not required to teach any specific part of the curriculum and many schools allowed parents to opt out their children. Some parents also objected to S.E.X.: The All-You-Need-to-Know Sexuality Guide to Get You Through Your Teens and Twenties, which they described as “explicit and graphic.” No removals of the book have been reported.

De Brunhoff, Jean
TRAVELS OF BABAR (1932)
A patron objected to the “racist depictions of Africans” with “stereotypical features” in this children’s book. Retained.
Source: 2018 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Desir, C.
OTHER BROKEN THINGS (2017)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.
Duncan, Lois

**KILLING MR. GRIFFIN** *(1978)*
Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.

Elliott, Zetta

**DRAGONS IN A BAG** *(2018)*
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Evans, Shane W.

**WE MARCH** *(2016)*
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Frank, Anne

**THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL** *(1947)*
A patron of the Josephine County Library District (Grants Pass, OR) complained about “talk about the vagina, penis, and sex” in Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and requested that an edited version replace it. After consideration by a committee of the various merits of different editions, the original material was retained in the children’s section as well as the adult and young adult sections of the library.


García, Cristina

**DREAMING IN CUBAN** *(1992)*
Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.

Gino, Alex

**GEORGE** *(2015)*
The Scappoose (OR) School Board proposed a resolution to take *George* off the 16-book list for elementary students, a decision that would exclude its students from competing in regional or state voluntary Oregon Battle of the Books contests. No student was required to read the book. Following a contentious board meeting, the board defeated the resolution to remove the book from the list on a 5–2 vote.


Green, Laci

**SEX PLUS: LEARNING, LOVING, AND ENJOYING YOUR BODY** *(2018)*
Challenged for “how to anal sex, oral sex, sex toy use, BDSM,” the book was moved from the young adult section to the adult section of the Mt. Angel (OR) Public Library.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Haack, Daniel

**PRINCE & KNIGHT** *(2018)*
A staff member of the ImagineIF Libraries (Kalsipell, MT) read this gay-positive children’s book to a visiting daycare class of four-and five-year-olds. The teacher protested the topic’s presentation to a group of “innocent school children,” and in a letter to the newspaper said that the book should not only never be read to children again, but it should also be removed from the library altogether. Hundreds of complaints about the book were sent to the library, including comments from an angry county commissioner. During a public meeting, the board received many comments. Most were favorable to the library and the book. The board voted to retain the book but adopted a new program policy.


Ginsberg, Allen

**HOWL** *(1956)*
At least two parents of high school students in Steamboat Springs, CO, objected to the poem “Howl,” originally (and unsuccessfully) prosecuted as obscene in 1957. In 2019, a school reconsideration committee voted 8–1 to retain the classic work. A student claimed that she was not allowed to opt out of the assignment and hired legal counsel to press her claims. The teacher sent an apology to students, claiming an oversight in not allowing students to opt out.

County (WV) Public Library. The library board president refused to discuss the issue or hear public comments but did state that the book is retained in the children’s section.


Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

HADDON, Mark


After the book was included on the voluntary summer reading list of the Westmont (PA) Hilltop School District, there were complaints to the school board about “foul language,” “profane use of God’s name,” and a “negative portrayal of a character with autism or a similar disorder.” A curriculum committee recommended that the title not be included on the list. At the largest public turnout at a board meeting in recent memory (75 people), some people said there was a contradiction between the school’s ban on profanity and approval of the book that contains curse words. The board voted to retain the title. In the words of one board member, “I think that the value gained from understanding differences for this individual in particular far outweighs the language used.”


HALL, Michael

RED: A CRAYON’S STORY (2015)

Complete description and source for the Oak Park, CA, challenge listed under “Anderson, Airlie” on page 3.

HARRIS, Robie H.

IT’S PERFECTLY NORMAL (1994)

It’s Perfectly Normal has been hailed by parents, educators, psychologists, and doctors for its thorough and scientifically valid information concerning puberty and sexual topics. Arizona Republican State Rep. Kelly Townsend wrote a Facebook post calling on public school and county libraries to pull copies from their shelves based on the false claim that the book “depicted minors having sexual intercourse.” The Maricopa County (AZ) Library District retained the book, finding that it adhered to their collection development policy.


