

Defending the Freedom to Read: Policies, Procedures & Civic Engagement

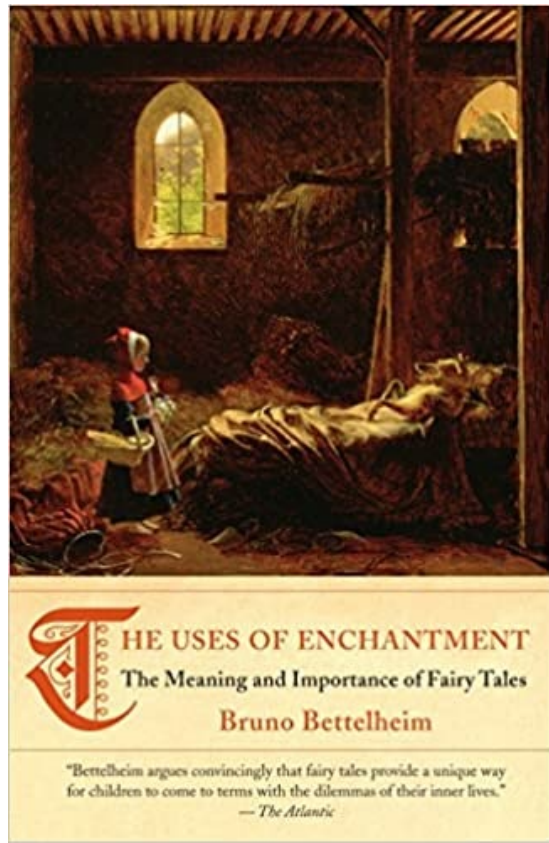
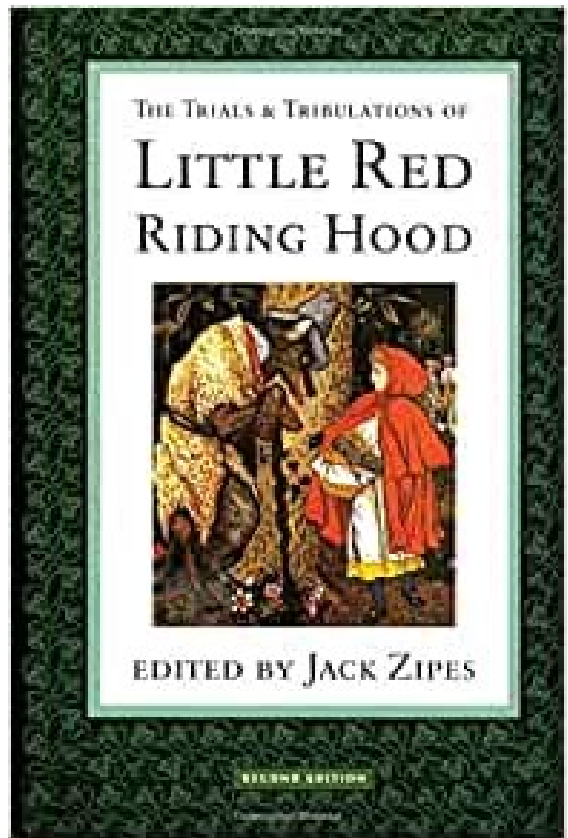
Jamie LaRue <jarue@jarue.com>

ACRL, Stillwater OK
November 10, 2023



Why people censor

- Personal prejudice (why I hate brussels sprouts)
 - Childhood trauma
- Parental panic
 - 4-6, 14-16 transitions
- Demographic panic
 - Public library as cultural mirror
- The will to power and control
 - Follow the money





Beloved

A novel by

Toni Morrison

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

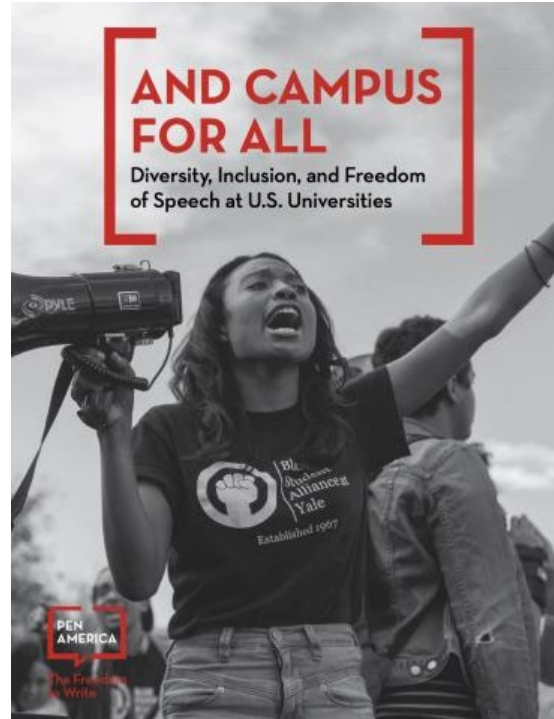
— WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR —

Schools



PEN America study

- *Support for intellectual freedom is declining*
- *Support for social justice is rising*



Academic freedom?



