

# BOOKS ARE FOR EVERYONE!



## The State of School Book Bans in the USA

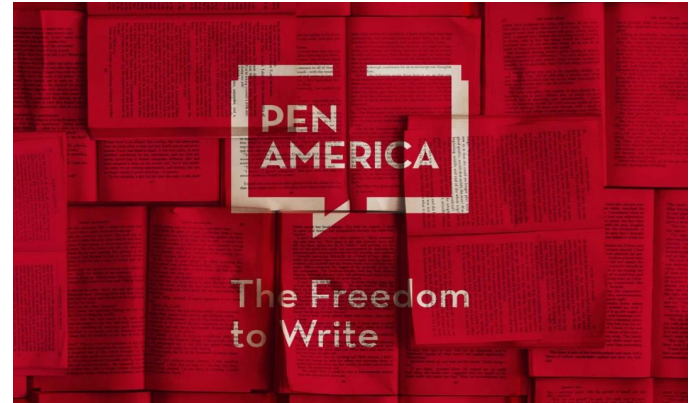
# About PEN America



**PEN America stands at the intersection of literature and human rights to protect free expression in the United States and worldwide.**

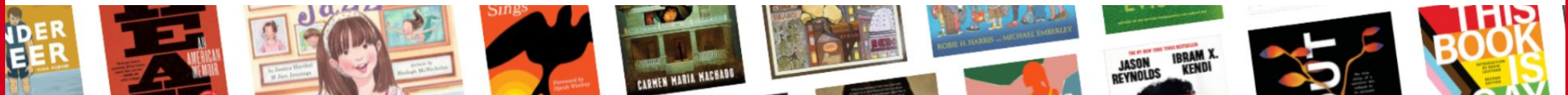
We champion the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world. Our mission is to unite writers and their allies to celebrate creative expression and defend the liberties that make it possible.

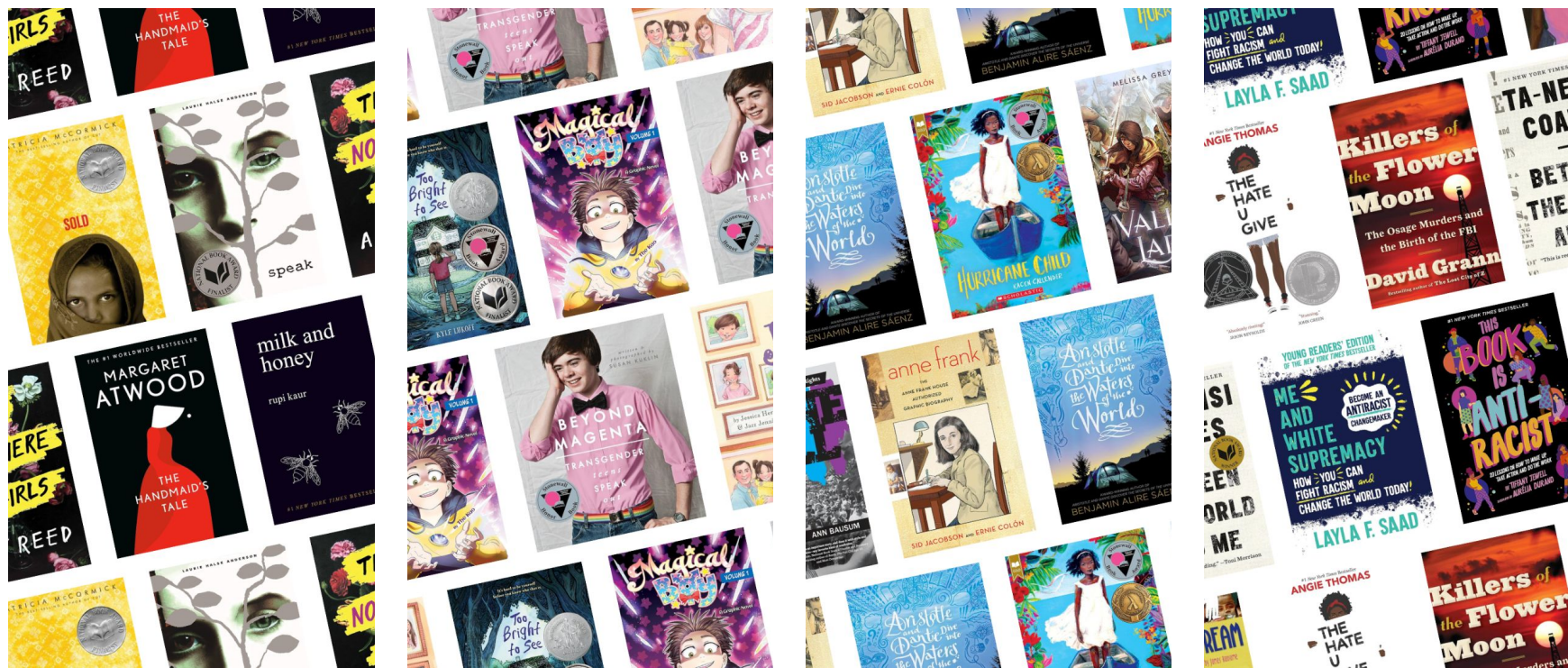
**PEN is a nonpartisan nonprofit, we do not take positions on political candidates or elections.**