Hoffman, Sarah, and Ian Hoffman

JACOB’S ROOM TO CHOOSE (2019)

A patron challenged this children’s book that addresses gender expression and the use of elementary school bathrooms. The book was retained, and the board and director of the Warsaw (IN) Community Public Library had a public discussion about the reconsideration process.


Hosseini, Khaled


A parent of a ninth grader at the Park City (UT) School District expressed two concerns: first, that The Kite Runner’s child rape scene could cause students who have been sexually abused further trauma, and second, that there were other school-approved novels whose sexual content violated criminal code. The school board said it would take all comments under consideration.


HOWE, James

BIG BOB, LITTLE BOB (2016)

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Hubbard, L. Ron

ALL TITLES BY AUTHOR

A patron submitted a statement of concern about the library’s collection of Scientology materials written by L. Ron Hubbard, stating “more books give the cult the appearance of legitimacy.” The materials were retained, and the library notified the patron.

Katcher, Brian

**ALMOST PERFECT** *(2009)*

Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.


Kilodavis, Cheryl

**MY PRINCESS BOY** *(2009)*

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.


Kirkman, Robert

**THE WALKING DEAD** *(2003–2019)*

A teacher at the Wallace (ID) Sr. High School objected to this series of graphic novels available at the school library. A reconsideration committee—comprising students, staff, and parents—voted 7–4 to retain the books. However, after parental pushback, the district superintendent removed all the books.


Larson, Hope

**GOLDIE VANCE** *(2016–2020)*

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Lawson, Robert

**THEY WERE STRONG AND GOOD** *(1940)*

Winner of the 1941 Caldecott Medal, this nonfiction children’s book tells stories about the author’s family. A patron of the Tigard (OR) Public Library complained about two concerns: slavery was mentioned without being condemned, and there were stereotypical representations of American Indians. In accordance with library policy, three library staff reviewed the item; the book was retained.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Lee, Harper

**TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD** *(1960)*

A white substitute teacher at the Mustang (OK) High School read the N-word aloud from *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The only black student in the class recorded the reading, notified the teacher that she was offended, and brought the matter to the attention of her principal. The district adopted a new policy stating that “racially charged language will no longer be spoken” in classrooms. The status of the substitute teacher is not known.


Look, Lenore

**ALVIN HO: ALLERGIC TO GIRLS, SCHOOL, AND OTHER SCARY THINGS** *(2009)*

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Lopez, Diana

**ASK MY MOOD RING HOW I FEEL** *(2014)*

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Martinez, Andres Vera

**LITTLE WHITE DUCK: A CHILDHOOD IN CHINA** *(2012)*

A parent challenged this favorably reviewed children’s book about life during the Cultural Revolution in China because of its depiction of violence against animals. The Corvallis–Benton County (OR) Public Library reclassified the book from juvenile fiction graphic novels to juvenile nonfiction graphic novels because it was more memoir than fiction.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Mathieu, Jennifer

**THE TRUTH ABOUT ALICE** *(2015)*

Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.

Matsui, Yusei

**ASSASSINATION CLASSROOM (SERIES)** *(2012–2016)*

This Japanese science fiction manga series featuring an octopus-like teacher who must be killed to prevent the destruction of the earth was available in the library of the Markham Intermediate School in New York. A parent of a student protested the violent premise of the series and met with school administrators. They decided to remove the book. The state Department of Education said that the series is not intended for middle school students, and it is not available in other middle schools in the state.


Join organizations that defend and promote free access to information. A list can be found at bannedbooksweek.org.
McCourt, Frank

**ANGELA’S ASHES** (1996)
Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.

Moradian, Afsaneh

**JAMIE IS JAMIE: A BOOK ABOUT BEING YOURSELF AND PLAYING YOUR WAY** (2018)
Complete description and source for the Oak Park, CA, challenge listed under “Anderson, Airlie” on page 3.

Morrison, Toni

**THE BLUEST EYE** (1970)
Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.

Murakami, Haruki

**KAFKA ON THE SHORE** (2002)
This international award-winning novel was on the approved reading list for the International Baccalaureate program. After discovering that her teenage son was reading the book, New Gloucester State Rep. Amy Arata concluded that the book’s content was too violent and sexual for students. She introduced a bill that would allow prosecutors to charge school administrators and teachers with a felony for sharing similar books with students. Penalties included potential fines and jail time. The bill was unanimously rejected by a legislative committee.


