

Committee: United States Joint Committee of the Library

Topic: Censorship in High School Libraries (Grades 9-12)



Theme of AUSMUN 2024

The theme for this year's AUSMUN is "Forging Tomorrow with Yesterday's Lessons". Dating back to 500 BC, great minds such as Confucius have spread this ideal: "Study the past, if you would divine the future". During a typical Model United Nations conference, delegates are expected to learn from their country's past and, in many cases, actively rewrite it. Historical knowledge when used effectively can lead to informed decisions; by reflecting on what has and has not worked in the past, collectively we are able to gain perspective on current and future policy. We encourage delegates to keep this ideal in mind while wrestling with the nuances and complications inherent in the ideas of modern day problems.

AUSMUN is committed to actively serving its community and combating pressing issues. As we continue to expand in numbers, we further seek to expand our positive impact on the world around us. We are proud to announce that we have partnered with Dress for Success, a non-profit organization that enables women to become economically independent by offering professional clothing, a network of support, and the resources necessary for both personal and professional growth. By participating in AUSMUN 2024, in addition to debating "model" policy, you are actively bettering society and changing the world.

The 2024 AUSMUN board is honored to host all delegates for our largest conference yet. We cannot wait to see what delegates bring forward to each committee in their efforts to embody values of collaboration and this year's theme. Looking twenty twenty-forward to seeing you!

Rationale

The growing movement to ban books in school libraries has sparked a nationwide debate surrounding the appropriateness of various subject matters, the degree to which content can be taught about historical events, and the type of books that belong in school libraries. The controversy surrounding book banning has stretched beyond the idea of censoring inappropriate literature and content from school libraries and has turned into a complex conversation about the fine line between age-appropriateness and censorship of diversity. Some argue that book banning is necessary to protect America's youth. In contrast, others argue that book banning intentionally attacks minority groups and aims to restrict student access to information based on the bias of their school board and community.

Instances of book banning have grown in frequency over the past ten years, with censorship surging 65% in 2023 alone, as compared to 2022 (American Library Assoc). Simultaneously, families around America are struggling to consider the implications of book bans in their own communities, and many worry that censorship will eliminate diversity measures taken in schools. Discussions include the types of book bans in schools, how school districts should approach book reconsideration processes, if school boards are following through with their policies, the role of political pressures in book banning, and which authors and titles are banned the most. However, the main issue at hand is who gets to decide what is or is not appropriate. Is it professionally trained librarians and educators? Or parents who feel that they should be in charge of censoring their children's literature? What regulations should be enforced in religious institutions versus public education, and on what grounds are some topics sinful or immoral? Additionally, a large aspect of the current debate revolves around health-related

content and how it can be distinguished from sexual content. The question of what information can or cannot be taught to or accessed by students is complex, as well as the debate about private schools' policies and whether they are required to comply with national, state, or local policies.

Background of the Issue

Book banning, burning, and censorship have existed since the creation of the written word. Throughout the centuries, people have censored books with which they disagree. By the time the United States was founded, books and the printing press had existed for centuries, as had the banning of them. During the colonial period, authorities often censored works deemed subversive to religious or governmental authority. For instance, the Massachusetts Bay Colony banned Quaker literature, and authorities in Virginia prohibited the dissemination of material critical of the British crown. In 1852, plantation owners in the Southern United States banned *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe from general circulation, hoping to prevent it from radicalizing any potential readers against slavery (Blakemore 6). In the 1950s, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, an organization of Confederate sympathizers, successfully banned some school textbooks that did not offer a sympathetic view of the South's loss after the Civil War. Additionally, they banned *The Rabbits' Wedding* by Garth Williams because it depicted an interracial marriage (Mudium 7).

Books that are the frequent subject of bans tend to have the same themes in common: minorities, social taboos, or radical ideas. Whether these themes regard race, sexual orientation, or witchcraft, examples throughout history all show a pattern. In the 20th century, the fear of communist ideology during the Cold War era led to widespread censorship efforts, particularly

targeting books with leftist or anti-establishment viewpoints. The McCarthy era saw the banning and burning of books suspected of communist sympathies, as well as the blacklisting of authors and publishers. Furthermore, the Civil Rights Movement and the subsequent push for desegregation in schools sparked contentious debates over educational materials. Books advocating for racial equality, such as "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee and "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry" by Mildred D. Taylor, faced challenges and bans in various school districts across the country. Moreover, the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged traditional gender roles, leading to controversies over books that explored sexuality, reproductive rights, and women's liberation. Works like "Our Bodies, Ourselves" faced censorship attempts due to their frank discussions of women's health and sexuality.

