

# Should books be banned?

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In this century as it is known, the ideals of freedoms and inalienable rights have become so interwoven within American society, that Americans view them as a necessity in which to live. Even the children, or minors as they are legally referred to as, have their own rights and grow up living privileged lives with their rights, for the most part, not being abused. Most of the time, their parents, or legal guardians, generally decide whether they want the child to experience things whether it is within school, or in the direct outside world. However, the school districts of the United States of America, feel that it is their obligation to dictate whether students have to ability to read certain material while within their educational environment.

Their solution to further “ helping” the students- banned books. By expelling certain books from educational environments, school districts take away the right of choice from both minors and their guardians alike, takes the challenges and learning experiences away from books containing arguable passages and results in the many challenges that come to surface in light of this debatable topic. Parents and guardians are able to determine whether a student receives medicine by a nurse, whether they are allowed to go on a field trip, what they watch, what they learn, etc. Students are able to choose what they desire to wear, even if the shirt displays controversial material, as long as it doesn’t disrupt the learning of other students. If they are able to do that, then why aren’t they able to read classic and enjoyable books such as *The Great Gatsby* by F.

Scott Fitzgerald, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee? According to the First Amendment of the United States of America, American citizens possess the right to freedom

of speech by being able to express their opinions through words, articles of clothing, forms of writing, etc. And as a result of the 1969 *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* court case, the Supreme Court ruled that students do not shed their constitutional rights the moment they cross the threshold of their school. Though their rights are limited, one of the fundamental rights that minors are entitled to, within school boundaries, is the distribution of literature.

According to [www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org), "...the U. S. Supreme Court has found that the First Amendment protects the right to receive information and ideas." In addition to this, the website also stated "

.. the court's ruling does not apply to the issue of whether certain books can be used in the curriculum." Though it is understandable that a certain book may not be taught within a classroom due to the instructor's opinion on the lasting educational impact the book will leave on the student, that does not mean that the students should be banned from bringing in and reading those books during class free time. Why, in fact, are books, such as *How to Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, banned from schools? Some administrators would be willing to say that each of those books contains offensive material and can lead the destabilization of a student's education.

According to *Searching for Offense* by Alexandra Petri, in the city of Chicago, the book *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman, was under consideration of being expelled from public schools, as a result of a parent's comment, stating that

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the book contained “ R-rated material,” when the book itself, had been “ taught in schools for years” and discusses the themes “ of social responsibility.” Wouldn’t any parent, and teacher alike, want to encourage and impress this lesson upon their children? I both read and analyzed the books *How to Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, and found no racist or rude texts within either book. Though some vulgar language was briefly mentioned in some scenes, it also has to be considered the year and time era it was published. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston was published in 1937 and *How to Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee was published in 1960. During both times, the language that was depicted within both novels was of the norm and during both time eras, great racism was present between African Americans and “ white people.” In all honesty however, both novels demonstrated life for every type of person within those years and taught to me the effects of racism and other important themes.

These books portray real life experiences to students and influences them how to act in real-world situations and are not in any way disruptive to the development of the student, in contradiction with the opinion of many school administrators. The banning of books is a complex process that in reality does not need to be made. It arises complications that could be easily avoided. According to *Searching for Offense* by Alexandra Petri, the process of banning books is so complex, and yet so simultaneously simple, that teachers and administrators search throughout the book, searching for one offensive word, or one contradicting paragraph. According to the article, “... specifically, a paragraph or two on page 86.

Specifically. (You can tell how objectionable the book is because the offense can be cited to the paragraph.)” Furthermore, the announcement that certain books are banned from school property arouses rebellious behavior amongst the students. For they could easily, once school has ended, go to their local book store or library, obtain the book, and read the material that was thought of originally as so objectionable and worth censorship. The enforcement of these bans is unnecessary, when the implementation instigates insubordinate conduct amongst the student population as well as stressful and complicated challenges that can be easily eluded. According to “ Schools Once Again Face Censorship vs.

Book Lists” by Natalie DiBlasio, banning books runs deeper than originally thought. According to the article, “ Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, says he believes that the challenges are increasingly influenced by politics and the economy.” The article also states, “ Districts are dependent on budgets, and politically motivated school boards try to determine what we read, what we think and what we teach.” He says.” While it may be that most of the books banned by American school districts cannot be afforded by the school board, it still does not give administrators the right to ban children from reading those books while on the school’s premises. Why go to the extent of banning certain books from school libraries, when the librarians can simply reply that the school does not personally own that book, or it is not in stock? Furthermore, couldn’t the student go to the public library or the local bookstore after school, obtain the book, and bring it to school? Wouldn’t their purchases and rents alleviate the stress placed upon the district to acquire these books for students? When a

book contains too much mature content for the age group educated within a specific school, the banning of books within the school library is acceptable.

However, when books are banned from being seen on campus, and are discouraged by the school board, it is a waste of time for both the students who are listening and the teachers who are informing. The banning of books conjures redundant challenges and “drama” within the school and the school board environment, prevents students from gathering crucial lessons from books that contain improper yet accurate content, and removes the First Amendment right of freedom of speech as well as the right of choice from the minor as well as the parent/guardian alike. Though it is the job for the school and the district alike to protect and educate their students to their fullest capacities and encourage them to strive to their fullest capabilities, it is against everything they so-called “stand for”, when they abuse the power given to them.