



THE FIGHT AGAINST BOOK BANS

**An Analysis of Issues and Solutions Surrounding Readership,
Authorship, and the Publishing Business**

Ashley Elizalde, George Washington University Alumna





QUOTE

“There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.” –Ray Bradbury

KEY DEFINITIONS

❖ Literature

writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest (“Literature” def. 1 a (1))

❖ Censor

to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable (“Censor” def. 4 a)

OR

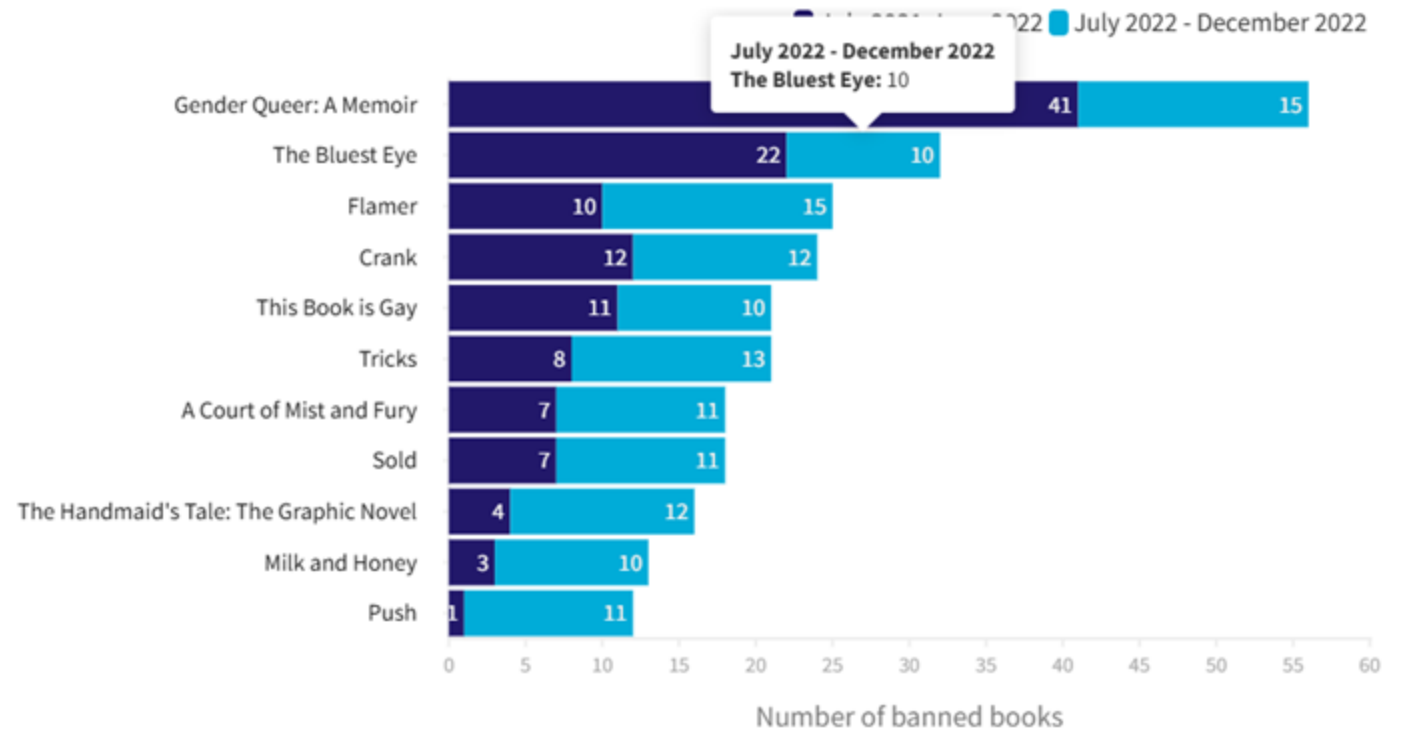
to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable (“Censor” def. 4 b)

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THESE?

Source: PEN America

Most Banned Titles

The 11 most banned titles of the year were each banned at least 10 times



2024 Book Ban Data

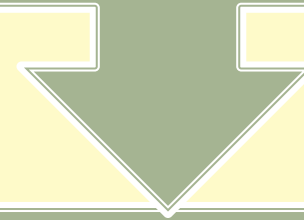
Most book challenges and calls for censorship are initiated by groups. These groups often include concerned citizens, elected officials, boards and leadership entities, and administrators (American Library Association).