The Supreme Court has addressed book banning before in the 1982 case *Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico*, in which the court ruled in favor of Steven Pico, with some limitations. The Supreme Court's exceptions included books that were "pervasively vulgar" or "educationally unsuitable" (Supreme Court 37). As media and literature have changed throughout the decades, the case of book banning has become a more complex issue, requiring further address. Other lower-level courts have addressed book banning, including *Counts v. Cedarville School District* and *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls, Texas*. As social media and widespread internet access developed, it has led to the formation of groups concerned with the issue of book banning, such as MassResistance and Moms for Liberty. Other groups advocate against book bans, such as the Freedom to Read Foundation, the American Library Association, and the National Coalition Against Censorship. Various groups have popped up, bringing the alertness of book banning to the forefront of the media once again. Cases of book banning and censorship have only increased in recent years, which calls for the need to readdress the issue.

Contemporary Evidence

Censorship in United States high school libraries has grown exponentially in recent years. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom documented 531 attempts to censor books and a total of 3,923 titles challenged during the period between January 1st and August 31st of 2023. Texas had the highest number of challenged titles, with thirty attempts to restrict access to over 1,120 titles (compared to the single-digit data in most states). The top two most challenged books of the 2022 school year in America were *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe and *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, both openly about LGBTQ+ topics. This is a 38% increase compared to the 1,858 titles targeted in 2021.

As book banning becomes more common, it can lead to suppression of so-called “divisive concepts—a shorthand affectation nearly always referring to issues about race and identity” (CAP 1). It opens the door for school boards to remove or even place bans on discussions of topics such as the Holocaust, slavery, and LGBTQ+ history. It allows for drafting legislation to feed off the ideas presented in book banning, such as the Texas House Bill 3979, enacted in September of 2021. It “prohibits compelling a teacher for any social studies course in the required curriculum to discuss a particular current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs” (Milwicki 6). This bill includes the following: “prohibits an employee of a district, charter school, or state agency from requiring or making part of a course certain concepts relating to race and sex; prohibits requiring an employee of those entities to engage in training, orientation, or therapy that presents any form of race or sex stereotyping or blame based on race or sex; prohibits those entities from accepting

private funding for applicable curriculum, teacher training, or professional development” (House Bill 3979).

Additionally, parents play a big part in decisions about book banning because, depending on the school district, they significantly influence the school boards’ decisions. In December of 2022 in West Virginia, there was a meeting in the Agricultural Commissioner’s office to hear from Dennis Westover, the leader of a pro-book banning group. During the meeting, Westover presented slides featuring books on historical figures and themes relating to diversity. He argued that they should be banned because he found them antithetical to his faith. “I am a Christian, and my worldview is no longer expressed in the schools,” Westover said. “I don’t want the LGBTQ worldview expressed in the schools either” (Karbala 5). Conversations such as these are growing in momentum around the country. This includes new legislation being passed, new societal standards, and new regulations being implemented each day.

Directive

Delegates should form firm stances on the topic while remaining diplomatic and respectful of all sides of the debate. We urge all delegates to cultivate a thoughtful and informed debate and navigate committee discussions with respect and dignity, as this is an incredibly intricate and intense topic. Here are some questions to consider when beginning your research and preparing for debate:

1. Is book banning unconstitutional under the First Amendment’s freedom of speech?

2. What is the difference between the national, state, school district, and an individual school's power, and what can they all individually regulate?
3. How do schools distinguish between hate speech and historical text; should they be categorized together? What belongs or does not belong in high school libraries?
4. What is the difference between appropriateness and bias? How should schools differentiate between a book that is truly inappropriate for the age category and a book that goes against their own beliefs?
5. Who gets to decide which books are or aren't allowed in schools? Is it professionally trained librarians and educators, or parents?
6. What regulations should be enforced in religious institutions vs public education, and on what grounds are certain topics sinful or immoral?
7. How should school boards differentiate between sexual content and health-related content? Does the censorship of sex education books pose a threat to America's youth? Could this potentially see greater implications such as rises in teen pregnancies?
8. What role should parents play in the banning of books? Does their payment of taxes to the school district allow them to influence major decisions such as which books are allowed in school libraries?

Resources for Delegates

[Book Banning in the United States and Beyond](#)

[Banned Book Data](#)

[Book Banning in History](#)

[Attempts to Ban Books Doubled in 2022](#)

[Professors Explore Censorship Around the World During Banned Books Week](#)

[Censorship by the Numbers](#)

[Book Banning Curriculum Restrictions](#)

Delegations

- 1. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez** - Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives for New York's 14th congressional district. She advocates for equal rights and representation of minority groups and has spoken out against book banning in both the House of Representatives as well as her online platforms. She is against book banning and believes that education should not be limited by community bias.

