



HOW TO FIGHT BOOK BANS

A Tip Sheet for Students

Campaigns to remove books from public schools and libraries are spreading quickly across the United States—and are often targeting works by LGBTQ+ writers, women writers, and writers of color. Those who stand up against these campaigns sometimes face overt hostility and intimidation, with some organized political efforts behind these attempts to censor what you can and can't read in the classroom.

How can students mobilize and respond? This guide will help you fight back against book bans and build a stronger community of readers and advocates in the process.

1. BRUSH UP ON THE BASICS: WHAT IS A BOOK BAN?

- Book bans can mean permanently removing a book from the classroom or library shelf, but they aren't always that straightforward. Rarely do people say they're seeking to ban a book; rather they identify lists of books or authors and subject them to endless review processes that 'suspend' them from classrooms and libraries. Just because it's temporary doesn't make it any less of a ban.

2. SPEAK OUT.

- The best way to fight censorship is by exercising your First Amendment rights. Courts have found that students have a constitutional right to participate in non-disruptive protests during the school day.
- Follow [these guidelines](#) from our partners at the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) to ensure that your demonstration cannot be ignored.
- Make sure your voice is part of the public conversation. Use platforms like social media or the press to express your support for keeping books in classrooms and libraries.



3. PUT PRESSURE ON DECISION MAKERS.

- Most school districts allow public comment. Look up your district's rules, and see if you can deliver public testimony. Bring your support crew: your friends, parents, or teachers. And if permitted, take photos and share your experience. People are more likely to take action if they see you setting an example.
- Remind your school leadership that you, as a student, should be the focal point of the school. Talk to them about why a challenged book is important to you.
- Write letters to your school board, school leaders, and library administration, and encourage others to do the same. Let them know what kinds of books you want access to and remind them that you're keeping tabs on whether or not they acknowledge your demands.

4. REPORT BOOK BANS.

- Let PEN America, the [NCAC](#), and the [American Library Association](#) know when a book is challenged at your school. This data will help advocacy organizations like ours fight book bans in the future.

5. FIND SUPPORT AND PROTECT YOURSELF FROM ONLINE HARASSMENT.

- Women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately targeted by online abuse—and students have been targeted for fighting against censorship.
- If you are subjected to online hate and harassment, remember that abuse is not your fault and you are not alone.
- Be sure to take a look at PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Manual](#), which outlines [abusive tactics](#) and offers guidance on how to [prepare](#) (including against [hacking](#) and [doxing](#)), [respond](#) (including [assessing threats](#), [documentation](#), [blocking and muting](#), and [practicing counterspeech](#)), [take care of yourself](#), and [find support](#).

For more information on defending free expression in schools, [visit our issue page](#).