<https://slate.com/culture/2021/10/beloved-glenn-youngkin-ad-toni-morrison-book-banning.html>

**The Woman Who Wanted *Beloved* Banned From Schools Is Right About One Thing**

BY [REBECCA ONION](https://slate.com/author/rebecca-onion)

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The [campaign ad](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDB4eLc5rfo) for Virginia Republican gubernatorial candidate Glenn Youngkin features an older blond woman, wringing her hands and telling a story about a book that her son had to read for school—one that was so upsetting, so explicit, that her “heart sunk” to think of it. Internet sleuths didn’t have to look far to [find out that](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/opinion/glenn-youngkin-toni-morrison.html) the woman was Laura Murphy, a Fairfax County conservative activist; the son is Blake Murphy, who’s now 27 and works for the National Republican Congressional Committee; the traumatizing reading was done almost a decade ago; and the explicit book was Toni Morrison’s much-decorated masterpiece, *Beloved*.

I called [Emily J.M. Knox](https://emilyknox.net/), a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s School of Information Sciences, and asked her to explain *Beloved*’s place in the history of book-banning and book-challenging in American schools. Knox, the author of [*Book Banning in 21st-Century America*](https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442231672)and the editor of [*Trigger Warnings: History, Theory, Context*](http://www.amazon.com/dp/1442273712/?tag=slatmaga-20), explained that Murphy’s not wrong about one thing: *Beloved* is unusually graphic—and this can help us understand the book’s particular power.

Our conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.

**Rebecca Onion: This isn’t the first time the inclusion of *Beloved* in curricula has been challenged, right?**

**Emily J.M. Knox:** The American Library Association collects as many public challenges as possible and [puts them together](https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/field-report-2020-download-email) every three years.*Beloved* is not challenged nearly as much as *The Bluest Eye*, but that’s because *The Bluest Eye* is read in non-AP classes, unlike *Beloved*, which is an AP book. So *Beloved* got challenged in ’96, ’97, ’98, 2006, twice in 2007, 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2016. … What I talk about in my work is that it’s not really ever about the book itself. It’s about larger issues in society. *Beloved*is a book that’s very straight on. What Morrison does is ask that the reader look at the horrors of slavery without any blinders on, and that is actually what people dislike about the book. It’s so graphic because that’s what Morrison was *trying to do.*

**It’s a very intimate book about slavery, very psychologically internal. The effectiveness of it overwhelms people. I was talking with a colleague about this story, and she said when she read *Beloved* in high school, it made her want to be a writer because she couldn’t believe any writing could *do*that. But reading it can also lead to another kind of reaction, as you say.**

One stance I take with people who try to ban books is that they’re not wrong, in one sense. People’s reactions to books can be quite literal. *Beloved*is an extremely violent book, it’s absolutely true. But that is the point of the book. This mother? She’s absolutely right—it’s extremely difficult to read. It gets stuck in your head. But what she’s saying is, *I don’t think people should be exposed to this aspect of history, it’s too much*, and there I don’t agree, of course.

The power of fiction is that you can read about what slavery is, but what fiction does is make it, as you said, internal. You’re following one person’s story, and that’s a very different way of thinking about how history works. A lot of what people want is a sanitized version of history.

Often what people argue for is the idea that stories about Black people are interchangeable. So why read this book, when you could just have a book that’s easier to read, or less upsetting?

**What books get proposed to fill in as alternatives?**

I talk in [this article](https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/article/view/32592/24971) about an English class reading *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and the challenger suggested that people read *Gifted Hands* by Ben Carson instead.

**OK, that’s just a little on the nose.**

Right! But interesting. OK, so Angelou is interchangeable with Ben Carson? That just shows that they see Black stories as all the same story.

