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BANNED BOOKS MYTHS



THE KIDS' RIGHT TO READ PROJECT

"Books aren't banned in this country anymore!"

People ask for books to be removed from libraries and classrooms all the time, and local officials often give in because they want to avoid controversy, or because they personally don't like or "approve of" the book.

We should all be able to decide for ourselves what to read, not have our choices limited by what someone else thinks. If someone doesn't want to read a book, they don't have to, but they shouldn't be able to keep someone else from reading it.



Don't be alarmed: thoughts and feelings are common side-effects of reading.

"If my community bans a book, it only impacts my district or school; it doesn't effect anybody else."

Censorship is about more than a single book. It is about the intellectual, cultural and political life of the community and the people in it.

Each time a book is removed, it reinforces the idea that books and ideas are off-limits if someone doesn't like them. It contributes to a culture where it's better to hide from controversial or difficult topics, than to acknowledge or discuss them.

Restricting or banning a book hurts kids and education, because teachers and librarians may decide not to teach or buy another similar book, even if they feel it would be educational or enjoyable.

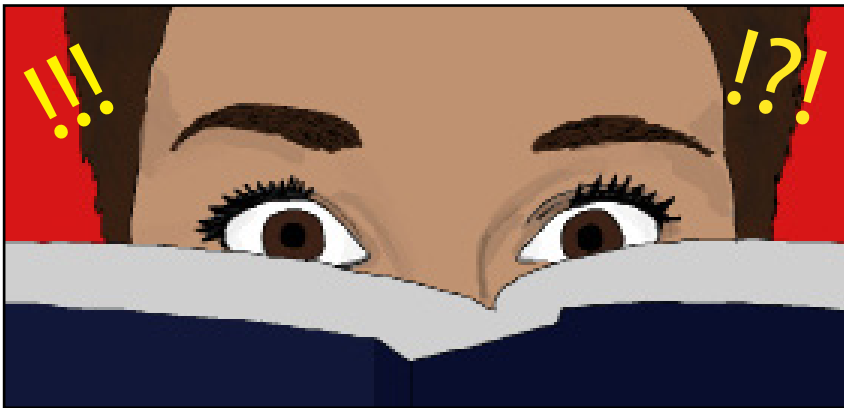
Schools, libraries and museums must rely on the professional judgment of individuals with training and expertise, not on the squeaky wheel, or majority opinion.

The Kids' Right to Read Project was founded by the **National Coalition Against Censorship** and the **American Booksellers for Free Expression**. It is also supported by the **Association of American Publishers** and the **Comic Book Legal Defense Fund**.

"Monkey see, monkey do! If kids read about it, they'll think it's acceptable behavior in real life."

Kids are often much smarter and savvier than adults give them credit for. Just because they know about something or read about it, doesn't mean they will run out and do it. Kids intuitively understand that novels, like life, are not always what they first may seem. Sometimes the bad guys aren't really bad, and sometimes the good guys aren't really good.

We may wish that good would always triumph, love win out, virtue be rewarded. But life doesn't always work out so neatly. Books help young people understand and appreciate difficult life lessons – before they have to confront them.



"They're just kids, they don't have rights."

Even minors have rights under US law, including First Amendment rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes a fundamental right to education, which is essential to human dignity and to citizen participation in society.

Giving young people an education that prepares them for the challenging world beyond school serves everyone's interests.

Soon they will be old enough to vote, get jobs, join the military, and start families. Kids need to explore and try to understand the world before they experience it firsthand. Reading widely is the safest way for them to do it.

"If you can buy a book, it isn't really censored."

A book doesn't have to be censored everywhere, to be censored somewhere. It's censorship whenever anyone in the government – including public schools and libraries – restricts access to a book because they dislike it or disagree with what it says.

It's also no answer to say "just buy it." Maybe you don't have the money, or can't get to a store that sells the book, or can't buy it online because you don't have a credit card. Not everyone can afford to buy every book they may want to read. That's what libraries are for.

But even if you could afford to buy the book, government officials still aren't supposed to tell us what books are "good" or "good for you."

"As a parent, I have the final say about what my kid reads."

Parents who object to a book are often able to obtain an alternative. Most school districts are willing to accommodate parental concerns in a way that doesn't affect students who parents do not share those concerns.

It's not easy to be a parent. It's impossible to anticipate or control what children hear about from their friends, much less what they see on television and online. Books can help -- especially books that raise difficult issues. Talking about a book offers opportunities to learn about what kids think and what worries them.