

THINKING OF THE CHILDREN: BOOK BANS, CENSORSHIP AND LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Book of Abstracts
11-13 February, 2026
University of Münster



DAY 1: WEDNESDAY 11TH FEBRUARY

Panel 1: European Perspectives I

No Book Bans in Western Europe? Book Censorship and Child Protection in France and Germany

Inga Orlowski and Jo Platteau

Media in Western Europe regularly reports on book bans in the US and on attacks that freedom of expression faces in eastern European states, like Hungary or Poland. However, countries such as Germany or France are not exempt from attacks on public libraries, sales restrictions for books considered too sensitive, or heated debates about books that are used in educational settings. In our contribution, we examine the legal framework between freedom of expression and child protection in both France and Germany as well as in European law. Which legal restrictions apply to children's books and the sales of books to minors? How are they enforced? Have authors, publishers, booksellers or librarians challenged the decisions of political and legal authorities or administrations in charge of child protection? Or, on the contrary, have groups or organizations tried to obtain book bans in court? Which kinds of books do these actions concern? After an overview of the legislative framework surrounding children's book publishing and circulation in both countries and on the European level, we will examine how these frameworks have been mobilized in concrete cases of books that were contested. By analyzing the legal situation and the case law in the two countries, we want to shed light on what enables, or hinders, book bans in different legal contexts. In doing so, we contribute to a broader reflection on how to effectively articulate child protection and freedom of art and expression.

To protect the child from everything unsightly: Evaluations of children's literature in Swedish library press, 1903-1940

Sebastian Lönnlöv

When the Swedish public libraries were established, during the early 20th century, their educating and cultivating role was clearly stated. The formation of libraries – including specialized children's libraries – coincided with a widespread campaign against trash literature. Ideas about the potentially hurtful impact of reading existed parallel to a strong belief in the importance of literacy and reading. Until 1965, the law stated that libraries financed by the state – and especially school libraries – should not buy indecent literature.

In a Swedish context, the library journals *Folkbiblioteksbladet* (1903-1911) and *Biblioteksbladet* (1916-) guided librarians in their selection process, through reviews and recommendations meant to help them choose the right, good books. Apart from these reviews, different actors – many of them librarians or teachers – express their thoughts about what children should read, or not, in opinion pieces. Reviews of, and debates about, children's literature is particularly interesting since young readers were thought to be more sensitive, and also more important to protect, than adult readers.

This paper will discuss the discourse about children's literature and reading, as formed in these journals during the period of 1903-1940. Which literature is seen as unsuitable for young readers, and why? Which function is reading ascribed in the lives of children, and in society as a whole?

Censorship as Theme and Structural Device in the Metatheatrical 8+ Performance

Hendrik IV: Ongeschikt voor Kinderen

Mahlu Mertens

Dutch theatre for young audiences (TYA) has the reputation of being very progressive, not afraid to tackle taboo topics. In recent years, however, the climate has been changing, and theatre makers observe that the pressure for (self-)censorship has increased. This paper explores how theatre as a form can be used to make what Peter Hunt (1997) called "invisible censorship" visible. Manon van de Water (2012) points out that – like in children's literature – taboos in TYA are fundamentally adult constructs and children are usually not included in censorship decisions. Via the analysis of the 8+ play *Hendrik IV: ongeschikt voor kinderen* ("Hendrik IV: not suited for children") I show how, in theatre, the co-presence of audience and makers creates the possibility to put the spotlight on such invisible censoring processes and to give the children a voice.

In this metatheatrical play a woman from The Bureau interrupts the actors during the performance, explaining that they sent her to check whether the work that is being performed is suited for eight-year-olds. Scene by scene, the actors negotiate and discuss with the representative whether, and if so, how they are allowed to perform the next scene, and they regularly call on the children to voice their opinion. However, in order to be able to perform, the play has to stay within the limits of what stakeholders deem acceptable. I therefore argue that even though the play successfully questions the need for censorship, it simultaneously seems to submit to it by engaging in self-censorship.

