The Freedom to Read: Who Decides What You Can Read?

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
GROSSE POINTE CHAPTER
ANNUAL MEETING 2022
Mission of the GPPL
EXPAND LEARNING, INSPIRE CREATIVITY, AND CONNECT THE COMMUNITY

Vision of the GPPL
THE LIBRARY IS THE WELCOMING HEART OF THE COMMUNITY; A PLACE FOR EVERYONE TO GATHER, DREAM, AND CELEBRATE THE JOY OF READING.
Core Values

SERVICE, ACCESS, RESOURCES, INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY, RESPECT, INNOVATION, INCLUSION, AND KINDNESS
Collection Development Policy

OUR STATED OBJECTIVES OF SELECTION ARE TO MEET THE EDUCATIONAL, RECREATIONAL, AND CULTURAL NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY
Who selects material for the GPPL?

- Our professional librarians select materials
- The Library Director has final responsibility
Criteria for Selection

• Demonstrated and anticipated user needs
• Reputation, authority, and literary skills of the author
• Timeliness of topic
• Existence of reputable reviews in professional journals
• Existing holdings in subject area
• Consideration of budget and physical space
• Availability through interlibrary loan
Controversial Materials

• We aim to have a collection that represents a diversity of views and expression
• We do not restrict materials because of frankness of language or content
• Parents or legal guardians are responsible for what their children are reading
United States Constitution

The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the role of public libraries to ensure freedom of speech and expression as well as the freedom to learn.
Censorship on the rise

• Although book bans are nothing new, there were more censorship attempts in 2021 than at any time since the American Library Association began tracking more than two decades ago.
Majority of Americans oppose banning books

• 71% of voters oppose efforts to remove books from public libraries
• 67% of voters oppose efforts to remove books from school libraries.

*Full poll results and key findings available via the American Library Association.*
Which stories have been banned?

*Many of these categories overlap

- Protagonists of color: 467
- LGBTQ+ characters and topics: 379
- Sexual or health related content: 283
- Addressing race or racism: 247
- Historical topics or figures: 184
- Death, grief, and suicide: 122
- Transgender characters and topics: 84
- Religious or ethnic themes: 18

Based on PEN America’s Index of Book Bans, which documents decisions to ban books in school libraries and classrooms in the United States from July 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022.
How are books banned?

• **Formal Challenges to Libraries and Schools**
  • Have become increasingly performative, organized at a national level
  • National networks
  • Targeted lists of books
  • Coaching and advising

“Shadow Banning” happening at extraordinary rate, according to recent anonymous survey by We Need Diverse Books
BOOK CHALLENGES
BY THE NUMBERS

Your words have the power to challenge censorship.
Out of the hundreds of challenges ALA records every year, only about 10% of books are removed from communal shelves, thanks to local literary champions such as librarians, students, and patrons.

#WordsHavePower

WHERE ARE BOOKS CHALLENGED?

- 49% Public Library
- 30% School
- 20% School Library
- 1% Special Library

82-97% of challenges remain unreported

WHO CHALLENGES BOOKS?

- 42% Parents
- 3% Patrons
- 10% Board/Administration
- 8% Librarians/Teachers
- 2% Political and Religious Groups
- 2% Government
- 8% Other

WHY ARE BOOKS CHALLENGED?

- Gay/Lesbian
- Gender Roles
- Author
- Death
- Horror
- Racism
- LGBT
- Violence
- Nudity
- Sexually Explicit
- Offensive Language
- Religious Viewpoint

Stats on challenged books are compiled by the Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association.
Banning Books is Bad for Communities

• Prevents individuals, especially young people, from accessing critical information
• Takes away opportunities for young people to see themselves reflected in literature
• Lost opportunities to build mutual understanding
• Freedom to read is a constitutional right
How are challenges handled at the GPPL?

• GPPL has a Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Policy

• Reconsideration request forms will only be accepted by library cardholders or those eligible for a Grosse Pointe library card.

• The Assistant Director appoints two or more librarians to review the material and submit independent reports to the Assistant Director

• Citizens who are not satisfied with the response may request the Director review their request. The decision of the Director is final.
MI Right to Read

- MI Right to Read is a grassroots coalition of concerned Michigan residents organized by the Michigan Library Association.