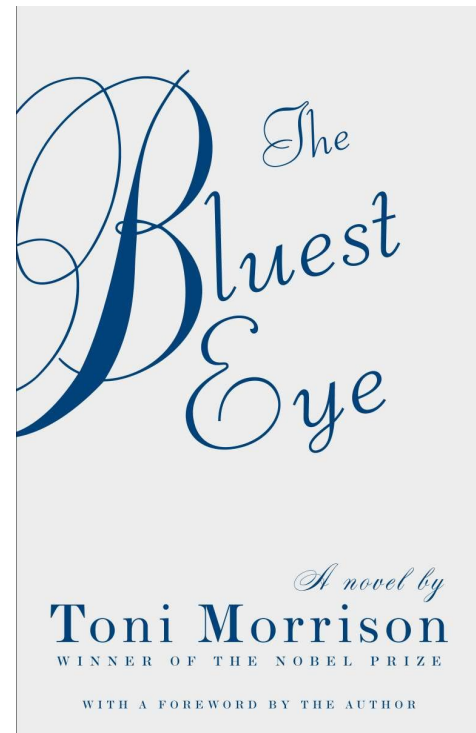
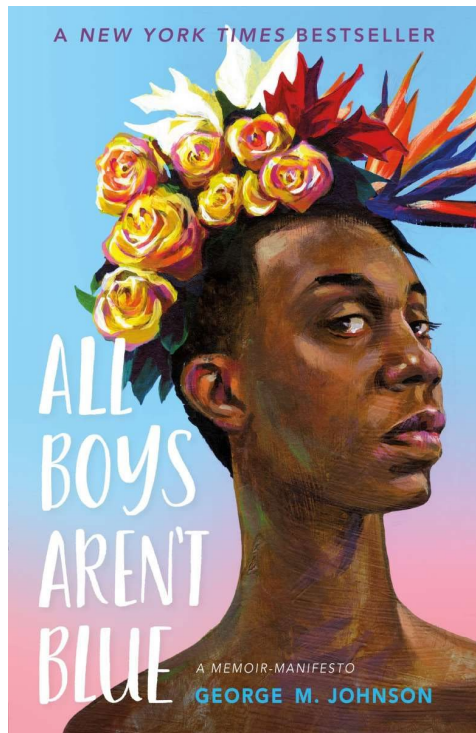
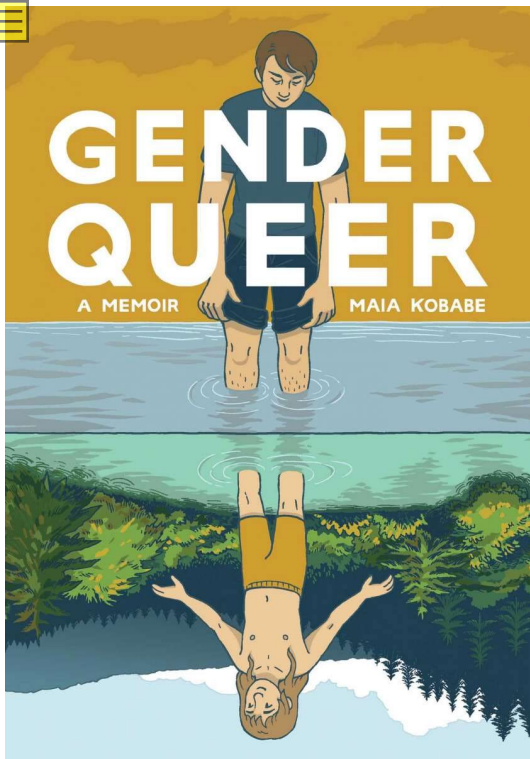
Ward Churchill, 2005
University of Colorado Boulder



Steven Salaita, 2015
University of Illinois-Urbana



Milo Yiannopoulos, 2017
University of California Berkeley



2022 Top Challenged Titles (3 of 13)

The rhetoric of
rage
(and sex)

groomer

pornographer

pedophile

obscene

communist

harmful to minors

human-trafficker



2021 and Texas: the Surge begins

- October 25, 2021: Rep. Matt Krause's letter to the Texas Education Agency asking if any of the schools in the state have the books listed on a 16 page spreadsheet, as well as how much schools had spent on these books.
- House Bill 3979, anti-CRT bill that bans teaching any materials that could mean “an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual’s race or sex.”
- <https://bookriot.com/texas-book-ban-list/>