These groups of censors comprised **72%** of the total books bans in 2024 in both school and public libraries (American Library Association).

2024 Book Ban Data Cont.



The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom reported 821 cases against library books and resources in 2024.



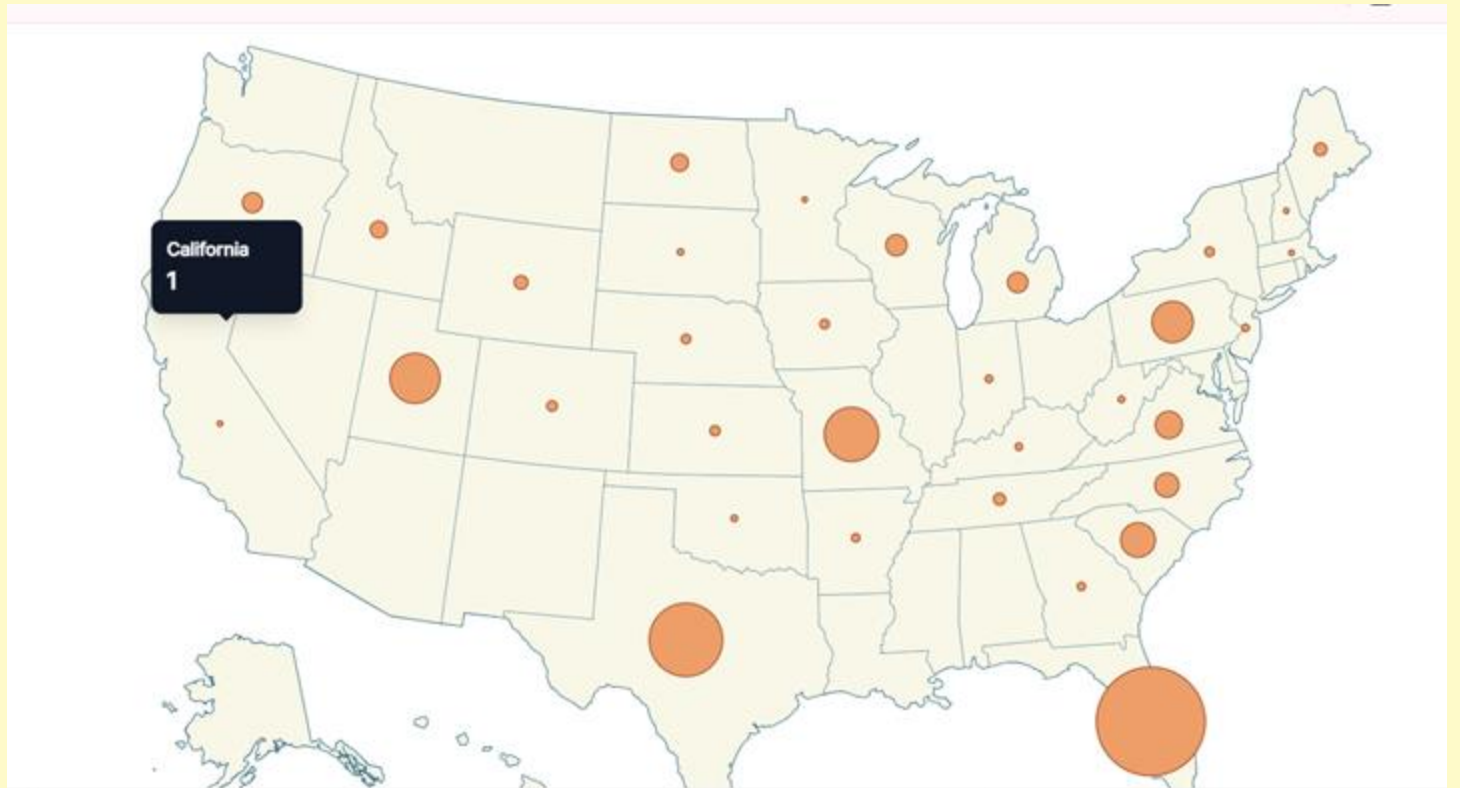
Since the pandemic, numbers have fluctuated but have remained higher (American Library Association).