Panel 2: Histories and Contexts

A Clue in the Blue-Bound Books: An Exploration into the Censorship and Gatekeeping of Historic Children's Literature

Kyra Droog

This paper utilizes the Hardy Boys series to explore censorship and gatekeeping of historic children's literature in the modern day. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, due to complaints regarding the series, the publishers initiated an editing process which saw significant changes to the first 38 books in the series. Such edits cut approximately seven chapters per book, whitewashed storylines, and in many cases resulted in two different stories existing under the same title. These changes were not actively publicized; when the books were re-released, most adults didn't realize that there was a difference between the books they had read as children and the books they were reading to their children.

This revamp leads to significant questions, which this paper attempts to address. What thought processes go into re-releasing classic children's literature, and where is the line as to what can be changed? How are parents, teachers, and educators informed about changes to classic children's literature, and how can they make their voices heard if they wish to support or oppose such changes? Who is making decisions about what content is and isn't appropriate for young readers in the modern day? The timeliness of this research is highlighted by content-related book bans across the United States and a global rise in concern regarding censorship and gatekeeping. While this paper does not draw firm conclusions on the topic, it considers a variety of important questions about gatekeeping, censorship, and intellectual freedom as regards children and historic children's literature.

The Sacred Child and the Vernacular Reader: Transnational Histories of Censoring Youth Reading

Fatima Naveed

Book banning in the United States is not an isolated moral panic but part of a transnational genealogy of censorship practices that mobilise the figure of the child reader as a sacred subject whose innocence must be safeguarded from the dangers of literature. This paper situates the recent wave of US book bans—especially under the Trump administration, targeting texts on race, sexuality, and gender—within a longer history of moral regulation rooted in Victorian ideals of childhood innocence. In colonial South Asia, for example, the Indian Penal Code of 1860, drafted under British rule, codified literary depictions of sexuality as “obscene” and a threat to “public morality” and “impressionable minds.” Obscenity trials against writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai exemplified how colonial law translated Victorian anxieties about childhood into enduring postcolonial frameworks of censorship. In the United States, the Comstock Laws (1873) performed similar cultural work, defining “obscene” literature through appeals to vulnerable youth and establishing a moral framework that continues to shape the policing of reading. By juxtaposing twentieth-century case studies from South Asia and the United States, this paper shows how the child became a moral frontier of the nation and a recurring justification for literary censorship across diverse contexts. I argue that contemporary debates on book banning—whether in US school districts or South Asian obscenity courts—inherit a shared colonial and transnational history of regulating reading through the figure of the child.

Science and Censorship in Progressive-Era US History Books: The Case of Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Margaret Wise Brown

Elizabeth Massa Hoiem

The teaching of evolution in US high school biology during the Scopes Era has been the subject of extensive research by Adam Laats, Peter Bowler, and Adam R. Shapiro [1]. The focus on science, however, overlooks elementary history books that began with human evolution as the first event in world history. Designed to teach democratic values in a globally connected world, these first “deep histories”—exemplified by Van Loon's Newbery Award winner, *The Story of Mankind* (1921)—also attracted controversy, polemical debate, and censorship.

I focus on Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Margaret Wise Brown's six-volume elementary social studies textbook series, *Our Growing World*, whose first three volumes appeared in 1944. Mitchell's team withdrew the remaining volumes after publisher D. C. Heath insisted they omit all mention of racial equality and human evolution, which the authors considered essential scientific facts [2]. Examining correspondence and unpublished drafts, I show how these irreconcilable differences unfolded after Heath's new project editor demanded Mitchell's team excise chapters on China and Mexico. This canceled project illustrates how censorship of evolution in textbooks, although ostensibly about religion, reflected polemical divides over gender roles, immigration, eugenics, and racism.

This case yields lessons for US book challenges today, which under the aegis of religious freedom, target materials on gender, sexuality, and racism. Occurring most frequently in geographies experiencing rapid demographic change, book challenges seek to shape public library collections to reflect competing narratives of American history and identity [4].

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2. Mitchell, Lucy Sprague. *Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), pp. 431.
3. Box 7, Folder 2, "Criticism from Heath, 1945," Lucy Sprague Mitchell papers, 1878-1967, RBML Columbia Univ.
4. Emily Knox, *Book Banning in 21st-Century America* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); Emily Knox, "The Geography of Censorship: Communities, Challengers, and Harry Potter," iConference 2014 Proceedings, pp. 628 - 634); Andrew Zelot, "Censorship and Shifting Contexts in Children's Literature," *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature and Culture*, eds. Andrea Mei-Ying Wu, Claudia Nelson, and Elisabeth Wesseling (Routledge, 2024), pp. 1:528-39.