## What does PEN's Freedom to Read Program do?

- **Track every instance of public school book bans** we can identify in the US and publish reports twice a year.
- **Support grassroots advocates across** the country and collaborate with state and national advocacy orgs.
- Develop public communications strategies to **raise awareness** of our focus issues.
- **Advocate campaigns on specific cases**, such as letters to school districts or legislators over concerning policies.





# What are school book bans?



The Freedom  
to Write

# What is a School Book Ban?

- PEN America's Index of School Book Bans lists instances where students' access to books in school libraries and classrooms in the United States is **restricted or diminished** based on the **content of the materials** for either **limited or indefinite** periods of time.
- PEN America also tracks the banning of **unique titles**. If the same book is banned in 10 school districts, that would count as 10 bans, but one unique title.
- **The banning of a single book title can mean anywhere from one to hundreds of copies are pulled** from libraries or classrooms in a school district, and often, the same title is banned in libraries, classrooms, or both in a single district.
- While we only track public school book bans, in the US, **book bans also occur in public libraries and in prisons and jails.**

## **Additional forms of educational censorship include:**

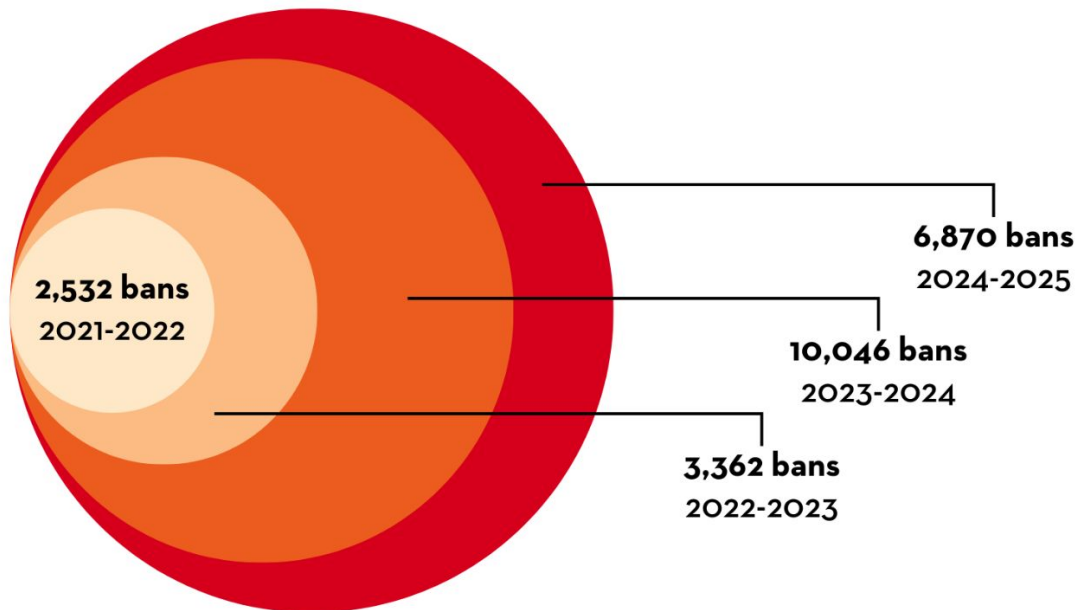
- Cancelled author visits and library events due to parental complaints or security concerns.
- Library display censorship.
- Hesitancy or censorship of library collection purchases.
- Removal/closure of entire classroom or library collections.
- Canceled book fairs.
- Book bans that happen in silence.

