

Top 50 Banned Books: The Most Banned Books in U.S. Schools

The 50 most banned books of the last four school years include National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winners, bestsellers, and beloved books by authors including Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Judy Blume.

Since PEN America began tallying school book bans in 2021, thousands of books have been targeted repeatedly – as many as 147 times for John Green’s popular young adult novel [Looking for Alaska](#) and 142 for bestselling author Jodi Picoult’s book centered around a school shooting, [Nineteen Minutes](#). Five of bestselling author Sarah J. Maas’ books appear in the top 50, along with six by young adult author Ellen Hopkins.

PEN America has documented [22,810 cases of book bans in U.S. public schools](#) since it began counting in 2021, wiping out everything from classic literature to children’s picture books. Bans have occurred in 45 states and 451 public school districts.

Censorship proponents frequently frame their movement as a drive to remove “porn” from schools, but many of the most banned books don’t contain so much as a kiss. Instead, many explore themes of race and racism or reflect LGBTQ+ identities, particularly those of the transgender community. Others reflect the realities of [sexual abuse and violence](#), something far too many children experience outside the pages of a book.

If groups pushing censorship consider widely read classics indecent, if they can come for the likes of John Green and Toni Morrison, is anything off limits?

[See the most banned books in 2025, the most banned authors in 2025, and PEN America’s Index of School Book Bans.](#)

Most Banned Books 2021-2025

1. *Looking for Alaska*, by John Green. 147 bans.

“*Looking for Alaska* brilliantly chronicles the indelible impact one life can have on another. A modern classic, this stunning debut marked

bestselling author John Green's arrival as a groundbreaking new voice in contemporary fiction."

- Michael L. Printz Award winner
- New York Times bestseller
- NPR's Top Ten Best-Ever Teen Novels
- *TIME* magazine's 100 Best Young Adult Novels of All Time
- TV miniseries

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780142402511>

2. *Nineteen Minutes*, by Jodi Picoult. 142 bans.

Jodi Picoult, bestselling author of *My Sister's Keeper* and *Small Great Things*, writes about the moments leading up to and the devastating aftermath of a school shooting.

- #1 New York Times bestseller
- Award-winning author
- American Library Association Outstanding Books for the College Bound and Lifelong Learners

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780743496735>

3. *Sold*, by Patricia McCormick. 136 bans.

McCormick tells the story of Lakshmi, a 13-year-old girl in Nepal who is sold into prostitution. "The powerful, poignant, bestselling National

Book Award Finalist gives voice to a young girl robbed of her childhood yet determined to find the strength to triumph.”

- National Book Award finalist
- Publishers Weekly and NPR Best Books of the Year

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780786851720>

4. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, by Stephen Chbosky. 135 bans.

In this coming-of-age novel, “wallflower” Charlie deals with the complexities of high school, from young love to the pain of losing loved ones.

- #1 New York Times bestseller
- American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults and Best Book for Reluctant Readers
- Major motion picture

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780061649424>

5. *Crank*, by Ellen Hopkins. 128 bans.

“Kristina Snow is the perfect daughter: gifted high school junior, quiet, never any trouble. Then, Kristina meets the monster: crank. And what begins as a wild, ecstatic ride turns into a struggle through hell for her mind, her soul—her life.”

- #1 New York Times bestseller

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781442471818>

6. *Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher. 126 bans.

“Clay Jensen returns home from school to find a strange package with his name on it lying on his porch. Inside he discovers several cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker—his classmate and crush—who committed suicide two weeks earlier.”

- New York Times bestseller
- Netflix movie

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/thirteen-reasons-why-jay-asher/1008421039?ean=9781595141880>

7. *Tricks*, by Ellen Hopkins. 120 bans.

“Five troubled teenagers fall into prostitution as they search for freedom, safety, community, family, and love in this No. 1 New York Times bestselling novel from Ellen Hopkins.”

