

# UNDERSTANDING THE FIRST AMENDMENT

## A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

Our fundamental freedom to read continues to be challenged. Children's books are constant targets of book-banning efforts in school systems and public libraries. Random House Children's Books is **committed** to those who stand against censorship, and we continue to publish books that celebrate freedom of expression. **We are proud to support our authors' right to write and our readers' right to read.**

## THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of **religion**, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of **speech**, or of the **press**; or the right of the people peaceably to **assemble**, and to **petition** the government for a redress of grievances.

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## GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED

- Discuss the freedoms granted under the First Amendment. What does “right of the people peaceably to assemble” mean? In recent years, we have seen the rise of several protest movements, including the women’s march and the Black Lives Matter marches. What is the purpose of these marches? How are the participants protected by the First Amendment? Research other marches and protests in our nation’s history. Some of these marches have turned violent. Explain why violence isn’t protected by the First Amendment.
- Which part of the First Amendment addresses the freedom to read? How would you explain this to those who argue there is no language in the First Amendment that guarantees a person’s right to read?

## DIG DEEPER INTO THE FIRST AMENDMENT AND THE FREEDOM TO READ

- What is intellectual freedom? Explain the relationship between intellectual freedom and the freedom to read. How does intellectual freedom encourage opposing views about a topic or issue? Explain why it’s important to listen to all views.
- Define  *censorship* . How is censorship about fear and control? Discuss why some people want to control what children read. Parents have the right to control what  *their*  children read, but they don’t have the right to choose what other children read. Debate whether people who try to ban books are imposing their values on others.
- Discuss the difference between a book challenge and censorship. How might some book challenges cause school officials to ultimately censor a book? Many school administrators and public library directors try to keep such censorship out of the news. Why is it important to expose all censorship cases?
- The late Norma Klein once said, “I still can’t believe there’s anything objectionable about telling it like it is.” Why are censors frightened by truth? Below is a list of frequently challenged titles. What commonalities do these titles have? What is different about them? What do those trying to ban them object to? What is their rationale for banning the books? Do you agree?

- *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*  by Erika L. Sánchez
- *Dear Martin*  by Nic Stone
- *This Is My America*  by Kim Johnson
- *Two Boys Kissing*  by David Levithan

- What does “age appropriate” mean? Those who have challenged books like  *Donovan’s Big Day*  by Lesléa Newman (picture book, ages 3-7) and  *Lily and Dunkin*  by Donna Gephart (middle-grade, ages 10 and up) claim that the books aren’t age appropriate. Donovan has two mothers, and Lily is transgender. Why is it important for kids like Donovan and Lily to see themselves in books? How might these books serve as a window for other readers? The main characters in each of these books is around the same age as the intended audience. How can stories about kids their age be inappropriate? Discuss.

- Some parents and school administrators advocate restricted shelves. How is this practice a form of censorship? Read about the following court case: [censorfreelib.blogspot.com/2009/10/counts-v-cedarville-school-district.html](http://censorfreelib.blogspot.com/2009/10/counts-v-cedarville-school-district.html). Discuss the position of the parent bringing the lawsuit. Do you agree?
- What are trigger warnings? Why do some public and school librarians want to place trigger warnings on books? Explain what viewpoint neutrality is. Debate whether trigger warnings are viewpoint neutral. How could such warnings lead to censorship?
- Why did our forefathers feel it necessary to include an amendment to the Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion to all Americans? Discuss the relationship between freedom of religion and freedom of expression. Organized religious groups have historically brought many book challenges. Some have even created websites that list titles with “objectionable” content. Debate the intent of these organized groups. Discuss whether these religious groups are intolerant of other people’s views. Read “The Golden Rule” by Carole Boston Weatherford in *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Voices* edited by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson. How does this poem promote the position of the First Amendment?
- Politicians, school and library boards, and some parents don’t want children and teens to read about other cultures. Why? Explain why this has become a common issue in book challenges.
- In the Supreme Court case *Board of Education, Island Trees School District v. Pico* (1982), one school board member advocating removing a book from the school library stated, “I would not dream of trying to take that book out of the public library. That would be censorship—and we are not censors.” Explain how his statement is misguided. How is the mission of a school library similar to that of a public library? How is it different? How did the Supreme Court rule in this case? Do you agree?
- Discuss the following statement: Every time we listen to another person’s opinion, we are practicing intellectual freedom. Do you agree? Can you think of an instance where listening to other would narrow your point of view?