**But they’re also kind of admitting that one is a lot more powerful than another, more disturbing, has more of a certain effect they see as threatening and negative—that’s still power.**

I study reading practices, like how people interpret and think about reading as an action and a practice. What I find so often with challengers, and this is the same for challengers from the right or the left, is that there’s an idea that fiction should be uplifting. That it should also contribute certain truths, with a capital T, but also that you should not have negative reactions to what you read. Any negative reaction—so that might be embarrassment, right? You shouldn’t be embarrassed to read something out loud to the class. If the teacher would be embarrassed to do that, they say, then the book is not worth reading.

**That’s so interesting, because that’s something Laura Murphy says in this ad about *Beloved*. She says, “I met with lawmakers. They couldn’t believe what I was showing them. Their faces turned bright red with embarrassment.”**

Oh, yes, I am very familiar with that kind of language! When you study book challenges, that kind of thing comes up over and over again.

**Which brings me to the question of sex. There’s sex in *Beloved*, really intertwined with the violence. How often has the sexual content of the book come up in challenges, as it did here, where Murphy called it “explicit”?**

It’s more common in the United States, as you might guess, for people to challenge books on the basis of sex than violence. In *Beloved*they are intertwined, as you point out. This comes up almost every time people have challenged the book.

In my work I talk about the idea of innocence that challengers invoke. They either think of students, kids, as being a tabula rasa, and what happens when you read is that it “puts bad ideas into” the kid, by reading—it triggers sexual arousal.

The other idea people have, which Cathy Davidson calls the idea of “undisciplined imagination,” is that certain people are unable to react well when they read about sex. So that’s always the issue with reading, and sexual arousal, and kids and women—that those readers will be unable to handle how they react when reading about sex.

And when I tell my students that this idea of “undisciplined imagination” includes women readers, they can’t believe it. But look at the controversy over whether *Fifty Shades of Grey* should be put in public libraries. BDSM and eroticism is always an issue, and that’s always targeted at women. Books for men, like thrillers, are rarely challenged in any way.

The thing about *Beloved* is that this puts everything together—sex, violence. That’s why the book is a masterpiece. But I think the opening part, with the bestiality, is very hard for people to get past sometimes, but she’s trying to set the scene for what is to come—what life was like, as an enslaved person.

**Right, the fact that that part is in the opening definitely adds a layer.**

Yes, I don’t know if you’ll have heard about this, but there was a challenge to a book called *The Higher Power of Lucky*, which was actually written by a librarian and won the Newbery Medal, but had the word “scrotum” on the first page.

**In one way, I do think the online reaction to the ad with the *Beloved*-challenging mom has been especially cathartic. If you’re on the left, you’ve spent years hearing people on the right mock you for having emotional responses to things, talking about trauma, and so on. And here’s this story of a teenager who was physically disturbed by reading a book about slavery, and it’s fun to point and say “Snowflake!” But you’re saying this kind of reaction to books is normal and common.**

Right. I haven’t done much interviewing of challengers recently, but when I was doing that, I always started with the question “What was your favorite book, and why?” Because I want to start by hearing people tell me about a book that changed their lives. There’s not any doubt that reading is powerful and can really make you a different person. I don’t read horror books, because I can’t sleep! *Beloved* is a hard book to read. It sticks in your head. I don’t know how many years ago I read it, but I remember it very well.

**The book that keeps coming up in my mind when I hear about these conversations is Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, which I’m always shocked to hear about being assigned to high schoolers. That book is so violent and hopeless—people eat a newborn baby in it! It’s a nightmare book, but it’s not by a female writer of color, and it doesn’t have sex in it.**

Yes. There is definitely a gendered aspect to books that get challenged. Dude books don’t get challenged very much. And it’s violent, but again, violence is much less often challenged than sex.

**Do you think Toni Morrison’s cultural capital, and the many awards her books have won, has insulated her at all from any of these challenges?**

Actually, it’s a lot more about society and what’s going on in society that changes what books are being challenged. At the moment, it’s all diverse books that are being challenged, so I’m not surprised that this has come up again. The books most challenged right now are *The Hate U Give*, books like that. *Beloved* is often not such a target because it’s considered part of the canon, which doesn’t get challenged as much. It’s a late addition to the canon—but it’s there.