- New York Times bestseller

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781481498241>

8. *The Bluest Eye*, by Toni Morrison. 116 bans.

“From the acclaimed Nobel Prize winner—a powerful examination of our obsession with beauty and conformity that asks questions about race, class, and gender with characteristic subtly and grace.”

- Nobel Prize-winning author
- Pulitzer Prize-winning author
- PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction
- *A Parade* best book of all time

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780307278449>

9. *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini. 115 bans.

“The unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father’s servant, caught in the tragic sweep of history.”

- No. 1 New York Times bestselling novel
- New York Times Readers Pick: 100 Best Books of the 21st Century
- Major motion picture and Broadway play

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781594631931>

10. *A Court of Mist and Fury*, by Sarah J. Maas. 112 bans.

Sarah J. Maas, who skyrocketed to fame with the help of BookTok, was the third most frequently banned author of the 2024-25 school

year, according to PEN America's Index of School Book Bans. This follow-up to *A Court of Thorns and Roses* offers romance, fantasy, magic, and political intrigue.

- #1 bestseller
- Goodreads Choice Award winner

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781635575583>

11. *Identical*, by Ellen Hopkins. 110 bans.

"Beneath their perfect family façade, twin sisters struggle alone with impossible circumstances and their own demons until they finally learn to fight for each other."

- New York Times bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781416950066>

12. *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood. 106 bans.

In the near future, Offred is a handmaid in an authoritarian society who is not permitted to read. We'll let that sink in.

- Modern classic
- Award-winning author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780385490818>

13. *Water for Elephants*, by Sara Gruen. 101 bans.

With more than 10,000 copies in print, this bestselling novel was the basis of a movie and a Broadway show.

- No. 1 New York Times Bestseller

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781565125605>

14. *All Boys Aren't Blue*, by George M. Johnson. 100 bans.

"In a series of personal essays, prominent journalist and LGBTQIA+ activist George M. Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue* explores their childhood, adolescence, and college years in New Jersey and Virginia."

- New York Times bestseller
- Goodreads Choice Award winner
- Kirkus Reviews Best Books of 2020

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781250895561>

15 (tie). *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie. 99 bans.

"Bestselling author Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot."

- National Book Award for Young People's Literature

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780316013697>

15 (tie). *Empire of Storms*, by Sarah J. Maas. 99 bans.

War is brewing in the fifth book in this complete, #1 bestselling Throne of Glass series by Sarah J. Maas.

- Bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781639731039>

15 (tie). *Milk and Honey*, by Rupi Kaur. 99 bans.

"#1 *New York Times* bestseller *milk and honey* is a collection of poetry and prose about survival. About the experience of violence, abuse, love, loss, and femininity."

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781449474256>

18. *Out of Darkness*, by Ashley Hope Pérez. 98 bans.

"A dangerous forbidden romance rocks a Texan oil town in 1937, when segregation was a matter of life and death."

- Printz Honor Book
- Booklist 50 Best YA Books of All Time

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780823445035>

19. *Gender Queer: A Memoir*, by Maia Kobabe. 94 bans.

“Started as a way to explain to eir family what it means to be nonbinary and asexual, *Gender Queer* is more than a personal story: it is a useful and touching guide on gender identity—what it means and how to think about it—for advocates, friends, and humans everywhere.”

- ALA Alex Award Winner
- Stonewall-Israel Fishman Non-fiction Award Honor Book

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781549304002>

20. *A Court of Wings and Ruin*, by Sarah J. Maas. 92 bans.

The third novel in the bestselling Court of Thorns and Roses series finds Feyre struggling to master her powers as war bears down.

- No. 1 bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781635575606>

21. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, by Jesse Andrews. 87 bans.

“This is the funniest book you’ll ever read about death. ... Fiercely funny, honest, heart-breaking—this is an unforgettable novel from a bright talent, now also a film that critics are calling ‘a touchstone for its generation’ and ‘an instant classic.’”