Book Banning in the US

States with highest number of banned books:

1. Texas
2. Florida
3. Missouri
4. Utah
5. Pennsylvania
6. South Carolina

Source: World Population Review

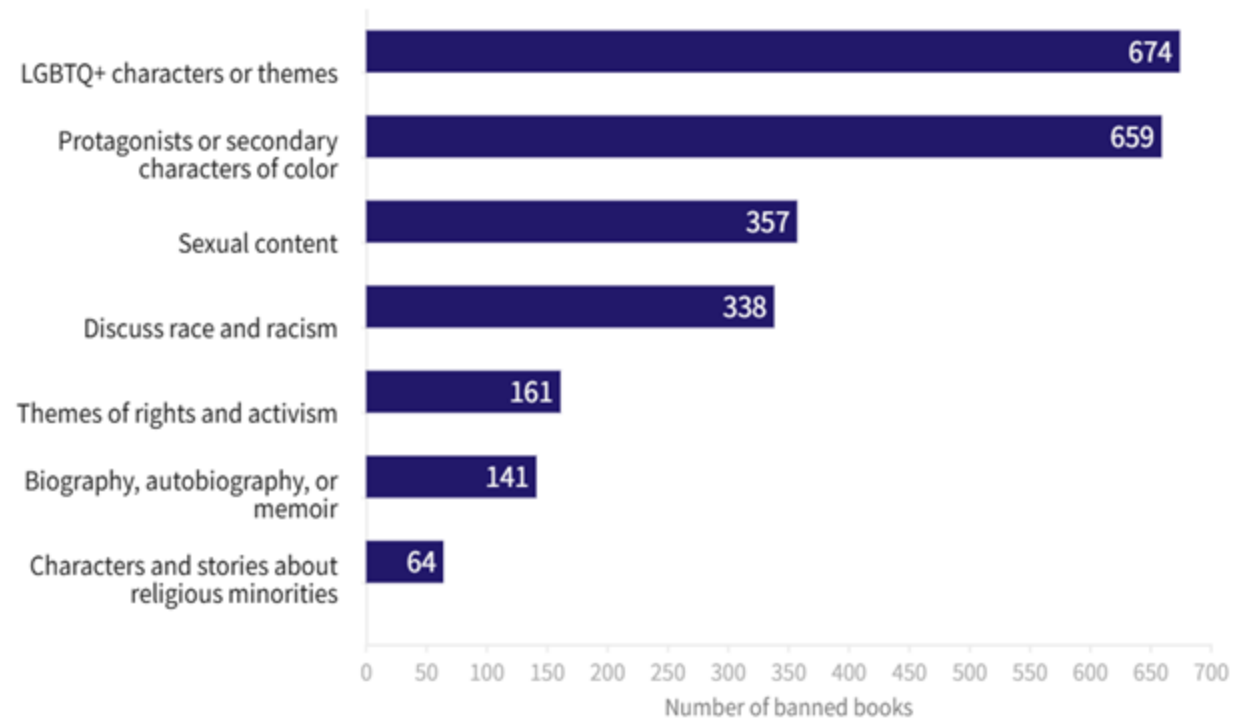


BOOK BANNING IN THE US

Source: PEN America

What topics are banned books about?

Books banned from July 2021 to June 2022 were about the following topics:





NOTABLE CASES

Florida



In the 2023-2024 school year, Florida had around 4,500 book removal incidents (Soule).



In the 2024-2025 school year alone, Florida removed or placed restrictions on over 2,300 books (Soule).



According to PEN America, the state remains Number 1 in the US in book removals across school libraries (Soule).

Outcomes

"Anybody who's been paying attention to this knows that a lot of the book-banning tactics are starting in Florida and then are actually influencing how books are banned across the country."

Sabrina Baêta, PEN America



- Continual increase in number of books
- Setting trends for other states to follow
- Could it lead to more?

Little v. Llano County

- 17 books were removed from county libraries by the government of Llano County
- 2023- A group of residents sued the library system to get the books returned to the libraries.
- The district court agreed with the plaintiffs at first and ordered the county to return the books to the library shelves.
- 2025-The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the district court's ruling.
- **Ruling: Not a violation of the First Amendment because the county has the right to make those decisions for its residents (*“Appeals Court Reverses Ruling in Texas Book Ban Case”*).**

Little v. Llano County Outcomes

1. Could set a precedent for other counties and states to follow.

2. Raises an argument over community values vs. free speech.

3. Libraries can make their own decisions about what to include on their shelves.

- "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison
- "The Hate U Give" by Angie Thomas
- "Gender Queer: A Memoir" by Maia Kobabe
- "Lawn Boy" by Jonathan Evison
- "Looking for Alaska" by John Green
- "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" by Sherman Alexie
- "This Book is Gay" by Juno Dawson
- "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky

- "Fun Home" by Alison Bechdel
- "The Kite Runner" by Khaled Hosseini
- "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood

▪ "The Glass Castle" by Jeannette Walls

▪ "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker

Arkansas Bill-Act 372

- “Harmful to minors”: Criminal penalties of up to a year in jail for librarians
 - Designated “adult” section of libraries to house books “inappropriate” books (“Libraries, Bookstores, and Readers Unite to Fight Arkansas’ Restrictive Censorship Laws”).
- Outcomes**
- Sections 1 and 5 were determined to be unconstitutional in September 2024 (Peet).
 - Defending readers’ right to choose and librarians’ discretion to curate
 - Brings attention to issue of “content segregation” in libraries
- “We’ve taken it as our mission right now to ensure that in every case, amicus briefs are filed that emphasize the importance of libraries as resources of information for every community, the application of the First Amendment, the right to read, and upholding the professionalism of librarians.”**
- **-Deborah Caldwell-Stone, *Director of ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom***



PROBLEMS WITH CENSORSHIP

Effects on Authorship

Reduced Income

1. Decrease in sales
2. Loss of royalties

Reputation

1. Fear of not receiving book contracts
2. Concern about losing audience members



“It’s more than hurtful. It makes me angry. It’s been hard to be accused of grooming children and being a pedophile when I’m nothing like that and she’s convincing people that I am. I’ve taken a lot of ugly social media stuff; I’ve learned the block button is my friend” (Hopkins).

ELLEN HOPKINS

Effects on Authorship Cont.

“Self-Censoring”

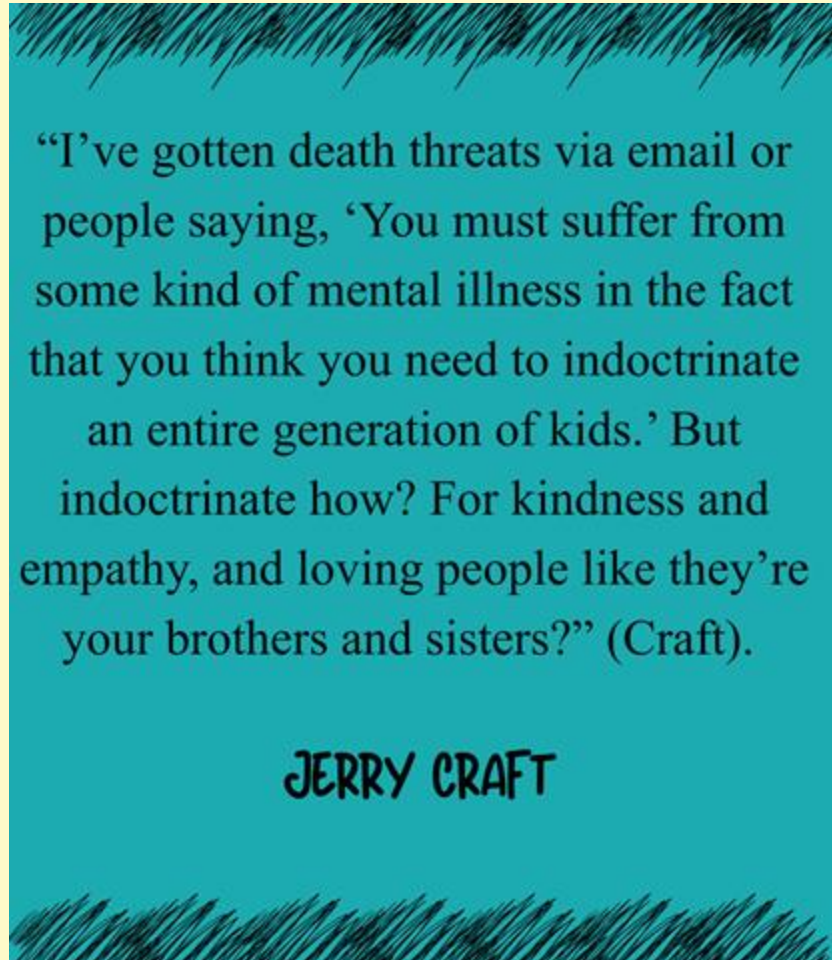
1. Fear of writing new books on certain topics because of banning

Demoralization

1. Loss of self-esteem and feel that their work is not valued
2. Emotional pain and mental health damage

Safety

1. Attacks in public places and on social media (Maughan).



“I’ve gotten death threats via email or people saying, ‘You must suffer from some kind of mental illness in the fact that you think you need to indoctrinate an entire generation of kids.’ But indoctrinate how? For kindness and empathy, and loving people like they’re your brothers and sisters?” (Craft).