Panel 3: Racism and Resistance

Confronting Slavery's Ghosts: Gothic Conventions in Book Bans and Banned Books

Maude Hines

My presentation examines how anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) legislation and associated book bans utilize Gothic themes in explaining their efforts to restrict what is taught and read in schools. The rhetoric surrounding these movements, as seen in publications from organizations like the Heritage Foundation and statements from activists like No Left Turn's prolific book challenger Bruce Friedman, employs Gothic imagery such as "haunting," "guilt," and "poison" to frame specific topics as dangerous and corrupting to children. I argue that these interventions

read like the setup of a Gothic novel, with a past that refuses to stay buried, imperiled innocence, and a fear of "transmission." Conversely, many of the challenged books themselves engage with Gothic elements. I read three banned and challenged books (Reynolds' *Long Way Down*, Rhodes' *Ghost Boys*, and Johnson's *This is My America*) for their shared reliance on a literary technique I call "Encounter." This approach uses Gothic echoes, such as ghosts and the persistence of trauma, to expose what Saidiya Hartman calls the "afterlives of slavery." By doing so, these books challenge attempts to deny a traumatic past (what James Baldwin called "monstrous innocence"), instead asking young readers to "bear witness" (Rhodes) and work toward a more hopeful future. The clash between those who use Gothic tropes to conceal history and those who use them to reveal it is central to current debates over children's literature.

Censorship or Anti-racism? The Reappraisal of a Danish Children's Classic

Frederikke Holkgard Buhl

In recent years, canonical works such as *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) have been subjected to progressive censorship practices where racist slurs and illustrations have been removed by the publisher (Nel 2017). These decisions are part of a wider discussion of what to do with children's classics that promote a racist or colonial worldview. Should offensive content be removed or should the books continue to be published unaltered? What different motives do publishers have to make alterations and how are they perceived by the public?

This paper discusses these questions, analysing the intersection between progressive censorship practices, children's classics and publishing practices in Denmark. Its main analytical case is the Danish public debate of 2019 concerning the publishing house Gyldendal's decision to leave out eight nursery rhymes from the newest collection of the Danish canonical author Halfdan Rasmussen's nursery rhymes. This paper suggests viewing Gyldendal's decision as a "reappraisal" (Zalot 2024, 535) of Rasmussen's work meant to protect the author's status as a canonical author. Inspired by Gloria Wekker (2016), Charlotte van Bergen (2023) and Mathias Danbolt (2017), the paper analyses newspaper articles, editorials and reviews either commenting on, attacking or defending Gyldendal's decision and discusses the different affects and positions at play in the debate. It demonstrates how concepts of censorship, childhood and innocence intersect with the national self-understanding regarding racism in Denmark and discusses how this intersection might influence future decisions from Danish publishing houses concerning the reappraisal of old children's classics.

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DAY 2: THURSDAY 12TH FEBRUARY

Panel 4: European Perspectives II

The Children's Book as an Ideological Tool: Censorship and Reading Control in Czechoslovakia 1948-1989

Milan Mašát

This paper explores censorship practices and the control of children's and young adult literature in socialist Czechoslovakia. Although formal censorship structures became fully institutionalized after 1968 - primarily through the Main Office for Press Supervision and later the Central Publishing Authority - censorship of children's literature was always a multilayered system of interventions. It included ideological self-censorship by authors, editorial policies of state-run publishing houses, and the development of state-approved reading lists for schools.

The paper focuses on three key areas:

1. The ideological construction of the child as a future socialist citizen and its influence on the selection, translation, and distribution of books.
2. Examples of banned or altered titles, including instances of soft censorship - such as the silent omission of topics like religion, emigration, dissent, or sexuality.
3. A comparative reflection on current developments in the United States, where conservative movements similarly invoke "child protection" to enforce ideological values - albeit from the opposite end of the political spectrum.

The paper asks whether and how the experience of post-totalitarian societies can contribute to a deeper understanding of current global trends in the censorship of children's literature. It also considers how transhistorical and transcultural comparisons might inform resistance strategies in defence of intellectual freedom and access to books for young readers.