Florida

- 2021 - Florida Parental Rights in Education Act /Don't Say Gay
- 2021 - Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (W.O.K.E.) Act
- 2023 - Disney!
- Moms for Liberty and ties to the Florida GOP




Blaming the *librarian (and teacher)*

- Oklahoma: 2022 . School employees and public library staffers can be fined up to \$20,000 or serve up to 10 years in prison for facilitating “indecent exposure to obscene material or child pornography.”
- **Texas (again) 2023: SB13** San Antonio public school pulls 400 books. Llano public pulls 12 LGBTQ titles, restores, considers closing library altogether.
- **Monitoring State Legislation That Criminalizes Libraries, Schools, and Museums 2023 (Everylibrary.org)**
 - Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Wyoming

2021 (and continuing) Surge

- Target: school libraries, then public
- Strategy: read naughty bits at public meetings - but always LGBTQ and race
- Context free-or a reduction of theme (and infantilization of young adults)
- Not one, but 20-30 titles at a time
- Threats to board, superintendents, principals, teachers, librarians - the attempt to criminalize speech
- Parental “notification” and parental rights
- Best defense - still policies
- Why now? From cancel culture to midterm elections ⇒ and beyond!
- \$\$\$

Responses



**“Until a drag queen
walks into a school
and beats eight kids to
death with a copy of
'To Kill A Mockingbird,'
I think you're focusing
on the wrong shit.”**

- Wanda Sykes





Concerned?

- About the leading causes of death of minors in the US. So are we!
 - #1 - Firearms (a little over 4,000 annually since 2020)
 - Nowhere on the list: library books
- About the sexual abuse and exploitation of children (reference). Us, too!
 - Studies suggest that up to one in five girls and one in 20 boys will be sexually abused before they are 18 years old. More than 90 percent of child sexual abuse victims know their abuser.
 - Most child abuse occurs within the family.
 - Catholic clergy: abuse and coverup
 - Southern Baptist Church, abuse and coverup
 - Not participating in any institutional systemic abuse or coverup: libraries or the ALA