INSTANCES OF BOOKS BANNED  
IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2021-2025



# The circle of censorship keeps expanding

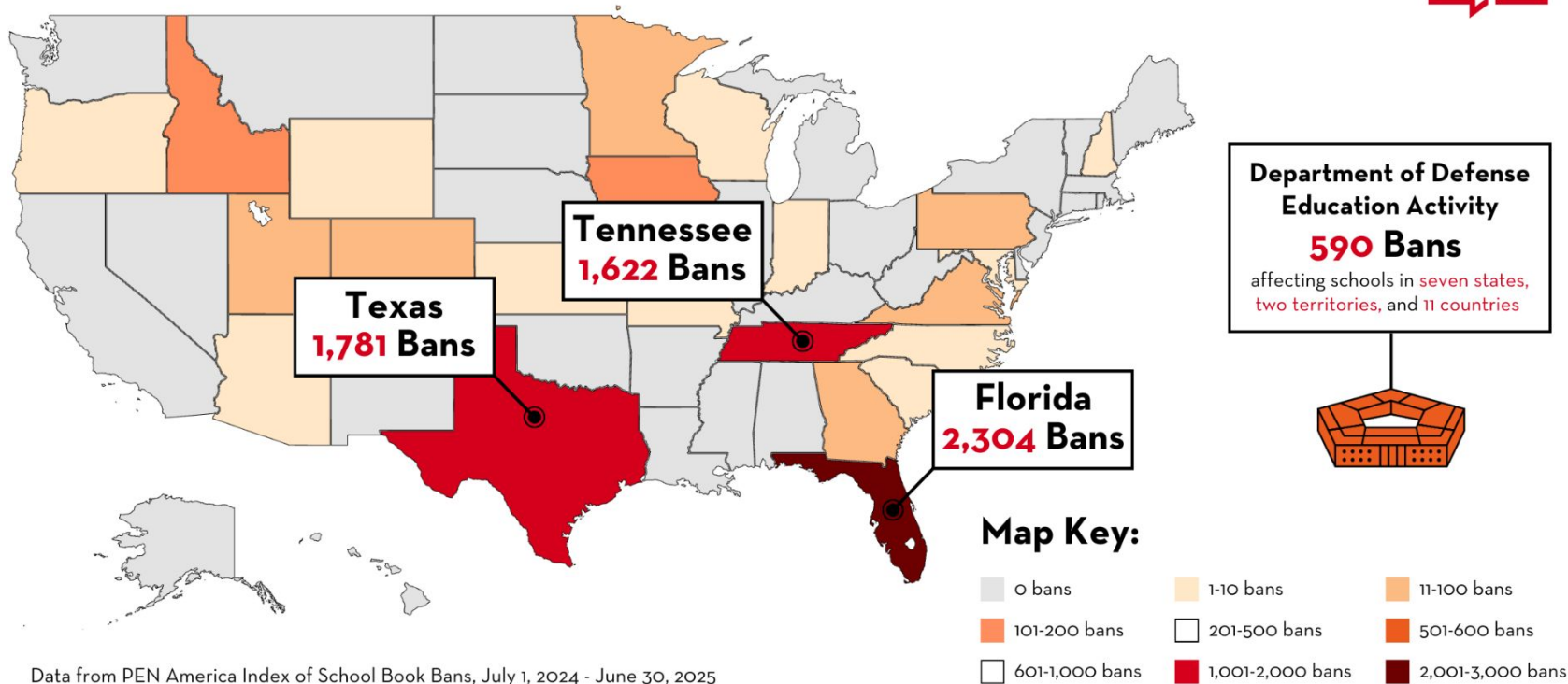
Instances of book bans by school year, 2021-2025



Data from PEN America Index of School Book Bans, July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2025



# 2024-2025 Instances of School Book Bans by State





## The Local Level

- Local or traveling **members of book banning groups** challenge books, sometimes hundreds at a time. **These groups offer trainings and resources on how to challenge books** for removal.
- Majorities on school boards that support book bans & pass policies/ decisions that led to book bans

### One Parent Got 444 Books Removed from a Wisconsin School District

Kelly Jensen | Dec 14, 2023

### Far-Right Candidates Are Trying To Take Over Public Schools Across The Country

Consequential school board races in North Carolina, Maryland and other states could change the education system as we know it.

