

Welcome to *Tuesday Topics*, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is sponsored by a member of OLA's [Intellectual Freedom Committee \(IFC\)](#). Questions can be directed to the author of the message or to the IFC chair (ifc.chair@olaweb.org).



Tuesday Topic: Banned Books Week 2017

Do you remember when librarians were the most visible symbol of free speech, not neo-Nazis with tiki torches? These times invite us to recommit ourselves to library values of creating a community where all are welcome and everyone has the freedom to read. What a wonderful time to celebrate Banned Books Week!

Next week (beginning September 24th) is the launch of Banned Books Week 2017, when libraries will join bookstores, schools and others across the United States in celebrating the freedom to read. In turbulent times, standing up for the free access to materials representing diverse voices and points of view is more important than ever.



Book challenges are rising nationally

According to the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), which tracks book challenges and removals nationally, 2016 saw an alarming 17% increase in book censorship complaints. Additionally, as reported on the [Banned Books Week website](#), half of the most frequently challenged books were actually banned in 2016, which is much higher than the usual rate of about 10% of titles being removed from the institution where they are challenged. In response, Banned Books Week Chair Charles Brownstein says, "Our free society depends on the right to access, evaluate, and voice a wide range of ideas. Book bans chill that right, and increase division in the communities where they occur. This Banned Books Week, we're asking people of all political persuasions to come together and celebrate Our Right to Read."

Most challenged books nationally

The OIF, which provides an annual list of the **Top Ten Challenged Books**, recorded 323 challenges in 2016. Sexuality was the most common concern, as is often the case, but this year LGBT and gender identity issues were especially prominent in the list:

1. ***This One Summer*** written by Mariko Tamaki and illustrated by Jillian Tamaki
2. This young adult graphic novel, winner of both a Printz and a Caldecott Honor Award, was restricted, relocated, and banned because it includes LGBT characters, drug use, and profanity, and it was considered sexually explicit with mature themes.
3. ***Drama*** written and illustrated by Raina Telgemeier
4. Parents, librarians, and administrators banned this Stonewall Honor Award-winning graphic novel for young adults because it includes LGBT characters, was deemed sexually explicit, and was considered to have an offensive political viewpoint.
5. ***George*** written by Alex Gino
6. Despite winning a Stonewall Award and a Lambda Literary Award, administrators removed this children's novel because it includes a transgender child, and the "sexuality was not appropriate at elementary levels."
7. ***I Am Jazz*** written by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, and illustrated by Shelagh McNicholas
8. This children's picture book memoir was challenged and removed because it portrays a transgender child and because of language, sex education, and offensive viewpoints.
9. ***Two Boys Kissing*** written by David Levithan
10. Included on the National Book Award longlist and designated a Stonewall Honor Book, this young adult novel was challenged because its cover has an image of two boys kissing, and it was considered to include sexually explicit LGBT content.
11. ***Looking for Alaska*** written by John Green
12. This 2006 Printz Award winner is a young adult novel that was challenged and restricted for a sexually explicit scene that may lead a student to "sexual experimentation."
13. ***Big Hard Sex Criminals*** written by Matt Fraction and illustrated by Chip Zdarsky
14. Considered to be sexually explicit by library staff and administrators, this compilation of adult comic books by two prolific award-winning artists was banned and challenged.
15. ***Make Something Up: Stories You Can't Unread*** written by Chuck Palahniuk
16. This collection of adult short stories, which received positive reviews from Newsweek and the New York Times, was challenged for profanity, sexual explicitness, and being "disgusting and all around offensive."
17. ***Little Bill*** (series) written by Bill Cosby and illustrated by Varnette P. Honeywood
18. This children's book series was challenged because of criminal sexual allegations against the author.
19. ***Eleanor & Park*** written by Rainbow Rowell
20. One of seven New York Times Notable Children's Books and a Printz Honor recipient, this young adult novel was challenged for offensive language.
21. (Source: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/NLW-Top10>)

LGBT issues have also been at the heart of a few recent high profile book challenge cases. A challenge last month by the Illinois Family Institute to the children's book "This Day in June" led to a heated board meeting at a Chicago library: [West Chicago Public Library denies request to remove gay pride book](#). Meanwhile in Sacramento, a school district had to hire a public relations firm to help with the fallout over the choice of readings for story time: ['A girl brain but a boy body.' Kindergarten parents outraged over transgender book read in class](#).

Most challenged materials in Oregon

LGBT issues also were the stated cause for many of the challenges reported in Oregon, according to the [2017 Annual Report On Challenges to Materials in Oregon Libraries July 1, 2016—June 30, 2017](#), as compiled by the Oregon State Library. This report documents 20 challenges to materials from six Oregon public libraries, including challenges to sound recordings, videos, and a magazine in addition to books. Included in these challenges were seven videos with LGBT+ characters featured in the cover art that a patron removed from a library's shelves and hid inside the library.

Fun with Banned Books

While standing up to censorship is serious work, Banned Books Week is also a time for creativity and fun! Check out these resources to liven up your displays and celebrate with the library community:

- Visit the [Celebrate the Freedom to Read in Oregon](#) Facebook page and share your library's events and photos.
- Portland residents – raise a glass for free speech at the [Uncensored Celebration](#), an art show benefiting the ACLU of Oregon that celebrates free expression and features posters designed by local artists. September 21 at Lagunitas Brewing Company.
- [Display ideas](#) for school, public, and academic libraries and bookstores (examples from Oregon libraries).
- [Activity ideas](#) for school, public, and academic libraries and bookstores. (examples from Oregon libraries)
- [More program and display ideas](#) (with lots of photos!) from ALA's Association for Library Service to Children
- [Promotional tools](#) with new graphics to include in displays

Responding to challenges

Patrons who raise concerns about materials in library collections are exercising their 1st Amendment right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. Here are some resources from the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse (OIFC) to help prepare for those situations:

- [Prepare](#) to deal with future challenges to materials at your library
- [Address](#) current challenges to materials at your library
- [Report](#) the intellectual freedom issues at your library to the OIFC

ALA provides a range of archived webinars to prepare for challenges:

- [Before the Mud Flies: Conversations for Banned Books Week](#)
- [Angry and Alarmed: Embracing the Concerned Parent](#)
- [Developing and Supporting your LGBTQ Collection](#)

Happy Banned Books Week!

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