[AOC on Republican Book Banning](#)

[Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#)

[Sponsored Legislation](#)

- 2. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a non-profit organization that works to support human rights, including LGBTQ+ freedoms, reproductive rights, and free speech. They have recently been fighting against discriminatory book bans, saying all students should have access to literature and reading.

ACLU believes in the freedoms of students protected under the First Amendment and believes in the right of students to read.

[Fight Against Texas Book Ban](#)

[Banned Books Stance](#)

[Fight Against Michigan Book Bans](#)

- 3. American Library Association (ALA)** - The American Library Association (ALA) is a non-profit organization and the oldest library association in the world. This delegation focuses on access to diverse literature and equitable education across the country. The ALA is renowned for its librarianship and wealth of factual information regarding libraries, books, education, and more. The ALA is firmly against book banning.

[American Library Association](#)

[Record Censorship](#)

[Library Book Challenges](#)

- 4. Amy Klobuchar** - Amy Klobuchar is a Democratic Senator from Minnesota and the Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on the Library. She is known to be relatively liberal on topics such as healthcare, immigration, and climate change. Klobuchar has expressed mild opposition to banned books, although has not taken much action against them.

[Amy Klobuchar](#)

[Politics and Students' Reading](#)

[Antitrust](#)

- 5. Bill Lee** - Bill Lee is a republican politician who is currently serving as the 50th Governor of Tennessee. Tennessee was in the top ten states with the highest number of banned books in 2022. On April 28th, 2023, Lee signed into law SB 1059. This bill

allows criminal prosecution of any book publisher or vendor who knowingly distributes any books containing “obscene materials” to public schools.

[SB 1059 Details](#)

[Book Banning Tennessee](#)

['Age-Appropriate' School Library Bill](#)

- 6. Brian Schatz** - Brian Schatz is a democratic politician who is currently serving as a Hawaiian senator. This delegate believes that book banning is a direct attack on First Amendment rights and also believes that the freedom to read is essential to a strong democracy. In a 2022 press release, he stated that “Any attempt to ban books is wrong. Full stop” and that “Freedom of expression is a founding principle of our country, and it’s up to all of us to stand up against these attacks on this fundamental right”.

[Brian Schatz](#)

[Schatz Reintroduces a Resolution Recognizing Banned Books Week](#)

[Schatz Condemns Banning Books](#)

- 7. Chuck Schumer** - Chuck Schumer is a democratic politician currently serving as a senator for New York. In a press release in February of 2022, Schumer defended censored literature as “vital to society because it can expand people’s understanding of the world around us”. This delegate has expressed that book banning is corroding the United States education system, and that the availability of diverse literature is crucial to a well-rounded education and worldview. This delegate has also sponsored multiple pieces of legislation relating to LGBTQ+ rights, women’s rights, and healthcare access.

[Schumer Press Release on Book Banning](#)

[Chuck Schumer Legislation](#)

[Chuck Schumer](#)

8. **Cory Booker** - Cory Booker is a democratic politician currently representing New Jersey. During the September senatorial hearing, he expressed feelings that book banning was not a federal issue, although he has previously expressed distaste for censorship of books. As a liberal-leaning leader, this delegate supports preserving the availability of diverse educational materials, including LGBTQ+ and racially focused literature.

[Senate Hearing on Book Bans](#)

[Book Banning Debate](#)

9. **David Zuckerman** - David Zuckerman is a progressive democratic politician who is currently serving as the 84th lieutenant governor of Vermont. In response to the increase of book bans in America, Zuckerman held a banned book-reading series. His series traveled across Vermont starting in the summer and ending this fall. Zuckerman advocates against book bans and points out the homophobic and racist sentiments involving the movement.

[Banned Books Tour of Vermont](#)

[Banned Books in Other States with Vermont](#)

[Zuckerman Discusses Nation Wide Book Bans](#)

10. **Dick Durbin** - Dick Durbin is a democratic politician currently serving as an Illinois senator. During a press release in September of 2023, he said, “Efforts to ban books are wrong, whether they come from the right or the left. When we ban books like *Maus* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the name of protecting students, we are instead denying those students the opportunity to learn about difficult topics”. This delegate is an advocate for the freedom to learn and read regardless of racial or cultural differences.