By Nathalie Baptiste

Oct 16, 2024, 02:49 PM EDT

### Manatee School District told teachers to cover classroom books, despite saying it didn't



**Steven Walker**

Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Published 12:29 p.m. ET Jan. 26, 2023



## The State Level

- **Legislation that makes it easier to ban books** has passed at alarming rates in recent years.
- **Pressure campaigns** from elected and appointed politicians and officials that intimidate administrators, educators, and librarians.

### Laws on book challenges, 'indoctrination' create culture of fear in Arkansas school libraries

Some school librarians have become “very strict about how books are chosen,” trying to preemptively avoid accusations or legal trouble, one librarian said

BY: **TESS VRBIN** - JANUARY 1, 2024 8:00 AM

### Wilson Co. Schools removes 425 book titles to comply with Tennessee law on sex, violence



**Andy Humbles**

Nashville Tennessean

Oct. 24, 2024 | Updated Oct. 27, 2024, 2:45 p.m. CT

## Spotlight: Statewide Ban Legislation

- **Three states so far have enacted legislation or state regulations allowing for books to be banned across their state, including Utah, South Carolina, and Tennessee.**
- Even before some of these laws went into effect, the **intimidation** of enforcement led some **schools to begin pulling books preemptively.**
- Overall, the **language of book banning bills are frequently vague and/or confusing.** Adherence will be **expensive and time-consuming** for schools.

## The Federal Level

- **Executive Orders**
- The Department of Education's **Office of Civil Rights under the new administration declared book bans a “hoax”** and eliminated a position meant to address them.
- Around **590 titles were banned in Department of Defense K-12 schools** for violating content restrictions imposed by new Executive Orders.
- The SCOTUS ruling in ***Mahmoud v. Taylor***, mandating “opt outs” for children whose parents object to LGBTQ+-relevant picture books, **forecasts heightened censorship of LGBTQ+ content across school districts nationwide.**

## Impact on Schools

- EveryLibrary estimates that **HB900 in Texas will cost over \$3.6 million dollars** to implement, and **Florida will have to spend \$5.8 million dollars *annually* to ban books under HB 1069.**
- In states with book banning legislation or laws censoring classrooms, polling shows:
  - **60% of Idaho librarians have said they are considering leaving library work due to legislative action focused on libraries** (ILA)
  - **65% of educators said that the banning of books is having a negative impact on their ability to teach** (FirstBook)
  - **72% of educators indicated that restricting access to certain books decreases students' engagement in reading** (Firstbook)



# Most banned books of the 2024-2025 school year, by district

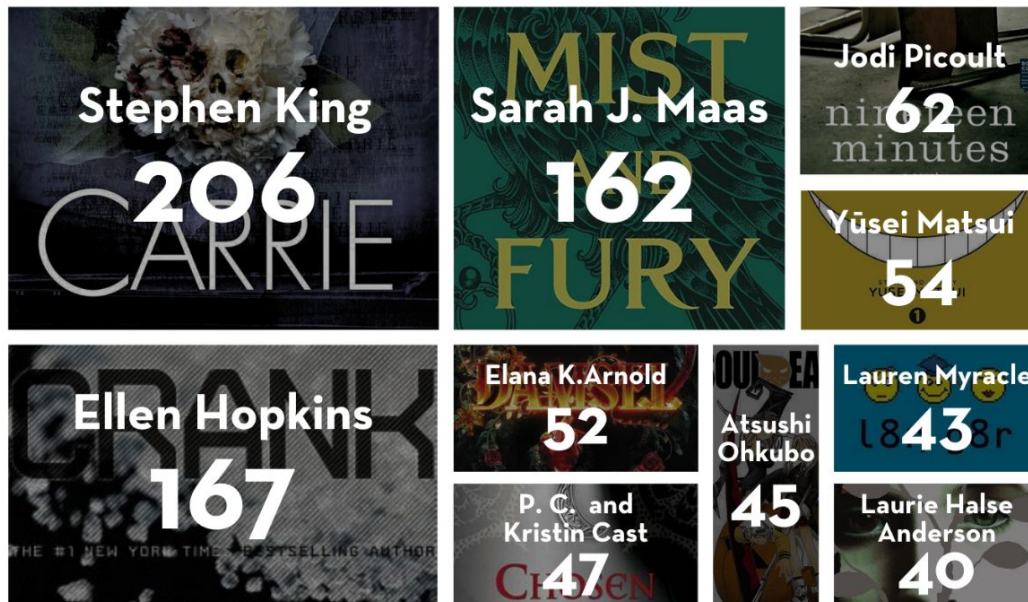


Data from PEN America Index of School Book Bans, July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025



Bestselling author **Stephen King** was the most banned author during the 2024-2025 school year: Of King's work, **87** unique titles were banned, totaling **206** instances.