- *New York Times* bestseller
- Adapted into a film

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781419719608>

22 (tie). *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, by Sarah J. Maas. 85 bans.

The first book in the Court of Thorns and Roses series introduces 19-year-old huntress Feyre as she is dragged to a magical land of faeries and finds herself developing feelings for her captor.

- #1 New York Times bestselling series

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781635575569>

22 (tie). *This Book Is Gay*, by Juno Dawson. 85 bans.

"The bestselling young adult non-fiction book on sexuality and gender! Lesbian. Gay. Bisexual. Transgender. Queer. Intersex. Straight. Curious. This book is for everyone, regardless of gender or sexual preference. This book is for anyone who's ever dared to wonder. This book is for YOU."

- *Booklist* starred review

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781728254326>

24. *Lucky*, by Alice Sebold. 83 bans.

Alice Sebold's 1999 memoir describes the sexual assault she suffered as an 18-year-old college student. After the man convicted of the crime was exonerated in 2021, publisher Scribner said distribution of the book would cease while they determined how to revise it.

25. *Tilt*, by Ellen Hopkins. 81 bans.

Love stories for three teens cause their worlds to tilt as they grapple with problems including pregnancy and HIV.

- No. 1 New York Times bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781416983316>

26. *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison. 77 bans.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning book from Morrison tells the story of Sethe, who was born a slave and escaped but is haunted by memories and the ghost of her baby, whose tombstone bears a single word: Beloved.

- Pulitzer Prize
- Nobel Prize-winning author
- Bestseller

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781400033416>

27. *Living Dead Girl*, by Elizabeth Scott. 72 bans.

The story of a girl who was abducted at 10, still trapped five years later with a menacing captor.

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781416960607>

28. *Forever...*, by Judy Blume. 71 bans.

Judy Blume's 1975 Young Adult novel has been a target of censorship for 50 years. Blume has said she wrote it because her daughter

wanted to read something where kids could have sex “without either of them having to die.”

- National Book Foundation Medal-winning author
- [NPR 100 Best-Ever Teen Novels](#)
- [Time Magazine 100 Best YA Books of All Time](#)

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781481414432>

29. *Damsel*, by Elana K. Arnold. 70 bans.

In this dark fairy tale, a damsel who is rescued from a fierce dragon by a handsome prince discovers that all is not what it seems.

- Michael L. Printz Award honor book

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780062742339>

30 (tie). *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, by Erika L. Sánchez. 68 bans.

After a tragic accident kills her seemingly perfect sister, Julia is left to piece her family together and live up to a seemingly impossible ideal.

- No. 1 New York Times bestseller
- National Book Award finalist

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781524700515>

30 (tie). *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, by Malinda Lo. 68 bans.

This National Book Award-winning novel is set in 1954, at the height of the Red Scare, when 17-year-old Lily Hu visits a lesbian bar called the Telegraph Club.

- National Book Award winner
- New York Times bestseller
- Stonewall Book Award winner

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780525555278>

30 (tie). *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson. 67 bans.

With more than 3.5 million copies sold and translated into 35 languages, *Speak* is a modern classic about a girl who stops speaking after a sexual assault.

- National Book Award finalist
- Michael L. Printz Honor book
- New York Times bestseller
- Major motion picture

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780312674397>

30 (tie). *A Court of Silver Flames*, by Sarah J. Maas. 67 bans.

Another book in the Court of Thorns and Roses series, *A Court of Silver Flames* follows Feyre's sister Nesta in a romance set against the sweeping backdrop of a world seared by war.

- No. 1 bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781635577990>

34. *Kingdom of Ash*, by Sarah J. Maas. 66 bans.

The finale of the Throne of Glass series features Aelin Galathynius trapped in brutal captivity by her enemy.

- No. 1 bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781639731077>

35. *Breathless*, by Jennifer Niven. 65 bans.