Naylor, Gloria

**THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER’S PLACE** (1982)
Complete description and source for the Marion County, FL, challenge listed under “Burgess, Anthony” on page 5.

Newman, Lesléa

**HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES** (1989)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.


Newman, Lesléa

**SPARKLE BOY** (2017)
Complete description and source for the Oak Park, CA, challenge listed under “Anderson, Airlie” on page 3.

Noguchi, Rick, and Deneen Jenks

**FLOWERS FROM MARIKO** (2001)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Obradovic, Julie

**AN UNFORTUNATE COINCIDENCE: A MOTHER’S LIFE INSIDE THE AUTISM CONTROVERSY** (2016)
A patron of the Corvallis-Benton County (OR) Public Library complained that the book spread misinformation about autism, and should not be in the collection or shelved with other “legitimate items of medical value.” Retained.

Source: 2018 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Ostertag, Molly

**THE WITCH BOY** (2017)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Packebush, Nina

**GIRES LIKE ME** (2017)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Parr, Todd

**IT’S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT** (2001)
Complete description and source for the Oak Park, CA, challenge listed under “Anderson, Airlie” on page 3.


Patel, Sonia

**RANI PATEL IN FULL EFFECT** (2016)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Pessin-Whedbee, Brook

**WHO ARE YOU? THE KID’S GUIDE TO GENDER IDENTITY** (2016)
A Mt. Angel (OR) Public Library patron complained that the book “tells children that adults are wrong about gender—too much information for young ones.” Retained.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Suggest an enlightening banned or challenged book as your next book club read.
Pohlen, Jerome

Quintero, Isabel
GABI, A GIRL IN PIECES (2014)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Ransom, Heather
GOING GREEN (2017)
A teacher in the Grants Pass (OR) School District’s middle school wrote a science fiction novel. It was approved for use in instruction by a parent committee. Then another parent objected that the book had “overly sensual materials for a 12 year old, talking about hooking up” and stated, “Normalizing this type of behavior, especially since a teacher . . . wrote it, kids may think this isn’t bad behavior.” Under consideration at this writing.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Richardson, Justin, and Peter Parnell
AND TANGO MAKES THREE (2005)

Rotner, Shelley, and Sheila M. Kelly
FAMILIES (2015)

Rowling, J. K.
HARRY POTTER SERIES (1997-2007)
A pastor at St. Edward Catholic School in Nashville, TN, expressed concern about the heretical lessons students could learn from the series. He consulted exorcists, and removed the books from the school’s library. “These books present magic as both good and evil, which is not true, but in fact a clever deception,” he explained. “The curses and spells used in the books are actual curses and spells; which when read by a human being risk conjuring evil spirits into the presence of the person reading the text.” He also stated, “The Harry Potter books promote a Machiavellian approach to achieving the ends they desire with whatever means are necessary.” Removed.

Rotner, Shelley, and Sheila M. Kelly
FAMILIES (2015)

Rumford, James
SILENT MUSIC: A STORY OF BAGHDAD (2008)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Russell, P. Craig
THE GIVER (2019)
The graphic novel version of the Lois Lowry book was blocked in the processing department by staff at the Macdonald (MI) Public Library, then wound up on the director’s desk. The staff member found the graphic novel scene of infant euthanasia inappropriate for the intended young adult audience. According to board minutes, the item was eventually reclassified from young adult to adult.

Salbi, Zainab
FREEDOM IS AN INSIDE JOB: OWNING OUR DARKNESS AND OUR LIGHT TO HEAL OURSELVES AND THE WORLD (2018)
Salbi’s memoir ranges from her childhood in Iraq to an arranged marriage in America to founding an organization to help women all over the world. One sexual scene in the book prompted a patron of the Deschutes (OR) Public Library district to request a label calling out adult content. Retained, not labeled.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon
Sanders, Rob


A parent of a Hanover County (VA) Public Schools student was upset that a teacher read this children’s book to their seven-year-old daughter’s class, which she claimed encouraged her daughter to question her faith. Originally, the teacher stood by the civil rights lesson. But after the local TV station reached out to district officials, the principal sent a letter home to parents apologizing for the incident, and stating that the book had not been approved for the curriculum.