JERRY CRAFT

Effects on the Publishing Industry

Financial

1. Challenged livelihood and increased risks for librarians
2. Temporary increase in sales before drop
3. Decrease in revenue due to lost sales
4. Loss of author relationships



Resource overuse

1. Additional time and money spent on legal counsel to protect the company and authors
2. Filing lawsuits to advocate for books

Effects on the Publishing Industry Cont.

“What diversity advocates are working for is an industry that honestly, accurately and equitably represents the world we live in”
(Jung).

—Mike Jung, author of
Unidentified Suburban Object



- **Hesitancy to publish books on certain content**

Reluctance to publish books containing controversial content:

1. Fear lack of sales and monetary loss
2. Fear damage to reputation

- **Decreasing progress**

Stifling and canceling diverse voices the industry has been working to increase and protect

Effects on Readers

“When kids grow up not seeing themselves in books they grow up feeling like they don't matter” (Smith).

—Eric Smith, author and associate literary agent at PS Literary

- **Demoralization**

Feel their own life experiences are not valid

Struggle to feel relevant in a society that does not depict who they are or their beliefs

- **Decreasing access to literacy**

Decreasing access to literature that sparks interest in reading

Loss of interest=loss of reading

Greatest Overall Effect on Readers and Authors

Attacking personal freedom!

Authors' voices are being shut out of society.

Violation: Freedom of Speech

Readers everywhere lose the right to choose what they want to read.

Violation: Individuality and Freedom to Choose/Consent



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

How Can We Help?

Advocacy

- ✓ Continue with advocacy groups such as the American Library Association and PEN America.
- ✓ Publishers keep fighting against book bans and legislature that permits such practices.
i.e Penguin Random House and the Authors' Guild
- ✓ Citizens and lawmakers make more informed decisions and attempt to remove bias from choices.

Support

- ✓ Support local libraries and check out books.
- ✓ Follow book ban challenges and legal proceedings and question and speak out.
- ✓ Support authors whom you like to read and even those you don't know about. (check out books, donate to causes, post on social media, etc.)

Where Are We Headed?

Step 1

A group or entity wants something removed for their benefit.

They call for books to be removed and claim societal justice or victory.

Step 2

If no solution is reached, the pull for censorship grows.

Authors and publishers feel unsupported and threatened and start to submit,

Literary merit is destroyed because books lose content that makes readers think, question, or deem it relevant or interesting.

Step 3

The reputation of publishing and literature crumble.