[Press Release on Book Banning](#)

[Recent Bill Introductions and Press Releases by Durbin](#)

[Dick Durbin](#)

11. Florida State Board of Education - The Florida State Board of Education is mainly responsible for setting curriculum standards and reviewing instructional materials for Florida public and charter schools. This delegate has the ability and authority to implement new curricula in schools and create recommendations for politicians and other delegates in the committee. They are responsible for implementing senate bill regulations into curricula; following Florida's views, this delegate leans towards more conservative regulations that ban more books. This delegation is complex in the research required because it is the intersection of education professionals and state legislation implementation.

[Florida State Board of Education](#)

[Florida School Districts Removed Over 300 Books](#)

12. Freedom to Read Foundation - The Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF) is a non-profit organization founded by the American Library Association. They are an anti-censorship organization and a sponsor of Banned Book Week. This delegate is known for defending freedom of speech and freedom of the press as they pertain to libraries, books, etc.

[Freedom to Read Foundation](#)

[FTRF History](#)

[Challenging Texas Censorship Law](#)

13. Gavin Newsom - Gavin Newsom is a democratic politician who is currently serving as the 40th Governor of California. On Sept. 25, 2023, Newsom signed into law AB 1078. AB 1078 prohibited book bans and textbook censorship in all public schools in California. He stated that “book bans harm all children and youth”, and he supports “intolerance and division across society”.

[AB 1078 Details](#)

[Bans on Book Bans](#)

14. Greg Abbott - Greg Abbott is the governor of Texas and supports book banning as well as the removal of LGBTQ+ materials in Texas schools. On June 13, 2023, he signed House Bill 900 into law, which prohibits sexually explicit materials in Texas public school libraries. Texas currently has the highest number of challenged titles at 1120 unique titles challenged in 2023.

[Texas Lawmakers Set New Standards](#)

[Greg Abbott Signs Ban on 'Sexually Explicit' Books in School Libraries Into Law](#)

[What Can Be Taught and Read in Texas?](#)

[Letter from Greg Abbott to TEA](#)

15. Gretchen Whitmer - Gretchen Whitmer is the Democratic Governor of Michigan. Whitmer has been a vocal advocate against book banning, retaliating against remarks made by her opposing candidate regarding the alleged danger of certain unspecified books to children. Banned books were a primary topic of debate in Whitmer’s campaign for governor, displaying her opposition to the idea.

[Dixon-Whitmer Debate](#)

[Threat of Books](#)

[Michigan Book Bans](#)

16. Jamie Raskin - Jamie Raskin is a democratic representative of Maryland in the House of Representatives. He condemns the escalating attacks on books and freedom of expression in the United States. Additionally, this delegate has concerns that “freedom of expression” is being silenced by the banning of books.

[Banned Books Week](#)

[Resolutions](#)

17. Kathy Hochul - Kathy Hochul is a democratic politician, currently serving as the 57th Governor of New York. She recently signed a letter along with 7 other governors that was sent to publishing companies stating that censorship will not be supported in schools in their states and claimed it negatively impacts school students.

[Hochul Investigate Reports of Anti-LGBTQ+ Bias at Long Island Libraries](#)

[Hochul's Bill to Recognize Banned Books Week](#)

18. Kim Reynolds - Governor of Iowa Kim Reynolds is a strong advocate for parents' involvement in education. She argues for legislation that allows parents to challenge certain books in school libraries and recently supported Senate File 496, an act focusing on the regulation of subjects taught in schools and parental/guardian involvement.

[Kim Reynolds](#)

[Iowa Governor Responds to School Book Ban Questions](#)

[Senate File 496](#)

[Kim Reynolds Government Site](#)

19. Kevin Cramer - Kevin Cramer is a republican politician who is currently serving as the junior United States senator from North Dakota. In remarks before the North Dakota

House of Representatives, Cramer said, “Book banning never seems to end after just a couple of authors. Censorship rarely stops with the silence of just a few fringe actors.” He goes on to say that attempting to rewrite history increases the chances of past actions repeating themselves. In 2022, North Dakota had the seventh-highest number of banned books.

[Sen. Creamer's Remarks](#)

[ND Book Ban Bills](#)

20. Laphonza Butler - Laphonza Butler is a Democratic California Senator and is the first openly LGBTQ+ person to represent California in the Senate. She is an advocate for human and women’s rights as well as LGBTQ+ and POC (person of color) representation in legislation. This delegate is against book banning and supports diverse representation in school libraries.

[California Book Banning Current Legislation](#)

[Laphonza Butler Career Highlights](#)

[Laphonza Butler](#)

21. Lindsey Graham - Lindsey Graham is a republican politician and is currently serving as the senior United States senator from South Carolina. South Carolina had the fifth-highest number of banned books in 2022. During a senate hearing on book bans and censorships in September, Graham said that concerned parents are “absolutely right” in thinking inappropriate content is being pushed on their children.