But one of the things I always talk about is how the first books to get challenged will be diverse books, because the lives of people who are underrepresented and marginalized are always, by definition, more difficult.

[**The Banned Books Project**](https://bannedbooks.library.cmu.edu/)

@Carnegie Mellon University

<https://bannedbooks.library.cmu.edu/beloved-by-toni-morrison/>

**Toni Morrison, “Beloved”**

September 11, 2019 [Talia Buksbazen](https://bannedbooks.library.cmu.edu/author/taliabuksbazen/)

Set in Ohio after the American Civil War, Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved African-American woman who killed her child to spare them a life of slavery. The story of *Beloved* commences with the hauntings of House 124: the home of Sethe, her daughter Denver, and a spiteful spirit, believed to be Sethe’s dead child. When Sethe believes the spirit in human form appears at 124, she not only invites this person into her home, but painful memories as well. *Beloved*is a novel that explores the topics of motherhood, violence, slavery, and the difficulties of moving forward when you are haunted by the past. In 1998, *Beloved*was adapted into a film starring Oprah Winfrey, Donald Glover, and Thandie Newton.

For years, *Beloved*has been among the list of “Top Ten Most Challenged Books” for the American Library Association. Here are a few examples of recent challenges, both successful and unsuccessful:

* In 2007, two Kentucky parents raised concern to the Eastern High School school board about violence within *Beloved. Beloved*was taken off the reading list for AP English Literature the following year, replaced with Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter.*
* In 2012, public hearings were held in Missouri’s Plymouth Canton School District to discuss whether a list of books, including *Beloved,*should be banned from AP English Literature classes. When two parents, Matt and Barb Dame, complained about the content of the book, the superintendent of the district ordered that it be removed from all English curriculums. At the public hearing, the couple claimed that the novel “contained violence… and sex acts that provide no historical context”. Barb Dame also argued the book was at a “fifth-grade reading level”, according to the Lexile complexity of language score. Many students who came to the public hearing were “offended” at the idea of banning the book, claiming “African American history is not pretty… But it’s education.” The school district decided against the ban, and declared that the novel could stay in the high school English curriculum.
* In 2016, Richard H. Black, a Republican member of the Virginia State Senate, challenged *Beloved*. He claimed the novel was “moral sewage” and was too violent to be taught in AP English courses. Sen. Black voted for a bill where K-12 teachers would be required to notify parents when sexually explicit content was present in books. As Virginia schools have a “similar procedure that allows parents to withdraw children from sex-education class,” Sen. Blac argued that parents should decide if their children should opt-out of reading books in the same manner. This bill was passed in February 2016, making it the first state to give parents the right to withdraw their children from reading novels.

**Banning Toni Morrison’s books doesn’t protect kids. It just sanitizes racism.**

‘Beloved’ and other works by the Nobel laureate have faced censorship battles before

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/10/28/beloved-toni-morrison-virginia/>

By [Farah Jasmine Griffin](https://afamstudies.columbia.edu/content/farah-jasmine-griffin)

Farah Jasmine Griffin, the recipient of a 2021 Guggenheim Fellowship, is a professor of African American and African diaspora studies and English literature at Columbia University and the author, most recently, of Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature.”

The final days of the Virginia gubernatorial campaign have [featured a cameo](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/beloved-book-virginia-youngkin-mcauliffe/2021/10/25/e6157830-35d3-11ec-91dc-551d44733e2d_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_2) by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison’s 1987 novel, [“Beloved.”](https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B000TWUTYG&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref_=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_1GWN3P2SQ13AHR9HNWZV&tag=thewaspos09-20) Republican Glenn Youngkin is running an ad bashing Democrat Terry McAuliffe for vetoing legislation in 2017, when McAuliffe was governor, that would have given parents the right to opt their children out of reading sexually explicit material in school. The ad features a mother who says her son, as a high school senior, suffered from night terrors after reading the book.