## LET’S DIG EVEN DEEPER

### Writing Prompts, Role Play Scenarios and Further Discussion

- Have the class prepare and conduct a survey that includes the following questions:
  - What is the First Amendment?
  - What are the provisions provided by the First Amendment?
  - Which provision supports the freedom to read?

Instruct students to survey ten adults using the questionnaire they prepared in class. Share the results of the surveys in class. Using the data collected, construct a graph that reveals public knowledge of the First Amendment.

- Discuss the relationship between the First and the Fourteenth Amendments. Research either *Tinker v. Des Moines School District (1969)* or *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier (1988)*. Have students write a short essay that discusses what the case has to do with free expression and students' rights.
- Police brutality has long been an issue throughout the United States. Recently, there has been increased efforts to ban books that address this issue. Read *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone. Split students into small groups to write a script for a conversation between themselves and characters in the novel about police brutality and racial profiling. It can be a formal debate or round table or just a conversation at lunch. Encourage them to perform it for the class.
- Judy Blume tried to get John O'Hara's book *A Rage to Live* from the public library when she was a teenager, but was told she would need parental permission in writing. Find out the policies of the public library in your town or city regarding young adults' access to the adult collection. Write an editorial for the local newspaper either defending or opposing the policies.
- Write an essay that interprets the following quote by Ray Bradbury: "There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches."
- Justice William Joseph Brennan Jr. stated in his opinion in *Board of Education, Island Trees School District v. Pico*, that the "special characteristics of the school library make that environment especially appropriate for the recognition of the First Amendment rights of students." Justice Brennan retired from the Supreme Court on July 20, 1990, and died in 1997. Write a poem that pays tribute to him from the schoolchildren of America.
- The late Golda Meir, an Israeli politician, once said: "One cannot and must not try to erase the past merely because it does not fit the present." Write a paper that discusses how those who have challenged books about the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement are attempting to erase the past.
- Ask to see your school district's collection development policy. Is there a section that deals with controversial materials? How is *controversial* defined? What is the consideration process when a book is challenged? Who makes the final decision? Find articles about students in York, Pennsylvania, who fought censorship and won. Using them as an example, write a letter to your school superintendent about the detrimental effects of book bans.
- Banned Books Week began in 1982 and takes place in late September. One of the ways that libraries and bookstores have celebrated is by sponsoring continuous readings of banned and challenged books. There are several such events that can be attended or participated in virtually. Let your voice be heard by reading aloud a short passage from a favorite banned or challenged book and posting it to the Banned Books Week YouTube channel. ([bannedbooksweek.org/videos/](http://bannedbooksweek.org/videos/)). Guidelines are provided on the website.

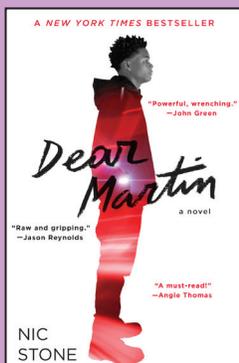


- Identify titles that have been challenged somewhere in the nation. Select one to read, identify the reason for the challenge, and prepare a written defense of the book.
- Stage a panel featuring a parental challenge to a specific book that deals with one of the following topics: sex and sexual identity; profanity; violence; the occult and witchcraft; and drugs and alcohol. The host should give a brief synopsis of the book and an overview of the challenge. Guests should include parents who oppose the book, parents who support the book, a school or public library board member, a librarian, and several young adults who have read the book. Ask students in the audience to be prepared with pertinent questions.
- Brainstorm ways to get banned and challenged books in the hands of the public. For example, placing the titles in little free libraries, starting a banned books club, or advocating against book bans.

