

LIBERTY GAZETTE

JAMES AND THE GIANT BAN

by Lisa and Aaron

Aside from causing a paper cut every now and then, books never hurt anyone. Right?

Wrong. Or at least, that's what some people want you to think!!!

Across the country, schools and libraries are being told to get rid of certain books so that people can't read them. They say these books are somehow harmful to readers in some way.

Like, maybe the authors use words some people don't like. Maybe people disagree with the ideas in the books, or they think the characters behave badly.

When someone complains that a book should get taken away, that's called a "book challenge." And if the challenged book ends up taken away, it's called a "book ban."

(This is just Aaron writing now.)
That's what happened to one of my favorite books of all time: James and the Giant Peach, by Roald Dahl. I tried to check it out from the library, only to find out it had been banned!!

(Now back to me and Lisa!)
Book banning goes against our First Amendment right to free speech. Books may not speak out loud, but their written words are considered protected speech, just the same. Authors have the right to write, and readers have the right to read!

So if you've got a problem with a book, we have a solution: instead of banning it... just don't read it! But don't keep others from reading it, either, because that's not fair. A book you don't like might be somebody else's favorite.



After all, some of the best books we've ever read are books that have been banned or challenged. Read them for yourself to see what all the fuss is about. Trust us: IT'S LIT...erary!

AARON & LISA'S TOP FIVE BEST BANNED OR CHALLENGED BOOKS OF ALL TIME:

**#5: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*,
by L. Frank Baum**
"We'll ban you, Dorothy! And
your little dog, too!"

That's right! This classic story has been banned and challenged many times since it was first published more than 100 years ago. People have complained about it being "untrue to life," that it features strong girl characters, and that it describes some witches as being "good," like Glinda.

#4: *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White
People have tried to ban this book about Charlotte, a spider who uses the power of words to save a pig named Wilbur, because they object to talking animals. The challengers consider this to be "unnatural" and "blasphemous," or disrespectful towards God. They also think the ending of the book is inappropriate for children. We won't spoil it for you, so you'll have to read *Charlotte's Web* for yourself to decide if that's true! (Our take: it's not. But you may want to grab tissues while you read, all the same.)

#3: *Captain Underpants*, by Dav Pilkey
A tale about a hero in tighty-whities became the most complained-about book in America for two years in a row (in 2012 and 2013). People say *Captain Underpants* has bad language and is too violent, making

it "unsuited for [kids]." We say it's hilarious and weird! We laughed our underpants off! So to all you challengers out there, before you throw *Captain Underpants* in with the dirty laundry, maybe we just agree to disagree?

#2: *New Kid*, by Jerry Craft
This award-winning book, about a Black boy named Jordan who starts 7th grade at a mostly-white school, was banned for a short time in 2021. Some parents were upset by how the book talks about race. They even went so far as to try and cancel a school event with the author, Jerry Craft! Thankfully, a group of reviewers found that there was nothing inappropriate about the book, and it was returned to the shelves.

**#1: *James and the Giant Peach*,
by Roald Dahl**
Our #1 pick for best banned or challenged book is - you guessed it! - Aaron's favorite: *James and the Giant Peach*, by Roald Dahl. It's a story about a little boy who sets sail for New York in an enormous, magical peach along with an earthworm, a spider, a centipede, a ladybug, and a grasshopper. The book has been challenged and banned for hinting at things that might be inappropriate for kids, and for being too scary. But that completely ignores the fact that this book is super funny and AMAZING!

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

How To Start a Banned Book Club



Book bans and challenges are designed to stop people from reading certain books. Fortunately, there is a fun way to oppose this practice: read them, anyway!

That's what then-high school junior [Ella Scott](#) did in 2021, when she discovered that her school district planned to remove books from public school classrooms and library shelves. She and her best friend started a Banned Book Club with their classmates, to exercise their First Amendment rights and decide for themselves what they thought about the books the district didn't want them to read.

Want to do the same, but don't know where to start? Here are five easy steps for getting your Banned Book Club up and running:

Step 1: Invite some fellow readers

Book clubs can be big or small – reading along with just one or two other people can be enough to get started. The important thing is that you're all interested in reading and open to talking about what you've read.

Ask a few friends and/or family members if they'd like to form a book club where the only things you read are banned or challenged books. You can start with two or three other readers, inviting more people to join you each time.