On Censorship and Publication of 'Destructive' Children's Books in Putin's Russia

Ekaterina Shatalova

"We are all fighting, and they [...] are publishing destructive books." This quote comes from Nikolai Nilov, head of the Children's Book Council of Russia's Union of Writers, who in 2024 claimed that 60 percent of children's books in the Russian market have a "destructive" character, allegedly promoting themes such as betrayal of motherland, rejection of traditional gender roles, or an emphasis on death and indifference to the future.

Such claims are not new (Lanoux et al., 2021) and have been directed at Russian children's literature since the introduction of the Federal Law on the Protection of Children from Harmful Information in 2010. However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has ushered in a new wave of intensified censorship, ranging from prohibition of all LGBTQ-related books and the banning of books by authors labelled as 'foreign agents' to the suppression of literature that addresses war and restriction on displaying such books at book fairs. These developments have

inevitably resulted in heightened self-censorship within the literary community and a resurgence of Soviet-era 'Aesopian language,' where allegory and metaphor serve as tools to navigate restrictive ideological boundaries.

In light of the state's growing influence over children's publishing, this paper examines the ways censorship work in contemporary Russian children's literature. Which children's books are being targeted, and why? Is it outsourced to publishers themselves to 'guess' when they publish something 'destructive' and self-regulate? What risks do children's publishers and authors face in this increasingly controlled literary landscape? Finally, what challenges do contemporary Russian practices of censorship present to scholars? How can scholars document self-censorship?

Silent Exclusions and Imported Panics: The State of Children's Books in Post-Socialist Albania

Ina Lamllari

In recent years, U.S. debates over book bans and censorship have managed to spill over across the pond. With the help of the Internet and algorithmic amplification on various social media platforms, American anxieties around childhood purity, parental rights, and LGBTQIA+ representation increasingly circulate transnationally, shaping conversations far beyond the United States. This paper examines how U.S.-based moral panics around children's and young adult literature are refracted in Albania, a post-socialist country with a long, complex history of censorship under Enver Hoxha's communist regime. Currently, the country is in the initial phases of manifesting a hybridization of socialist-era control and U.S. discourse. While there is no formal state apparatus for censoring books, the Albanian Ministry of Education controls curricula, and publishers and translators often exercise preemptive self-censorship. The result is an archive of titles that are never translated, never taught, and never openly contested, a form of silent exclusion that contrasts with high-profile American book challenges. Nonetheless, due to the export of U.S. ideological conflicts via global platforms, there have been unprecedented cases of American-style outrage online regarding children's books. This study adopts a comparative framework, and draws on case studies of literature classes curricula, publishing decisions, and a small-scale survey, to address how Albania exemplifies a new form of digital cultural colonialism. Authoritarianism is still within living memory for many teachers, librarians, and parents—and yet, in the name of protecting children and traditional values, old patterns are being repeated under new, imported guises.

Panel 5: Politics and Practices

Skim, Quote, List

Katherine Inglis

All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto by George M. Johnson is currently one of the most frequently challenged books in United States libraries. This paper takes the opposition to Johnson's Young Adult memoir-manifesto as a case study to interrogate the reading practices

and critical toolkits of organized activist groups that challenge books for young readers at scale. The challenger playbook analysed in this paper is characterized by a reading practice that involves skim-reading for key words, decontextualization of abbreviated quotations, 'slick' and shareable reports, machine-generated book lists, and a forum for challenging that is both online and hyperlocal. Key to justifying the removal of books from libraries is the legal concept of obscenity, which is misconstrued in challenger discourse.

Alongside book challenger reading practices, I will compare the reading protocols of a US library committee that restored Johnson's memoir to school library shelves, the use of quotations in anti-censorship toolkits, and the experiences of reading that are explored by the memoir itself. I argue that the multiple and incompatible 'readings' of *All Boys Aren't Blue* connect the divergence of reading practices with fracturing constitutional norms.

Dangerous Knowledge: The Slippery Slope of Censorship in Rachel Caine's *The Great Library Series*

Janieke Koning

Rachel Caine's *The Great Library* series (2015-2019) offers a compelling speculative lens for interrogating contemporary debates around book banning and censorship. Set in an alternate history in which the Great Library of Alexandria never burned, it now controls global access to all written knowledge. The series depicts an institutionalized system of censorship suppressing intellectual freedom under the guise of order, stability, and peace, which centers on the systematic erasure of the printing press as unrestricted knowledge is deemed too dangerous. This paper examines how *The Great Library* invites adolescent readers to critically reflect on who censors knowledge, and on the motivations, methods, and consequences of erasure and restriction. Following Basu, Broad, and Hintz's assertion that dystopian YA engages young readers in persistent real-world concerns (4-5), Caine's narrative demonstrates how fiction can illuminate and contest contemporary forms of censorship.