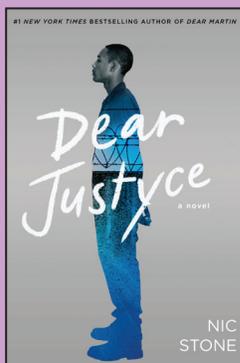
**Guide written by Pat Scales, children's literature consultant.**

## READ BANNED AND CHALLENGED BOOKS

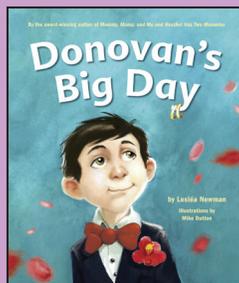
These titles are discussed in this guide.



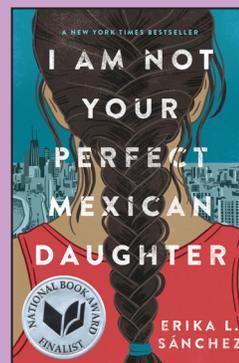
**Dear Martin**  
Nic Stone  
HC: 9781101939499  
TR: 9781101939529  
EL: 9781101939512



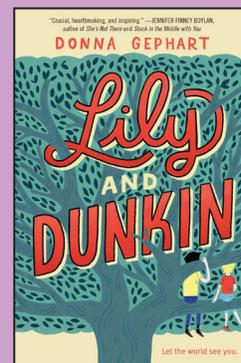
**Dear Justyce**  
Nic Stone  
HC: 9781984829665  
TR: 9781984829696  
EL: 9781984829689



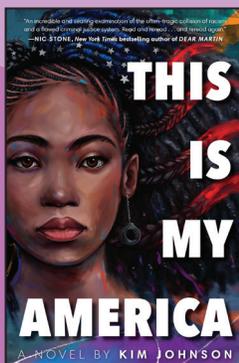
**Donovan's Big Day**  
Lesléa Newman; Illustrated by Mike Dutton  
HC: 9781582463322



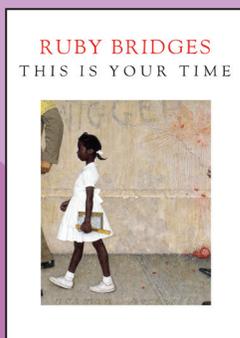
**I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter**  
Erika L. Sánchez  
HC: 9781524700485  
TR: 9781524700515  
EL: 9781524700508



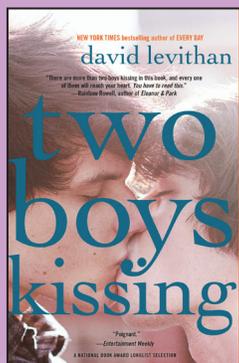
**Lily and Dunkin'**  
Donna Gephart  
HC: 9780553536744  
TR: 9780553536775  
EL: 9780553536768



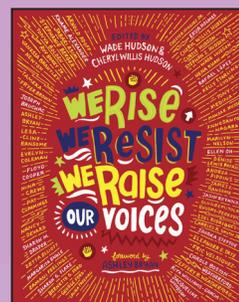
**This Is My America**  
Kim Johnson  
HC: 9780593118764  
TR: 9780593118795  
EL: 9780593118788



**This Is Your Time**  
Ruby Bridges  
HC: 9780593378526  
EL: 9780593378540



**Two Boys Kissing**  
David Levithan  
TR: 9780307931917  
EL: 9780307975645



**We Rise, We Resist We Raise Our Voices**  
Edited by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson  
HC: 9780525580423  
TR: 9780525580454  
EL: 9780525580447



**White Bird**  
R. J. Palacio  
HC: 9780525645542  
TR: 9780593487785  
EL: 9780525645559