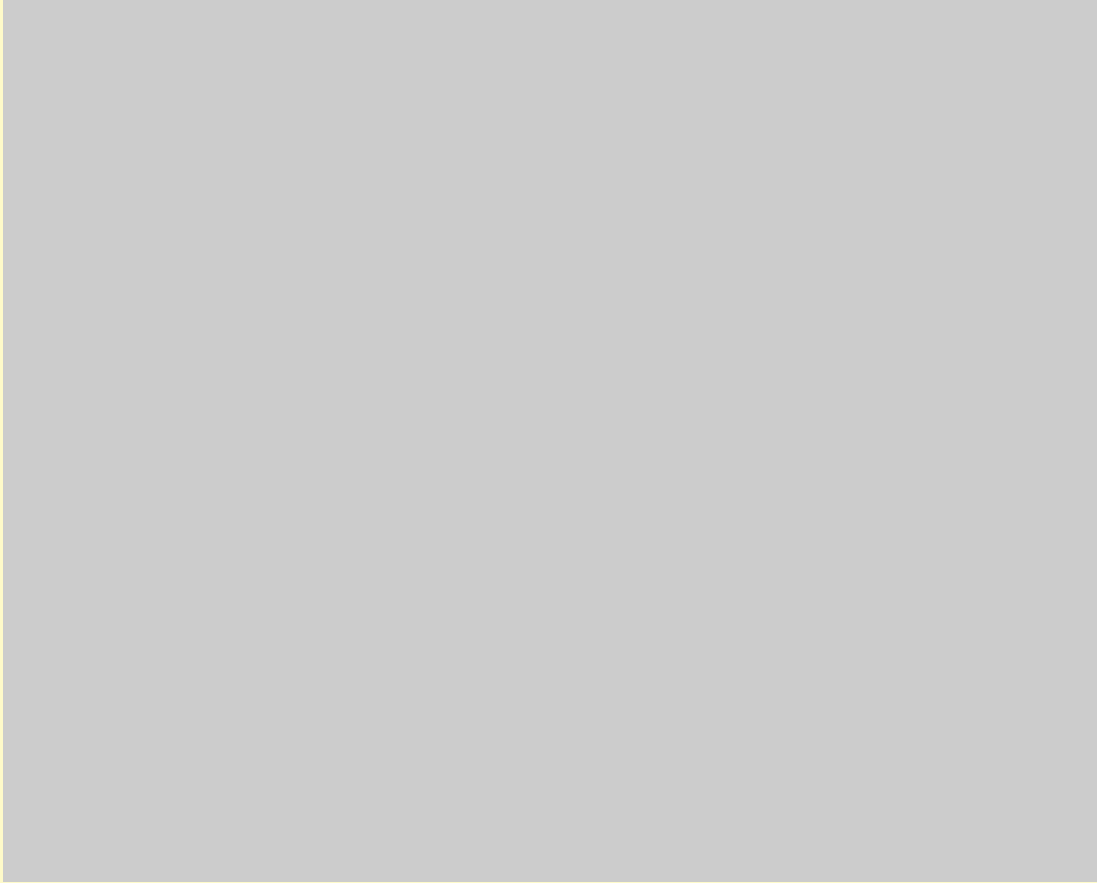
Society allows the effects to trickle to other areas.



QUOTE

Russian poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky once said,

**“There are worse crimes than burning books. One of them is not reading them”
(Brodsky, qtd. in Goodreads).**



Works Cited

“Appeals Court Reverses Ruling in Texas Book Ban Case.” *Juris Review*, 29 May 2025, <https://jurisreview.com/appeals-court-reverses-ruling-in-texas-book-ban-case/>. 3 Oct 2025.

“Book Ban Data.” *Banned and Challenged Books*, American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>. 26 Sept. 2025.

“Books Banned by State 2025.” *World Population Review*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/banned-books-by-state>. 26 Sept. 2025.

Canva. Graphics. 4 Oct 2025.

“Censor. *N.* (4).” *Merriam-Webster*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/censor. 3 Oct. 2025.

Works Cited

“Libraries, Bookstores and Readers Unite to Fight Arkansas’ Restrictive Censorship Laws.” *ACLU of Arkansas*, 2 June 2023, <https://www.acluarkansas.org/press-releases/libraries-bookstores-and-readers-unite-fight-arkansas-restrictive-censorship-laws/>. 3 Oct 2025.

“Literature. *N.* (1).” *Merriam-Webster*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literature. 3 Oct. 2025.

Maughan, Shannon. “Children’s Authors on the Real-World Cost of Book Banning.” *Publisher’s Weekly*, 16 Sept. 2024, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/95934-children-s-authors-on-the-real-world-cost-of-book-banning.html>, 27 Sept. 2025.

Works Cited

Paquette, Ammi-Joan. "9 Quotes on Diverse Books & Representation in Writing." *Writer's Digest*, Active Interest Media, 2 Feb. 2018, <https://www.writersdigest.com/publishing-insights/quotes-on-diverse-books-representation-writing>. 27 Sept. 2025.

Peet, Lisa. "Arkansas Act 372 Declared Unconstitutional in District Court." *Library Journal*, MSI, 10 Jan. 2025, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/arkansas-act-372-declared-unconstitutional-in-district-court>. 4 Oct. 2025.

Pendharkar, Easha. "Book Bans Over the Years, in Charts." *Education Week*, 26 Apr. 2023, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/book-bans-over-the-years-in-charts/2023/04>. 26 Sept. 2025.

Works Cited

Soule, Douglas. “Report: Florida is No. 1 in School Book Removals and Restrictions for Third Year in a Row.” WUSF, npr, 1 Oct. 2025, <https://www.wusf.org/politics-issues/2025-10-01/pen-america-florida-no-1-book-bans-third-year-in-row>. 4 Oct. 2025.