Source: “Hanover Mom Outraged after Gay Rights Book Read to 7-Year-Old Daughter,” WRIC, April 1, 2019.

Savage, Dan, and Terry Miller

IT GETS BETTER: COMING OUT, OVERCOMING BULLYING, AND CREATING A LIFE WORTH LIVING (2011)

A patron of the Mt. Angel (OR) Public Library complained about the “anti-religious” sentiments and “frequent use of profanity” in this book by the founder of the “It Gets Better” YouTube channel, which provides support to LGBTQIA+ teens in the wake of many teen suicides. After following appropriate policy, the director informed the patron that the book would be retained. The patron did not appeal the decision.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Silverman, Erica

JACK (NOT JACKIE) (2018)

This children’s picture book on gender identity was challenged by a Waukee (IA) Public Library patron objecting to its display on the shelf of new books. Her concerns, and those of another patron, were as follows: “highly controversial subject and needs to be taught by the parent first,” “may be confusing to children,” “it’s a sexual topic,” and “it’s an adult theme.” Both patrons suggested creating a new “parent guided children’s books” section for similar books. The item was retained as cataloged.


Stone, Nic

DEAR MARTIN (2017)

Complete description and source for the Columbia County, GA, challenge listed under “Barker, Pat” on page 4.

STOTT, ANN

WANT TO PLAY TRUCKS? (2018)

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Strasser, Todd

BOOT CAMP (2007)

Complete description and source for the Westwood, NJ, challenge listed under “Asher, Jay” on page 3.

Strasser, Todd

CAN’T GET THERE FROM HERE (2004)

Complete description and source for the Westwood, NJ, challenge listed under “Asher, Jay” on page 3.

Thompkins-Bigelow, Jamilah

MOMMY’S KHIMAR (2018)

Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Truss, Lynne


A patron of the Lake Oswego (OR) Public Library complained about an image in the 32-page book about punctuation: a beheaded king continued talking and had blood around his neck. The patron said the book was inappropriate for children, and that she had challenged it in other libraries. No formal complaint was filed. Retained.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Twiss, Jill

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MARLON BUNDO (2018)

A person defaced this parody of Marlon Bundo’s A Day in the Life of the Vice President, writing in the book that “Girl bunnies marry boy bunnies. This is the way it has always been.” Then the person added, “because science.” No formal request for
reconsideration was filed. The director announced that typically people are asked to pay for books they have damaged.

Vernacchio, Al
FOR GOODNESS SEX: CHANGING THE WAY WE TALK TO TEENS ABOUT SEXUALITY (2014)
A parent filed a request for reconsideration form, asking, “Do I really want my 12 year old to know how do girls have sex? or how 2 guys dance together? Or learn crude terms and names for body parts?” The book was retained, but moved from the young adult section to the parenting section, which was the book’s intended audience.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

Weaver, Lila Quintero
MY YEAR IN THE MIDDLE (2018)
Complete description and source for the Loudoun County, VA, challenge listed under “Bond, Victoria” on page 4.

Wright, Lawrence
Members of a longtime book club at the Parr Library (Plano, TX) said officials temporarily removed this book from their reading list for being too political. Library officials claim it was a misunderstanding. The book remains available for circulation.

EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT
The Education Justice Project (EJP), a college-in-prison program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, established a library in the Danville (IL) Correctional Center. Center officials removed more than 200 books, essays, and journals from the collection, most of them related to African American history, race, and social change. Following testimony and public pressure by the EJP, all of the titles were returned to the EJP’s shelves in Danville Correctional Center.

DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARY
The Kalamazoo (MI) Public Schools announced a plan to add more diverse content to elementary school classrooms. After complaints from three parents about a story featuring a transgender child, the school announced that the diversity initiative would not encompass LGBTQIA+ materials, focusing instead on racial and ethnic diversity. Then some two dozen people showed up at a board meeting to argue for the inclusion of materials addressing LGBTQIA+ and disability issues. The school board president apologized, and the board reversed its decision. While racial issues remain the focus—more than 6 in 10 students belong to racial or ethnic minorities—the program will also address broader themes, including LGBTQIA+, disabilities, and socioeconomic diversity.

If there’s a local challenge reported in the news, write a powerful letter to the editor in your newspaper. The letter could touch on the benefits of unrestricted reading, a defense of the First Amendment freedom to read, or your personal experience with reading the book.