Caine contrasts the Library's authoritarian leadership with the rebellious adolescent protagonists to expose the slippery slope of censorship. Through Jess, his fellow students, and their teacher, Scholar Wolfe, the series explores the difficulties of recognizing and resisting institutional power, as well as the potential for complicity. As the Library students gain access to forbidden knowledge and start questioning the Library's stranglehold on originals, they face hard choices about what to preserve, share, and, indeed, conceal. Suddenly, they risk replicating the very mechanisms they once opposed.

The series offers adolescent readers a youth-centered perspective on the stakes of access, authority, and resistance in a climate of control, connecting the fictional Library to real-world debates over censorship, book bans, and progressive gatekeeping.

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Panel 6: Allyship and Activism

Queer in a Time of Book Banning: A Few Strategies from a Red State Educator

Elissa Myers

As a recently graduated Ph.D. trained in children's literature, I was not ready for what happened to me when I became a children's coordinator in a public library in East Texas. In this job, I attempted to navigate a virulent censorship campaign aimed at, first, our Pride display, and increasingly, myself as a queer library worker. At my subsequent job at an academic library, I also experienced censorship based on displays—not books themselves, but which books were deemed appropriate for us as workers to draw readers' attention to—which books were okay for us to make visible.

Whereas the commonsense belief now seems to be that visibility is the heart of queer politics, my experience in these venues showed me that visibility, while it may be desirable generally, may not be a wise political move during a time of great backlash toward queer people. In these situations, I settled for semi-visibility in order to better serve my students, and this was a calculated political move in which I had agency, not merely a sad reality. While academics tend to think of diversity as an aspect of our work that can be translated into CV lines, the reality at this time was that my most effective work was done invisibly and in silence. In my talk, I will argue that queer educators in heavily conservative places have a lot to teach all of us about navigating fascism during this time—in particular, how we can protect our own mental and physical well-being and that of others during this time.

Books, Bans, and Backlash: Book Censorship and Queer Erasure in Alberta

Anah-Jayne Samuelson

Canada is not historically known for banning books, a practice often more associated with the United States. Yet the Canadian province Alberta has broken this trend. In May 2025, the United Conservative Party (UCP) announced that by October 1, 2025, books with "explicit sexual content" (defined as "detailed and clear depictions of sexual acts, including masturbation, penetration, and ejaculation") must be removed from school libraries ("Standards"). This sweeping censorship surprised many, particularly since a UCP survey found that 48% (the majority) of parents with children in schools opposed governmental involvement in determining library collections ("School Library"). Adding to the alarm, the UCP released specific examples of content to be banned: three of the four texts cited are award-winning coming-of-age graphic novels with queer protagonists. Critics argue that 2SLGBTQIA+ narratives are targeted under the guise of protecting youth.

This presentation investigates how fears surrounding "gender ideology" are mobilized by the UCP and its supporters to justify this ban, and why the intersections of sexuality, gender, and childhood are framed as dangerous. These policies are not isolated and will be linked to broader political agendas in Canada (and globally) that aim to reinforce traditional, heteronormative structures.

As a scholar of children's and young adult literature and a post-secondary teacher in Alberta, I will examine the dangers such censorship poses to youth. I will also consider how historical examples of book banning can offer models of resistance, helping to safeguard inclusive literature and counter these exclusionary policies.

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Reading to Resist, Not Conform: How Queer Young Adult Literature Functions in Response to Book Banning Efforts

Christopher Morabito

This presentation frames current debates over banning queer books within the context of literacy studies, arguing that queerness can be understood as a literacy practice — a lens and skillset through which individuals can interpret, navigate, and impact society. Within this framework, QYA novels serve as literacy sponsors, modeling these practices for readers, while queer book bans serve as attempts to restrict access to queer literacy and the skills that it provides.

