



KNOW YOUR
RIGHTS

Libraries, Book Bans, and the First Amendment

Libraries are a cornerstone of American Democracy, ensuring that all people, regardless of their income, education, race, or geographic location, have free and open access to information and lifelong learning so they can meaningfully engage in civic life. Public libraries—because they are public institutions—are bound by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Public and school libraries may violate the First Amendment when they:

- Do not establish neutral criteria for selecting and removing books.
- Change library policies to:
 - remove books or other materials in circulation, or
 - prevent materials from reaching library shelves *because they offend library board members' or staff members' personal values.*
- Remove materials simply because they disagree with, are uncomfortable with, or are offended by the ideas contained in those materials.
- Place disfavored books in a separate section of the library or behind the librarians' desk.
- Require parental permission to check out a book.

Specific examples you might confront:

- Public libraries may not censor websites affirming LGBTQ+ people.
- Public libraries may not restrict access to books affirming LGBTQ+ people and families, such as books depicting romance between two women/men.
- Public libraries may not remove books featuring or written by people of color or depicting atrocities committed against people of color.

What you can do if your library/school board violates the First Amendment:

Contact your Library Board of Directors/School Board of Trustees.

Contact the ACLU of Idaho at intake.acluidaho.org/

Report censorship to the [American Library Association](https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report)

Online at <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report>

By phone at 1-800-545-2433, ext. 4226.

Learn about #BannedBooksWeek at <https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/artistic-expression/banned-books-0>