#### Total Instances of Book Bans



\*Images are representative of the authors' banned books

Data from PEN America Index of School Book Bans, July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

# The Stories Behind the Bans: Topics



- Attacking **LGBTQ+ topics**, and in particular, **trans identities**:
  - Weaponizing obscenity law and labeling gay and trans representation as “obscene” or “overly sexual”
- Focus on themes of **race and racism** and books with **people and characters of color** by:
  - Advancing rhetoric disparaging “critical race theory”, “woke ideology,” and efforts to ensure library collections are diverse and inclusive



## The Stories Behind the Bans: Topics



- Disproportionately targeting books by women and nonbinary authors,
  - Particularly when dealing with **stories that depict sexual assault**;
  - And books discussing **healthy relationships, consent, or bodily autonomy**.





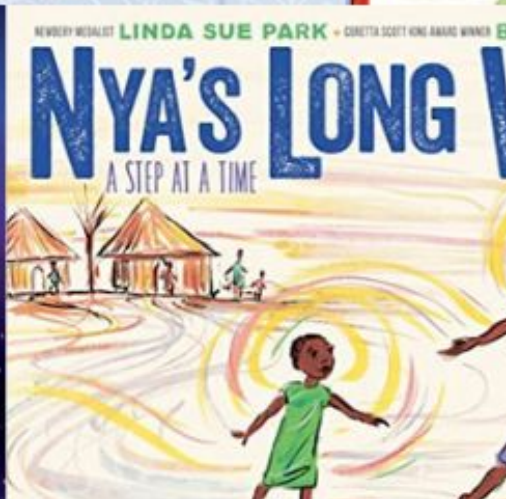
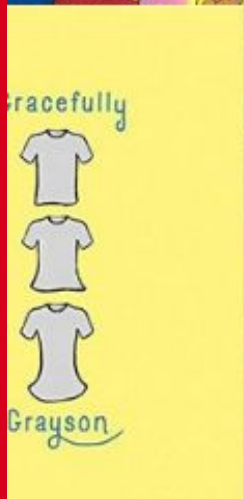
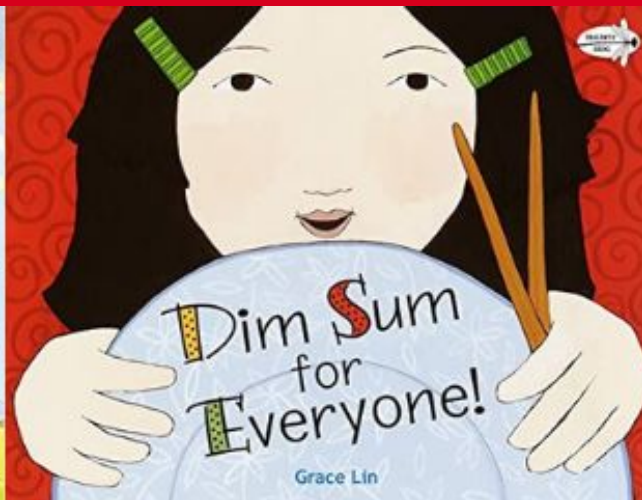
# The Growing Resistance

- **Students** are at the forefront of the movement.
- **Parents and community members** are organizing together.
- **Authors** are speaking out.
- **Legislators** and **lawyers** are doing policy and legal work to defend the freedom to read.



# What can you do to protect the freedom to read?

- **Support your local library and public school!**
- **Support student organizations** fighting book bans. In NY, there are Students Protecting Education & Brooklyn Public Library's Intellectual Freedom programs.
- If you hear about book bans in a school, see if you can **speak at a school board meeting**. You can speak up as a concerned citizen supporting young people's access to literature.
- Pay attention to **calls-to-action from organizations that defend the freedom to read**.
- Find tips about how to speak out, send a letter to local and state lawmakers, and report a book ban at [pen.org/action](https://www.pewresearch.org/action).



**Thank you!**