[Senate Hearing on Book Bans](#)

[A Senator's Role in Book Banning](#)

[More Information on September Senate Hearing](#)

22. Marco Rubio - Marco Rubio is a republican politician who is currently serving as the senior United States senator from Florida. Rubio has been a vocal supporter of legislation that supports and allows the banning of books in school libraries and has spoken out against the American Library Association on multiple occasions. He recently wrote a letter to the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services calling for “swift action” against ALA’s actions.

[Public Officials Are Right to Leave ALA](#)

[Rubio Against the ALA](#)

[Florida Severing Ties with the ALA](#)

23. Missouri State Board of Education - The Missouri State Board of Education focuses on setting policies for the Department of Primary and Secondary Education. This delegate establishes requirements for education and the distribution of federal funds to school districts. During the 2022-2023 school year, Missouri had over 330 books banned in public schools, and in August of 2022, Senate Bill 775 went into effect, which bans “explicit sexual material” in private and public schools. This delegation is complex in the research required because it is the intersection of education professionals and state legislation implementation.

[Missouri Leads Nation in Educational Intimidation Bills](#)

[Missouri Bans 330 Books During the 2022-2023 School Year](#)

[About the Missouri State Board of Education](#)

[Senate Bill 775](#)

24. Mitch McConnell - Mitch McConnell is the Senate Minority Leader from Kentucky. Although this delegate does not have significant published opinions on book banning, his

voting history and political party show that he is most likely in support of banning explicit books in Kentucky public schools. However, in 2010 he had an involvement with Elena Kagan and questioned whether she would back book banning as “very troubling”. In 2023, Kentucky had 45 unique titles challenged.

[McConnell Raises Book Banning Concerns About Kagan](#)

[Mitch McConnell](#)

[McConnell and Kagan](#)

25. Mitt Romney - Mitt Romney is a republican politician who is currently serving as the junior United States senator from Utah. On his government website, Romney stated that he “supports policies that will return authority back to the states and empower parents, not bureaucrats, in Washington. In 2022, Utah had the fourth-highest number of banned books.

[Mitt Romney Education Policies](#)

[Mitt Romney](#)

26. Moms for Liberty - Moms of Liberty is a conservative organization that argues for traditional views in school classrooms. They oppose school curriculums that mention LGBT rights, race and ethnicity, critical race theory, and or any forms of discrimination. Many chapters of the organization have advocated for the banning of books in school libraries that mention LGBTQ+ topics. This delegation has significant influence over conservative groups and politicians; while they do not hold any legislative power, they have a large sphere of influence and could influence other delegates in the room.

[Moms for Liberty](#)

[Founding and Structure](#)

[Moms for Liberty Book List](#)

27. National Coalition Against Censorship - The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is a group of nonprofit organizations that aims to establish free speech with an emphasis on the inclusion of diversity and democracy. The group is known for promoting free speech, expression, and inclusivity, and outwardly opposes censorship of literature and book bans.

[National Coalition Against Censorship](#)

[Policy on Books](#)

28. Raphael Warnock - Raphael Warnock is a democratic politician who is currently serving as a senator for Georgia. Raphael stated, “We have to push back against this idea that somehow our children cannot handle the truth of the complicated world we live in and of our American story”. This delegate has demonstrated his support for freedom of speech and believes that books should be available to all.

[Warnock Stands Up for Freedom of Expression](#)

["I Don't Know if my Book Would be Banned in Florida"](#)

29. Ron DeSantis - Ron DeSantis is the governor of Florida and has repeatedly shown his support for book banning and the censorship of topics such as race and sex education as well as LGBTQ+ representation in school curricula. He has defended Florida’s book-banning cases by arguing that the current regulations protect students from explicit literature. Florida currently has the second-highest number of challenged titles at 194 unique titles challenged in 2023.

[Ron DeSantis](#)

[Florida Parental Rights in Education](#)

[Ron DeSantis Debunks Book Ban Hoax](#)

[Florida Bill: School Materials Review Process](#)

30. Texas State Board of Education - The Texas State Board of Education is mainly responsible for setting curriculum standards and reviewing instructional materials for Texas public and charter schools. This delegate has the ability and authority to implement new curricula in schools and create recommendations for politicians and other delegates in the committee. The Committee on Instruction had a meeting about Instruction Item 4 in August of 2023, which discussed the ways Senate Bill 900 would influence or impact school library collections. This delegation is complex in the research required because it is the intersection of education professionals and state legislation implementation.

[Committee on Instruction Item 4](#)

[Texas State Board of Education](#)

[House Bill 900](#)

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