This presentation examines two distinct strands of QYA literature as responses to these bans. The first set includes novels that advocate through acceptability by trying to convince readers that being queer does not make someone different from their straight and cisgender peers. Within these texts, such as Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015), characters use their literacy skills only to be able to name their gender and sexual identity categories and share their identities and ideas with others. In comparison, there is the second group of books, such as *Can't Take That Away* by Steven Salvatore (2021), in which the characters use a more expansive set of queer literacy skills, not to conform to society, but to change it.

This presentation argues that the best way to respond to book bans is not to be less radically queer, but more, ensuring that queer and questioning youth have access to as many tools as possible so that they can best respond to any issues that they face.

DAY 3: FRIDAY 13TH FEBRUARY

Panel 7: Publishing and Consumerism

Age-Appropriate or Censorship? “Cleaning Up” Young Adult Fiction Through the New Adult Label

Lore Goossens

Do explicit sex scenes belong in young adult fiction (YA)? BookTok, the bookish corner of TikTok, has been heavily debating what young adult fiction should entail, highlighting a shift in the interpretations of the liminal genre. A recurring comment is that YA, as a genre aimed at minors, should be kept “clean” of explicit scenes. This conflicts with prominent YA scholars like Lydia Kokkola (2013) or Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) who state that sex is a central topic within the genre. This presentation analyses the TikTok discourse around sex scenes (or, as it is often called online, spice or smut) in young adult fiction and ties it to the rise of the new adult label.

New adult fiction has been gaining traction in the last decade as the successor to YA, for those who have outgrown YA but want similar themes. This fits in a cultural context where typical markers of adulthood (a job, a house, a family) are becoming less achievable and less desirable, extending the category of non-adult. Despite the potential of the new adult label to respond to this phenomenon, it is getting reduced to “young adult fiction with sex”, as a separate and easy to censor category for YA books that deal with sex. As an example, I delve into the hysteria surrounding Hannah Grace’s *Icebreaker* (2022), which was criticized for its sexual content and deceptive YA-looking cover, to show how paratext can reflect the call to “clean up” young adult fiction.

Independent Publishing and Contemporary Censorship in Children’s Literature: A Qualitative Case Study

Daniel Laliena and Rosa Tabernero

Throughout history, children’s and young adult literature has been a domain especially vulnerable to adult control. While censorship under authoritarian regimes is a well-documented issue (Cassino, 2023; Tena & Soto, 2021), recent research highlights how adult conceptions of childhood, interactions among adult agents, and pressures arising from ideological, moral, or other interests can trigger censorship in contemporary democratic societies (Clark et al., 2025; Lowery, 2023; Ruiz, 2020).

In this context, editors emerge as particularly significant figures. As central agents in the transmission of children’s literature (Tabernero, 2005), they occupy a pivotal position through interactions with authors, publishers, educators, and other stakeholders. Within this framework, independent publishing —due to its defining characteristics (Biernacka-Licznar & Paprocka, 2016; Squilloni, 2019)— constitutes a key focal point for understanding how censorship impacts the periphery of mainstream children’s literature production.

This study explores how independent editors perceive current dynamics of censorship in children's literature. Using a qualitative case study design (Stake, 1999), the subjectivity of eight participants from the Iberian Peninsula was explored through semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2011). The data collected were examined through content analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), complemented with discourse analysis (Alba, 2009; Tusón, 1999). The results provide a nuanced account of how independent publishing can be constructed both in relation to and as a reaction against censorship, while also showing how the intrinsic characteristics of these projects may operate as conditioning factors in the production and circulation of children's literature.

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Contested and Commodified: The Banned Book in Contemporary US Consumer Culture

Aline Franzus

Censorship has been a facet of US history since before the nation's founding and continues to be part of contemporary US culture as illustrated by the upsurge in book challenges and bans since midway through the COVID-19 pandemic. Those affected most by book bans are children

and young adults, not only because the attempts to restrict access to books take place in the context of US public schools and libraries, but also because children's and YA books, and more generally, books that touch on themes crucial to the lived experiences of children and young adults, account for a large part of today's book bans and challenges. While these attempts have been widely successful and are supported by the Trump administration, the book banning crisis has prompted a countermovement, a whole range of responses from individuals, organizations, and the corporate world to (seemingly) help counter the current wildfire of attempted censorship while making use of, e.g., the mechanisms of the Streisand Effect. These responses vary largely in scale and intention, from activist approaches that aim at filling the gap book bans create to corporate commodification of the movement. As a result, the banned book has become profitable in recent years, and presents an opportunity for publishers, bookstores, brands, and individuals to profit from the current crisis by aligning themselves with the fight against censorship and actively engaging in banned book marketing strategies. This paper discusses a few examples of corporate responses from US publishers, bookstores, and brands—both before and after Trump took office. In looking at examples of banned book displays in German bookstores, this paper also considers the potentialities of marketing banned and challenged children's and YA books explicitly as banned books to appeal to an even wider, potentially non-YA, and international audience.