It doesn't matter if you've known your fellow readers for a long time, or if you've just met. One of the joys of having a book club is getting to know others better than you had before. Everyone imagines and interprets a story differently, and it can be a lot of fun to hear what different people in your group think about the same piece of writing. You may be surprised by how much you learn about each person!

Step 2: Pick a book to read

Pick a book for the whole group to read together. This might sound simpler than it is! There have been so many books that have been banned or challenged over the years that it can be hard to know where to begin.

If you know of a book challenge or ban that is underway in your area, you might want to start there. But if not, check out the ACLU's list of [Popular Books that have been Banned or Challenged](#), which groups together titles based on different categories. Or the American Library Association's [Challenged Books Archive](#), which lists the top 10 most frequently challenged books by year, going back to 2001. Common Sense Media also has a list of [Frequently Challenged and Banned Books for Kids and Teens](#) that includes everything from picture books to classic literature.

Step 3: Find a copy

If the book you've chosen has been banned where you live, this could be tricky. You may not be able to find it at your public library, or at your school.

Start by asking other people in your book club if they have a copy of the book at home. Once they are done reading, they can pass it back and forth among the book club members.

If not, you might be able to find an online recording of someone reading the book out loud – especially if it's short, like a picture book. The ACLU has [an awesome playlist](#) of artists reading from some of their favorite banned books. You might also be able to find an audiobook version to stream. (Audiobooks totally count as reading!)

Finally, if you are able, consider buying the book from a local or online bookseller, or putting together a wish-list for books people could buy for you. Among other things, book bans hurt authors by making it hard for them to earn money from sales of their books.

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

How To Start a Banned Book Club



Step 4: Read and discuss

Now comes the fun part! Read the book on your own. Take note of what you think about it. What do you like or dislike about the story? Which characters do you relate to? What surprises you about the book? What disappoints you? Why do you think someone might find the book controversial enough to challenge or ban it? Would you recommend it to a friend?

When your book club gets together, pose these same questions to the group. It's okay if not everyone agrees; that's what makes book clubs so interesting! Listen to what others have to say about it, and share your own opinions, too.

Once everyone has had a chance to talk about it, see if you can learn more about why the book has been challenged in the first place. Talk about whether the criticisms against the book or its author make sense to you, and what is gained or lost when others can't read it.

Step 5: Decide what book to read next

Congratulations: you've had your first book club meeting! Now it's time to plan the next one.

As a group, decide how to choose the next banned book to read. You can do this a few different ways. Some book clubs make a list of 5-10 books, then go through them one by one until it's time to pick another 5-10 titles. Others nominate a few books per meeting and vote on what they most want to read next. You can also assign a different person to pick what the group should read. There's no right or wrong way to do it! The important thing is that you keep on reading, and thinking, and sharing your ideas.

That's what free speech is all about!

EPISODE 2 STUDY HALL:

Book Bans and Challenges FAQs



1. What is a book challenge? What is a book ban?

When someone makes a complaint about a book they strongly object to, with the goal of getting it removed from a school or library, that's called a book challenge. If they succeed, and the book is taken away so that others can't read it, that's a book ban.

2. Why do people ban or challenge books?

A person or a group might challenge a book if they disagree with the kinds of ideas it expresses. Challengers want to keep others from being exposed to what they consider to be inappropriate ideas and information inside the book, even if it might be valuable to somebody else. These might include ideas about gender, sexuality, race, religion, politics... or even how kids should behave in school!

People have even challenged books because they don't approve of the kind of language, humor, or tone that the author uses. (Captain Underpants by Dav Pilkey is a classic example!)

If enough people with decision-making power – like a school board, or state legislators – agree with a book challenge, they will demand that the book be removed from shelves, even if students want to read it. In other words: they will ban it.

3. Why are book challenges and bans a First Amendment issue?

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects our right to free speech. This means that people are free to share their thoughts and opinions, without fear of the government telling them they can't.

Books may not speak out loud, but the words and ideas they communicate are considered free speech just the same. Book bans keep authors from being able to share their ideas freely – and they keep readers from being able to explore those ideas, too.

It's important to remember that challenging a book is not the same as saying that you don't like a book. Freedom of speech means that we are allowed to express our opinions – even if they are negative! But there is a difference between saying “I don't like this book” and “Because I don't like this book, no one should ever have the chance to read it.” Book challenges and book bans restrict our freedom to make our own decisions and form our own opinions.