In this coming-of-age love story, Claudine Henry is coping with her parents' divorce and getting ready for college when she meets a local trail guide with a mysterious past.

- #1 New York Times bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781524701994>

36 (tie). *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker. 62 bans.

The Color Purple depicts the lives of African American women in early 20th century rural Georgia through sisters Celie and Nettie, separated as girls but connected across time.

- Pulitzer Prize
- National Book Award
- Two major motion pictures
- Broadway musical

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780143135692>

36 (tie). *Flamer*, by Mike Curato. 62 bans.

In Mike Curato's debut graphic novel, Aiden is away at summer camp, navigating the changes of adolescence and his own identity.

- Lambda Literary Award
- One of Kirkus Reviews' best books of the 21st century

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781250756145>

36 (tie). *Monday's Not Coming*, by Tiffany D. Jackson. 62 bans.

When Claudia's best friend Monday stops coming to school, she seems to be the only one to notice. How can a teenage girl just disappear?

- Bestselling and award-winning author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780062422682>

39. *The Haters*, by Jesse Andrews. 61 bans.

After Camryn Lane publishes her first book, the disturbing messages begin. Is it a disgruntled reader, or someone she knows?

- Bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781538766118>

40 (tie). *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out*, by Susan Kuklin. 60 bans.

Author and photographer Susan Kunklin interviewed six transgender or nonbinary teens navigating their gender identities.

- Stonewall Honor book

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780763673680>

40 (tie). *The Glass Castle*, by Jeannette Walls. 59 bans.

In Jeannette Walls' memoir, she and her siblings learn to parent themselves as their dysfunctional parents founder.

- No. 1 New York Times bestseller
- Major motion picture

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780743247542>

40 (tie). *Melissa (George)*, by Alex Gino. 59 bans.

Melissa is known at school as a boy named George, but she knows she is a girl. When she's told she can't play a part because she is a boy, she comes up with a plan to show who she really is.

- Stonewall Award
- Lambda Literary Award

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781338843415>

43 (tie). *Drama: A Graphic Novel*, by Raina Telgemeier. 57 bans.

Raina Telgemeier explores the drama – on stage and off – surrounding a middle-school musical.

- Stonewall Book Award Honor
- Bestselling author
- Eisner Award-winning author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781338801897>

43 (tie). *What Girls Are Made Of*, by Elana K. Arnold. 57 bans.

In the aftermath of a breakup, Nina revisits regretful moments in her life and the strange memories that left a mark.

- National Book Award finalist

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780823445677>

45 (tie). *More Than This*, by Patrick Ness. 56 bans.

A teenage boy named Seth drowns, but wakes up in a desolate, abandoned version of his childhood hometown.

- Bestselling and award-winning author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780763676209>

45 (tie). *Perfect*, by Ellen Hopkins. 56 bans.

What would four teens give up to be perfect? Four characters explore their own ideas of perfection – whether it's having a perfect face and body or scoring the perfect home run.

- New York Times bestseller

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781416983255>

47 (tie). *Impulse*, by Ellen Hopkins. 54 bans.

Three teens' lives collide at a mental hospital after each has attempted suicide.

- Bestselling author

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9781416903574>

47 (tie). *Like a Love Story*, by Abdi Nazemian. 54 bans.

Three teens encounter the AIDS epidemic in different ways in 1989 New York City.

- Stonewall Honor book
- A TIME magazine best YA book of all time

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780062839374>

49 (tie). *Lucky*, by Rachel Vail. 53 bans.

Part of a trilogy about three sisters, *Lucky* tells the story of popular middle school student Phoebe, who must keep secrets when her family hits financial trouble.

- Starred reviews from Publishers Weekly and the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780060890452>

49 (tie). *The Lovely Bones*, by Alice Sebold. 53 bans.

Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones* is written from the point of view of its murdered 14-year-old heroine as her family grieves and her killer tries to cover his tracks.

<https://bookshop.org/a/2436/9780316168816>

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