PROMOTE THE FREEDOM TO READ IN STYLE
with posters, T-shirts, and mugs from the ALA Store (ala.org/bbooks/shop). Sales support the defense of intellectual freedom in libraries and schools.
BEYOND BOOKS

The following are 2019 public challenges to library or school services and resources that aren’t books.

FILMS

THE CLUB (2016)
This award-winning Chilean drama about priests and child abuse was challenged at the Deschutes (OR) Public Library District due to scenes of brutal violence, violent sexual acts, explicit sexual language, and because it was “not suitable.” Retained.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

DEATH PROOF (2007)
A patron of the Josephine County (OR) Library insisted that this Tarantino exploitation horror movie be removed from the library because of foul language. Retained.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

DEATH OF A NATION: CAN WE SAVE AMERICA A SECOND TIME (2018)
The patron of an unspecified public library in Oregon objected to what he called a “pro-Trump DVD.” The docudrama is based on Dinesh D’Souza’s book, and the author was a director and writer of the film. Retained.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

HAPPYTIME MURDERS (2018)
A patron of the Sheridan County (WY) Public Library System requested that the library bar children from checking out the puppet/black comedy because of the sexual scene between two puppets. Status unknown.

LAST TANGO IN PARIS (1972)
A patron of the Deschutes (OR) Public Library District, concerned about allegations of an actual rape of the actress Maria Schneider in the film, called for the library to remove the film and take a stand for women’s rights. The film was retained.
Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

THE WOLF OF WALL STREET (2013)
A patron of the Antioch (IL) Public Library District objected to the graphic sexual scenes, vulgar language, and heavy drug use in the film. Retained.
Source: Antioch Public Library Board documents, July 2019.

NEWSPAPERS

NEW YORK TIMES
Citrus County, FL, commissioners unanimously denied a request from their local library to spend $2,700 annually on digital subscriptions to the New York Times, stating that the paper is “fake news” and they “agree with
Donald Trump.” “I don’t want the New York Times in this county,” said one commissioner. The library has a subscription to the print edition.

“Challenges” are not just complaints about books, but rather willful attempts to remove or restrict access to library resources or programming. Challenges can be a written complaint, a form submitted to a library, or a call to action on social media.
An increasing number of challenges to library programs and meeting room usage target Drag Queen Story Hours, where the focus is less on the titles, contents, or authors of any specific books, but rather who is reading them. In these special storytime events where picture books are read aloud to children, performers dressed in drag (usually men dressed in theatrically feminine costumes) try to encourage both a love of reading, inclusivity, and kindness. Hate mail, petitions, social media campaigns, death threats, and lawsuits were directed at the performers, administrators, and library workers of 27 states. The Office for Intellectual Freedom recorded 53 challenges to Drag Queen Story Hours in 2019, including in the libraries of Washoe County, NV; Albuquerque, NM; Haverford, PA; Irving, TX; Lafayette, LA; Louisville, KY; Lexington Park, MD; Putnam, TN; Lafayette, CO; and Greenville, SC. Events that were not cancelled demonstrated a positive message of LGBTQIA+ support in their community.

The Jonesboro (AR) Public Library invited trans author Meredith Russo to its annual authors program. Public protest persuaded the library to request police presence at the event. In previous years, schools attended this event as a field trip. According to library officials, “Due to safety concerns that have arisen, the schools have decided they will not be attending this year.” The event was held.

The Jacksonville (FL) Public Library cancelled its Storybook Pride Prom at Riverside’s Willowbranch Library after Raymond Johnson, founder of Biblical Concepts Ministries in Jacksonville, and Elizabeth Johnston, a blogger and author who goes by “The Activist Mommy,” asked their followers to call the library and “express your disgust that this perversion is taking place in a taxpayer funded library.” After a flood of calls both protesting and supporting the event, the library concluded that it could not provide “safety and security for everybody involved,” particularly gay minors.

The author of Kid Activists, Robin Stevenson, reported that her visit to the Longfellow Elementary School in Wheaton, IL, was canceled because of a parent complaining about the book’s inclusion of Harvey Milk. The school responded that the concern was not so much the topic, as the fact that they did not have the opportunity to inform parents of the content and give them the opportunity to opt out.

