**Sample Op-ed for Local Paper**

The call to ban books is nothing new. Since 1982, public libraries in the U.S. have received demands to [ban more than 11,300 books](https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/by-the-numbers-banned-books-week/). But according to the [American Library Association](https://time.com/6117685/book-bans-school-libraries/), an unprecedented number of school boards are currently being bombarded with requests to remove books from school libraries and classrooms.

Even more alarming is that those books most often banned [disproportionately impact students of color](https://madison365.com/tennessee-parents-say-some-books-make-students-feel-discomfort-because-theyre-white-they-say-a-new-law-backs-them-up/) or those struggling with questions related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Indeed, a recent lawsuit challenging Oklahoma’s new law restricting the teaching of critical race theory claims that the approved reading list only [allows books by white male authors](https://kfor.com/news/local/lawsuit-alleges-book-banning-related-to-new-oklahoma-law/), while a recent analysis of the [850 books Texas lawmakers seek to ban](https://www.npr.org/2021/10/28/1050013664/texas-lawmaker-matt-krause-launches-inquiry-into-850-books) revealed that [62% involve LGBTQ+ characters or issues](https://bookriot.com/texas-book-ban-list/).

At a time when the country has never been more polarized, it is hardly surprising that parents may object to certain materials and ideas taught in public schools. Parents have the right to decide what people and values they wish to expose their children to, including whether to educate them at a public or private school or at home. U.S. law, however, does not grant them the right to impose those decisions on other parents’ kids. The burden on public schools to meet the unique learning needs of every student is difficult enough without having every decision they make be subject to the differing viewpoints of every parent.

Moreover, many schools today already offer students one or more alternative book titles if a parent has a concern about a particular assignment. Parents can exercise that option if they object to a specific work without disrupting what the rest of the class reads.

That’s why those in our community who believe that banning books diminishes the quality of education children receive and undermines democratic principles must urge their local school boards and lawmakers to not give in to pressure to censor certain books and concepts because, reading texts like Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* about the horrors of slavery might give [a 17-year-old nightmares](https://www.businessinsider.com/virginia-gop-ad-features-woman-who-wanted-to-ban-beloved-from-school-2021-10) or make [children “uncomfortable](https://madison365.com/tennessee-parents-say-some-books-make-students-feel-discomfort-because-theyre-white-they-say-a-new-law-backs-them-up/).”

To this, I can only add that learning isn’t always comfortable. Millions of kids struggle with math or science concepts, but most parents understand that their children still must learn the material. Why should the same not be true for the materials students encounter in English, history, or other required classes? Reading more challenging novels or other texts at school allows for a teacher or librarian with an advanced understanding of the work to help students put the text in proper context and think critically. It also [teaches students empathy](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1239918), increasingly regarded as one of the [most important skills leaders need](https://www.inc.com/yoram-solomon/10-reasons-empathy-is-most-important-business-skill-you-will-ever-need.html) to succeed. Banning books, therefore, is not only against a child’s best interests but against all our best interests.

Name, City, Contact Information