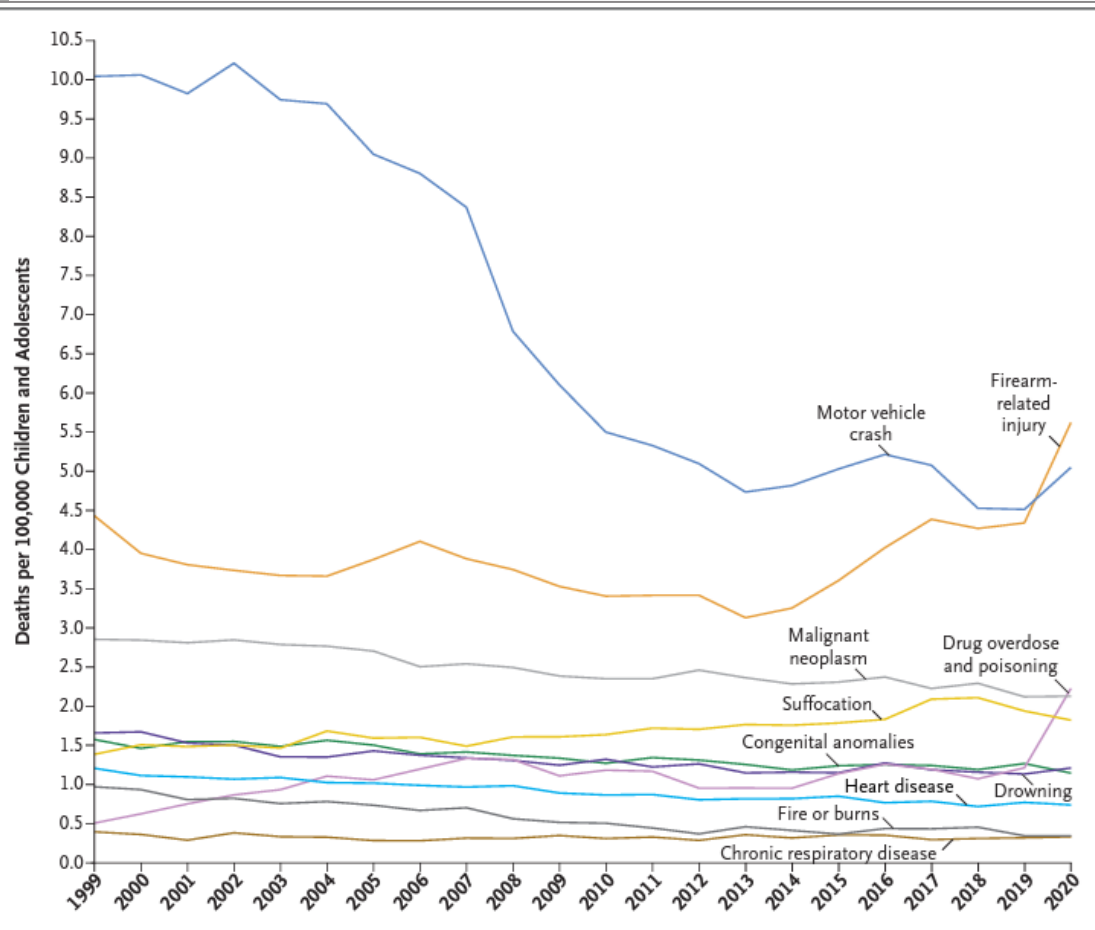


Figure 1. Leading Causes of Death among Children and Adolescents in the United States, 1999 through 2020.

Children and adolescents are defined as persons 1 to 19 years of age.

CDC.

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc220176>

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Policies

- Library Bill of Rights (and interpretations)
- Freedom to Read statement (now under ALA review)
- Freedom to View (movies)
- Collection Development Policy / Programs & Exhibits
- Request for Reconsideration
 - For *all* library resources
 - Must be a resident of the service area
 - Some say: must have examined entire item
 - Committee review and recommendation, Director decision, appeal
 - Scope of appeal: overturn, or just examine for compliance to policy
 - Limit on future reconsiderations
- Public comment (next slide)



Public comment

- Name and address (Gunnison CO caution)
- 3 minutes (or some time - but for all speakers)
- Total public comment time (may flex)
- Can't give time to someone else (may suggest spokesperson)
- Board doesn't engage in conversation (clarifying questions ok)
- No action taken during meeting
- No items or services pulled while reviewed
- Wellington CO result



A couple of approaches

What some folks want

Public drama and brouhaha

A shot of adrenaline to the amygdala

Viral violence

Money! Fundraising appeals

What they deserve

Thoughtful attention

Measured responses

Pre-public comment follow-up

Reaffirmation of policy

Meaningful conversation

Who are we? Community identity

Keep cool and carry on. Follow your policies.



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- Personal prejudice (why I hate brussels sprouts)
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 - 4-6, 14-16 transitions
- Demographic shifts / Social Justice => 3%
 - Public library as cultural mirror
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 - Follow the money



Drag Queen Story Times





Helping Others Realize
Muslim Journeys

Muslim Journeys and Your Community: Managing Controversy, Maximizing Impact

October 24, 2013, 2 p.m. Central

Speakers:

Martin Garnar
Chair, ALA Committee on Professional Ethics
Reference Services Librarian and Professor of Library Science, Regis University

Lesley Williams
Head of Adult Services and Muslim Journeys Project Director, Evanston (Ill) Public Library

Presented by the ALA Public Programs Office and the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom.

Programming Librarian CCF M.AmericanLibraryAssociation



Wendy
Campbell

Samir
Bitar





PENGUIN YOUNG READERS

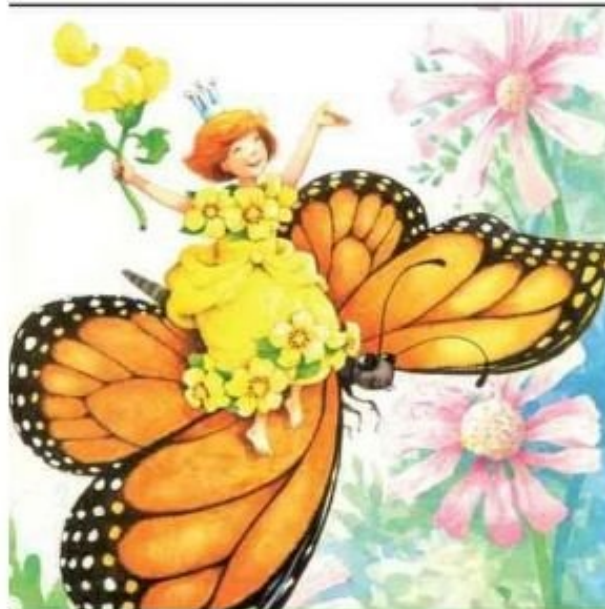
LEVEL

2

PROGRESSING
READERS

Princess Buttercup

A Flower Princess Story



by Wendy Cheyette Lewison

illustrated by Jerry Smith



ON CENSORSHIP
A PUBLIC LIBRARIAN
EXAMINES CANCEL
CULTURE IN THE US

JAMES
LARUE

ON CENSORSHIP: A
PUBLIC LIBRARIAN
EXAMINES CANCEL
CULTURE IN THE US

A SPEAKER'S CORNER BOOK

Questions

jarue@jarue.com