The Worcester County (MD) Library cancelled a lecture on the U.S. Constitution hosted by the president of the library’s foundation and former chair of the Worcester County Democratic Central Committee after it received protests and a threat from local groups who said the lecture would address “how to either impeach Trump or
remove him from office” and how to “collude and conspire to take away your vote.” While county commissioners praised the professionalism of the director and board, a member of the Republican Women of Worcester County later expressed her own concern with what she contended was the partisanship of the lecture, referring to the speaker’s previous affiliation with the Worcester County Democrats.


The Anne Arundel County (MD) Public Library sponsored a Drag Queen Story Time, which was attended by more than 100 people. Following the event, the board of trustees adopted a policy to give themselves final say over library programs. While a board representative stated that the intent was not to censor or preempt library staff, many programs—including at least a dozen LGBT-related events—had been put on hold, creating logistical problems for staff. The programs were retained after the board unanimously voted to adopt a revised version of the policy that no longer gives the board voting power or calls for programs to be flagged as “potentially controversial,” and instead asks for notification of any programs that “merit their special attention.”


The Mid-Continent (MO) Public Library sponsored a “Trans 101” program, an educational program aimed at teens and adults intended to provide education and conversation about transgender identity and experiences. While the event was well attended, one person submitted a petition to cancel all future such events. The second Trans 101 program was postponed but reinstated following circulation of a supportive petition. The library board continued to hear from supporters and objectors at library board meetings. Without authorization or endorsement from the board, a board member wrote a personal letter to the newspaper, writing that “a once safe community setting known as the public library has become a space that, in the guise of intellectual freedom, wants to change thinking on voyeurism and gender confusion, while promoting materials and programs that lead children toward being sexually exploited.”


Following protests against a visit from Golbarg Bashi, the author of P is for Palestine: A Palestine Alphabet Book, the Highland Park (NJ) Public Library canceled the talk. The chief concern of the many Jewish residents of the community was the page on “I is for Intifada”; intifada is considered by many as an endorsement and encouragement of violence against the Jewish state. The visit was rescheduled for later in the year, and held despite protests.


Author Lesléa Newman was invited to speak at a Jewish day school in her hometown of Brooklyn about her latest book, Gittel’s Journey: An Ellis Island Story. However, after the school cancelled due to an unanticipated field trip, Newman said online that she believes she was disinvited, which she inferred was due to school officials discovering that she was a lesbian. Newman is also the author of Heather Has Two Mommies.


Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder criticized gay pride events at public libraries, contributing to the cancellation of a library’s teen pride event in Licking County, which is half of his district. Householder called the event at the Licking County Library “a stunningly bizarre breach of the public trust,” and said “taxpayers aren’t interested in seeing their hard-earned dollars being used to teach teenage boys how to become drag queens.” Citing safety concerns, the director canceled the meeting. It was rescheduled for a local bookstore.


An event by the Delaware County (OH) District Library was geared to children of any gender ages 12 to 17 interested in learning “the basics” of dressing in drag. Those who objected to and supported the class made many comments in public and at board meetings. Eventually, the event was canceled due to safety concerns.

Source: “Updated: Drag 101 Riles Some, but Delaware County Library Stands Firm,” ThisWeek Community News, May 23, 2019.
Camille Paglia was scheduled to give a talk titled “Ambiguous Images: Sexual Duality and Sexual Multiplicity in Western Art” for the University of Arts Philadelphia, where Paglia has taught for 30 years and is a tenured faculty member. A group of students demanded that the talk be cancelled and Paglia fired for previous comments they considered transphobic. (Paglia identifies as transgender.) During the event, which took place with peaceful protesters outside, a person pulled the fire alarm. Afterward, many professors at the institution were reluctant to go on record with their thoughts, pointing out that the university no longer awarded tenure, a guarantee of academic freedom.

Author Julia Watts, who has written about LGBTQIA+ teens growing up in Appalachia, reports that she was abruptly unininvited, and her name removed from the website of the Knox County (TN) Public Library’s LitUp Festival. Allegedly, one of the adult festival coordinators was fearful that the LGBTQIA+ themes of her fiction weren’t suitable for teens. Library officials claim that while they “love” Watts, who has worked with them on many programs, they learned that some of her books are categorized as “erotic” (Watts says, “mildly romantic”), and that the age of the conference attendees was 12 to 15.

