

# PEN America warns of rise in books 'systematically removed from school libraries'



PEN America released its list of the most-banned books of the 2024-2025 school year on Wednesday – and warned that the number of books challenged or banned in public school districts across the country has risen [exponentially](#) in the past two years.

The group dedicated to free expression counted 6,870 bans during the past academic year. While that's down from a total of 10,046 bans imposed during the 2023-24 school year, it's still a sharp rise from the period of 2021-2023, which averaged just under 3,000 incidents of book banning each year, in what it calls a "disturbing normalization of censorship" in public schools.

PEN America defines a school book ban as "any action taken against a book based on its content and as a result of parent or community challenges, administrative decisions, or in response to direct or threatened action by governmental officials, that leads to a book being either completely removed from availability to students, or where access to a book is restricted or diminished."

According to the new report, the most-banned book in the country in the 2023-24 school year was Anthony Burgess' 1962 dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange*, followed by Patricia McCormick's 2006 young adult title *Sold*, a fictional account of a girl sold into sexual slavery in India that was named one of the American Library Association's [best YA books](#). The third book on the list is Jennifer Niven's YA coming-of-age novel *Breathless*.

Horror writer Stephen King ( 206 instances), young adult novelist Ellen Hopkins (167 instances) and fantasy author Sarah J. Maas (162 instances) are the authors listed as most-challenged overall in the 2024-25 academic year.

Other frequently banned and challenged authors include novelist Jodi Picoult, manga author Yusei Matsui and children's and young adult author Elana K. Arnold.

The report lists the states with the highest rates of book banning in 2024-25 as Florida, with 2,304 instances; Texas (1,781); and Tennessee (1,622).

"Never before in the life of any living American have so many books been systematically removed from school libraries across the country. Never before have so many states passed laws or regulations to facilitate the banning of books, including bans on specific titles statewide," the PEN report says.

The PEN America report's authors added that although many bans have been enacted at the local and state levels, the federal government has been using new executive orders signed by President Trump to [remove](#) certain titles from Department of Defense schools on military bases; in July, nearly 600 titles were removed for lack of alignment with executive orders related to [diversity](#), [discussions of race](#) and ["gender ideology extremism."](#)

In January, the Department of Education issued a memo in which it called book bans a ["hoax,"](#) and rescinded all federal guidance that indicated that removals of "age-inappropriate" books could be violations of civil rights laws.

PEN America also argues that representations of LGBTQ+ identity in books are frequently deemed "sexually explicit," including in the picture books [And Tango Makes Three](#), the true-life tale of two male Emperor Penguins hatching and raising a baby chick together at New York's Central Park Zoo, and [The Purim Superhero](#), whose main character debates what costume he should wear for the joyous Jewish holiday – and who has two fathers.