The Role of the Public in Censoring Children's Books in China

Svetlana Kharchenkova

Censorship in academic literature is often portrayed as an act of the state, which is imposed top-down on editors and readers. This paper investigates the role of the public in censoring children's books in mainland China. Based on participant observations and in-depth interviews with editors, foreign rights managers, heads of publishing houses, and literary agents conducted primarily in Beijing and Shanghai in 2023-2024, this paper shows how censorship is relational. Since there is hardly any pre-publication censorship of children's books at the level of the authorities, publishers have much freedom on what books to publish and whether and how to amend their content for the Chinese context. However, as they select and prepare books for publication, they have to consider post-publication reactions of the public, which can lead to removal of books from circulation and to serious financial or career consequences for those involved in making the book. Such reactions from the public can take different forms, including, for example, complaints to the authorities and a potentially viral online discussion. Anticipating such reactions, Chinese publishers do not select certain books in the first place or amend the books' content, often with consent and even assistance of foreign authors and illustrators. This paper contributes to sociological understanding of the workings of censorship as a complex relational process. It also shows how censorship of books in China concerns topics much more diverse than political ideology and sex, as parents worry about various sources of "bad influence" of books on their children.

Panel 8: Censorship in/and Libraries

I Read Whatever I Want! Public Library Strategies for Defending Children's Access to Literature

Rina Teske

In an era of escalating book bans and ideological censorship, cultural practitioners are increasingly called upon to safeguard children's access to diverse narratives and collective memory. This paper investigates how librarians, archivists, and curators in New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle have mobilised institutional and community-based strategies to resist erasure and preserve diverse stories and cultural heritage access for young readers. Grounded in interviews with the practitioners themselves, this comparative study examines Brooklyn Public Library's *Books Unbanned* campaign, LA County Library's *Freedom to Read* Student Summits in collaboration with PEN America, independent bookstores, and cultural resource centres, and, lastly, Seattle Public Library's activist-oriented approach, including youth-led storytelling projects, banned book art workshops, and civic literacy campaigns that have reached over 15,000 teens and generated more than 440,000 checkouts. From I Read Banned Books online challenges to offering young readers unrestricted access to frequently banned books and hosting education summits addressing the threats of censorship, public libraries have fought at the frontlines of information wars seeking to restrict children's access to stories which reflect the diversity of their experiences.

To evaluate the success of these efforts, this paper applies a multidimensional framework encompassing foremost cultural impact, but also digital reach, youth engagement, advocacy outcomes, and institutional sustainability. Framed through theories of identity politics, politics of childhood and libraries' roles as cultural custodians, the study asks: What makes resistance effective? How do these programs foster not just access, but agency and belonging in young readers? I argue that the efforts of public libraries in New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle against censorship reassert the role of public institutions as stewards of pluralistic identities and children's rightful place as agents in pluralistic societies. Highlighting the ethical commitments and socio-political labour of public librarians, this paper offers a model for resistance that is locally grounded, internationally resonant, and urgently necessary.

Queerbrarians Summer Reading Challenge 2025: Banned Books Edition

Claudia Frick and Daniela Markus

Throughout the summer of 2025, we — the Queerbrarians, a network of German-speaking queer librarians — hosted our annual reading challenge, this time dedicating it to banned books. The goal was to discover and read books together, have fun, learn new things, find new favorite books and think about why they were probably banned. The idea was born from channeling our personal and professional bewilderment and frustration into an event that fosters connection through social reading and engagement with the topic of censorship, raising awareness not only within the German library community. By explicitly encouraging people to read banned books, we wanted to prompt reflection on the banned contents, but also on censorship in general and

in libraries specifically. Based on PEN America's lists for the school years 2021 to 2024, we developed a set of 24 banned book categories, such as Graphic Novel, Gay, and Mental Health. We then created a Bingo chart for people to cross off one category at a time once they read a banned book that fit the category. To help those unfamiliar with banned books, who might be overwhelmed by the number of titles, we provided a selection of books per category as a list and as a StoryGraph challenge. In the process, we decided not to include books by authors we deemed problematic in our suggestions, and reflected on our own attitudes towards censorship and approaches to designing the event.