A middle school in Texas abruptly canceled author Jen Petro-Roy’s visit to promote her debut novel P.S. I Miss You. According to the author, a school administrator said that by teaching this book, she’d be promoting an LGBTQIA+ “agenda.” Petro-Roy reports that many authors touching on LGBTQIA+ themes are experiencing greater frequency of such cancellations, although schools are rarely forthcoming about the reason.

Two hours before a planned talk at the Leander (TX) Public Library, award-winning transgender comic book writer Lilah Sturges learned that the program had been cancelled due to “unforeseen circumstances.” The cancellation followed a highly publicized controversy over a pride festival and story time event held by an LGBTQ-friendly church. After protests, the city council ended library meeting room rentals and some library programming. A few months later, the longtime library director announced her departure.

The mayor of Charleston, WV, an invited speaker at the West Virginia Book Festival, protested when Orson Scott Card, author of Ender’s Game, was also invited to speak at the festival. The mayor said Card had a “well documented history of views that are contrary to the City of Charleston’s commitment to being an inclusive and welcoming community,” and asked the festival to reevaluate its invitation to him. When the festival did not withdraw Card’s invitation, she withdrew as a speaker, saying “I will not support hate speech of any kind.” Card spoke at the festival despite protests.
A group of students, educators, and artists recommended that a mural depicting scenes in the life of George Washington (including the image of a murdered Native American, and a slave) be removed from a San Francisco high school because it doesn’t represent the school’s values. First, the school board voted to paint over the New Deal-era artwork. After public outcry, they amended the vote to digitize the work and merely cover it up.


The Otis Library (Norwich, Connecticut) installed a memorial to thousands of Sikhs killed 35 years ago in India. The memorial accused the Indian government of genocide. Then India’s consul general in New York allegedly threatened the library’s nonprofit status and called the library’s executive director to discuss the memorial. India calls the deaths “riots,” not state-sponsored genocide. “Otis Library and the Norwich Monuments Committee jointly agreed to remove the plaque, flags, and portrait,” said the president of the library board of trustees. Local Sikhs have begun planning an independent Sikh museum in Connecticut.


An Oak Park, IL, school district removed a 1937 Works Progress Administration (WPA) mural from Julian Middle School because it did not reflect today’s more diverse student population. The mural, called “Child and Sports Winter,” features only white children. The mural, according to district officials, was moved and joins other WPA artwork in Washington, D.C.


A patron of the Park Ridge (IL) Public Library inquired if the Works Progress Administration mural called “Indians Cede the Land” was insulting to Native Americans and questioned its display in the library. In addition, a neighboring community removed similar murals from school libraries in Oak Park, IL. Ultimately, library officials worked with the acting director of Newberry Library’s McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies to provide additional historical context and education about the portrait and the period it was created. The mural remains.


The Rumford (ME) Public Library’s banned books display included two LGBTQIA+ titles, Two Boys Kissing and My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness. Following protests, an interim town manager investigated how displays were chosen and wrote, “The current practice regarding ‘banned books’ seems tantamount to providing certain individual town employees with their own political platforms during work hours.” The board of trustees, which noted that it was they, not the town, that was charged with authority to manage the library, adopted a display policy, which gave final approval to the director. However, the director resigned a month later.


The University of Minnesota set up an exhibit called “The ABCs of It,” featuring the works of several children’s authors drawn from the children’s literature archive housed at the Elmer L. Andersen Library. Some children’s authors were concerned that the exhibit spotlighted classics without providing context that some titles were considered by some to be racist, such as The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss and Caddie Woodlawn by Carol Ryrie Brink. This led the university to expand the exhibit and offer an additional program about racism in children’s literature.


The Kearney (NE) Public Library put up a pride display. A patron proposed changing the library’s policy to prohibit such displays, or offer equal access to Biblical perspectives. The library board voted against the proposed policy alternatives.

Doane University (Crete, NE) library staff curated an exhibit of historical photographs and other memorabilia from student scrapbooks housed in university archives. A student complained about two photographs in a display called “Parties of the Past,” which showed students attending a 1926 Halloween party in blackface. Following the complaint, the director removed the photographs in an attempt to avoid “external censorship,” but the provost directed the removal of the entire exhibit. The director was placed on suspension, but later reinstated.


A local nonprofit that curated an art exhibit called “Love and Fear,” held at the Montclair (NJ) Public Library, removed a painting showing President Donald Trump wearing a hat with the words “Make America White Again.” The curators said they made the decision because some of the language in the painting violated a library policy about vulgar language. But the library no longer enforces the policy and was not consulted about the decision either to display or remove the piece. A week later, the painting was restored to the exhibit.


At the Oregon City (OR) Public Library, two people complained separately about the library’s Pride Month display set up in an area away from the children’s reading section. One parent complained that her children had seen the display and she was upset that it was not balanced by other views or values. Another parent said he would not return with his children while the display was in place. Staff listened to patron concerns; the displays were retained.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

The Lincoln City (OR) Driftwood Public Library Pride Month display was nearly cancelled because the city manager worried displays and programming could be seen as endorsing LGBTQ issues. The library director, its governing board, and the city manager created policies on displays and programming, and the library programs continued as planned.

Source: 2019 Annual Report, State Library of Oregon

As part of a City of Shoreline public art program titled “Pop-Up Pianos 2019,” a local artist salvaged a female mannequin to create a “sculpturally enhanced piano” displayed at the Shoreline branch of the King County (WA) Library System. The exhibit immediately garnered patron complaints that “the female mannequin’s nude torso was inappropriate for children.” When requested by the library to cover up the torso, the artist objected, but eventually put a tank top over the piece, saying that she would have liked to add a message on the shirt: “Censored by the Library.”


The president of Hollins University (Roanoke, VA) temporarily removed four editions of yearbooks from its digital archives that included images of former students in blackface and racially insensitive cartoon drawings. Some groups urged the university to restore access, including university librarians, a group working to address the legacies of slavery and racial inequality, the Office for Intellectual Freedom, and the Society of American Archivists. Hard copies of the yearbooks are available, and each edition will include a message that acknowledges the racist portrayals of African Americans.

Top 10 Challenged Books of 2019

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 377 challenges to library, school, and university materials and services in 2019. Overall, 566 books were targeted. Here are the “Top 10 Most Challenged Books in 2019,” along with the reasons cited for censoring the books:

#1 George
by Alex Gino
Challenged, banned, restricted, and hidden to avoid controversy; for LGBTQIA+ content and a transgender character; because schools and libraries should not “put books in a child's hand that require discussion”; for sexual references; and for conflicting with a religious viewpoint and “traditional family structure”

#2 Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out
by Susan Kuklin
Challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, for “its effect on any young people who would read it,” and for concerns that it was sexually explicit and biased

#3 A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo
by Jill Twiss, illustrated by EG Keller
Challenged and vandalized for LGBTQIA+ content and political viewpoints, for concerns that it is “designed to pollute the morals of its readers,” and for not including a content warning

#4 Sex is a Funny Word
by Cory Silverberg, illustrated by Fiona Smyth
Challenged, banned, and relocated for LGBTQIA+ content; for discussing gender identity and sex education; and for concerns that the title and illustrations were “inappropriate”

#5 Prince & Knight
by Daniel Haack, illustrated by Stevie Lewis
Challenged and restricted for featuring a gay marriage and LGBTQIA+ content; for being “a deliberate attempt to indoctrinate young children” with the potential to cause confusion, curiosity, and gender dysphoria; and for conflicting with a religious viewpoint

#6 I Am Jazz
by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, illustrated by Shelagh McNicholas
Challenged and relocated for LGBTQIA+ content, for a transgender character, and for confronting a topic that is “sensitive, controversial, and politically charged”

#7 The Handmaid’s Tale
by Margaret Atwood
Banned and challenged for profanity and for “vulgarity and sexual overtones”

#8 Drama
written and illustrated by Raina Telgemeier
Challenged for LGBTQIA+ content and for concerns that it goes against “family values/morals”

#9 Harry Potter (Series)
by J. K. Rowling
Banned and forbidden from discussion for referring to magic and witchcraft, for containing actual curses and spells, and for characters that use “nefarious means” to attain goals

#10 And Tango Makes Three
by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson, illustrated by Henry Cole
Challenged and relocated for LGBTQIA+ content