Between the Stacks and the Stakes: Risk Work and Book Banning in UK School Libraries

Alison Hicks

Censorship has typically been understood in abstract terms by UK school librarians. Since 2021, though, these professionals have found themselves at the foreground of attacks on intellectual freedom, with between 37% and 53% of school librarians indicating that they have been challenged on reading matter (Turner, 2024; Dancey-Downs, 2024). Creating the danger that young people will be forced to access material in unregulated online spaces, these incidents also generate significant legal, financial and employment risk for non-statutorily protected school librarians. This paper develops conceptual approaches to book banning through using the theoretical construct of 'risk work' to explore these professional experiences. Referring to the everyday working practices that involve the negotiation or handling of risk, risk work emerges from the field of health and social care to refocus attention on the material and embodied practices that enable these endeavours to "get done" (Brown & Gale, 2018). Applied to questions of censorship, this theoretical framing supports an expanded understanding of organisational responses to book ban challenges, including how key stakeholder actions are enabled and constrained. The presentation will start by outlining the UK book banning context and the underpinning theoretical framework. It will then draw upon findings from interviews with ten UK school librarians who have experience of book banning to establish how risk is reshaping the nature and experience of school library work. The presentation will finish by offering suggestions for how risk work might inform research into wider cultural concerns.

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Panel 9: Teaching Banned Books

Using Milton's "Areopagitica" as an anchor text to teach book banning

Erin Weinberg

In 2024-25, I taught a full-year English literature course on banned books and the politics of censorship. Authors covered ranged from Ernest Hemingway to Amanda Gorman; from William Shakespeare to Shel Silverstein; from Dr. Seuss to Gengoroh Tagame. I sought to expose my students to the idea that, to quote this conference's Call for Papers, "reading has long been considered dangerously immersive, seductive and morally degrading" (emphasis mine). To highlight this focus throughout year, I used John Milton's "Areopagitica" as an anchor text that we returned to at the beginning, middle and end of the course. Milton's 1644 prose oration responds to the prohibitive Licensing Order of 1643. He powerfully protests: "books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them...he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself." While my students were originally daunted by the lofty language of Milton's oration, their investment in its arguments grew as we returned to it after covering so many case studies of censorship and book bans. As I will argue in my paper, the value of this pedagogical strategy is evidenced by two mutually reinforcing outcomes: learning about centuries-old censorship strategies informs students' understanding of the present; seeing their experience in the present as part of a greater history of book banning deepens their investment in studying literature from the past.

Hierarchy of Intent: Building Inclusive Reading Classrooms in the Era of Book Bans

Janell Pycior

In an era marked by rising censorship and book bans in recent years, the need for culturally inclusive and student-centered reading classrooms has never been more urgent. Hierarchy of Intent: Building Inclusive Reading Classrooms in the Era of Book Bans presents a six-step framework designed to resist erasure and uplift diverse narratives. This model evolved from a doctoral dissertation research project that cataloged over 11,000 children's and middle grade books in southern Indiana public and private K-8 classrooms to assess representation and cultural authenticity. The findings formed the Hierarchy of Intent, a guide for educators in creating equitable reading environments through intentional design, inclusive curation, and community engagement.

Drawing on foundational scholarship from Rudine Sims Bishop, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Sonia Nieto, and Geneva Gay, the conversation explores how to develop spaces that reflect student identities, elevate underrepresented voices, and encourage critical engagement with literature. It begins with designing welcoming, accessible reading spaces and curating classroom libraries that reflect a broad range of experiences, languages, and perspectives. It also emphasizes the importance of student agency, allowing learners to choose texts, share reviews, and participate in peer discussions.

By fostering critical thinking and connecting stories to real-world issues, educators can help students view literature as a lens for understanding themselves and the world. Finally, community engagement, through guest speakers, family involvement, and cultural partnerships, extends the impact of reading beyond the classroom. The Hierarchy of Intent offers a roadmap to resist censorship and reaffirm every student's right to read, reflect, and be seen.