This may be an unexpected turn for Virginia politics, but it’s not so unusual for Morrison’s work to be at the center of censorship battles. Since the publication of her first novel, [“The Bluest Eye”](https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B000TWUTYQ&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref_=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_K757ZACSAEG713M4RCHE&tag=thewaspos09-20) in 1970, Morrison’s books have often come under fire. In 1997, Texas prisons considered [“Paradise”](https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B000TWUTXW&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref_=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_AN6YPJAH2KSPND8WYF6T&tag=thewaspos09-20) too [dangerous](https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/09/paradise-in-texas-prisons/) for their libraries because it might incite “strikes or riots.” In its yearly reports, the American Library Association often lists [Morrison’s novels](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIv-C3oufq8wIVhrKGCh0gTwJqEAAYASAAEgJbc_D_BwE) among the most frequently challenged or banned books. Last year, a Southern California school board announced [the reversal](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2020-10-01/banned-book-reinstated-toni-morrison-the-bluest-eye) of its decision to remove “The Bluest Eye” from its core reading list for AP English Literature classes.

But this latest iteration of the controversy surrounding “Beloved” occurs in the context of nationwide debates about race and history, and in the closing days of a close political campaign. This suggests that bringing the book back up now, nine years after the mother featured in Youngkin’s ad first complained about it, is less about the comfort of teenage readers and more about parents trying to elide the harsh truths and realities of our nation’s history.

[*Critical race theory’s opponents are sure it’s bad. Whatever it is.*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/critical-race-theory-law-systemic-racism/2021/07/02/6abe7590-d9f5-11eb-8fb8-aea56b785b00_story.html?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_6)

Censorship does not result in education, the pursuit of knowledge or intellectual growth. What Morrison said about Mark Twain’s “Huckleberry Finn” might also be said of her own writing. Concerning parental attempts to have Twain’s classic removed from classrooms because of its use of a racially pejorative term, [Morrison wrote](https://www.loa.org/books/321-the-mark-twain-anthology-great-writers-on-his-life-and-works#:~:text=The%20Mark%20Twain%20Anthology%20brings,irreverence%20and%20skepticism%2C%20his%20profound) that such efforts are the “purist and yet elementary kind of censorship designed to appease adults rather than educate children.”

Morrison found the great brilliance of “Huckleberry Finn” to be “the argument it raises” about the role of slavery in our nation’s identity and the way it thwarted our professed commitment to freedom and liberty. Even as she was herself offended by some aspects of the text, she nonetheless defended Twain’s work from accusations of racism. She valued the way he called attention to race and slavery, she appreciated his elevation of an American vernacular, itself built upon the contributions of American blacks to the language, and she critically engaged his novel in her own work, “Beloved.”

As such, she modeled for us a way of teaching, engaging and debating works of art. Confronting the difficult truths of the past in this way has given rise to our most powerful literature and to political movements that have helped the nation move toward a more expansive sense of its democratic principles.

Morrison saw efforts to ban her work as proof of its power, and she devoted much of her life to protecting the rights and safety of writers who risked censorship and worse. She understood that attempts to silence writers — indeed, to silence all artists — are authoritarian in nature. These efforts endeavor to keep citizens ignorant, if comfortable.

[*Five myths about slavery*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/five-myths/five-myths-about-slavery/2020/02/07/d4cb0e6a-42e0-11ea-b503-2b077c436617_story.html?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_14)

Literary history is full of examples of complex, difficult books replete with scenes of sex and violence, often told in controversial, if beautiful, language. The most sophisticated of these works do not sensationalize violence, nor do they insist that readers put themselves in the place of the characters, but instead, they encourage us to bear witness to the suffering of others. For literature to bear witness, it must engage with violence, even as it condemns it. From the Old and New Testaments to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” or Elie Wiesel’s “Night,” readers are confronted with powerful narratives that not only tell the stories of oppressed people, but also hold the mirror up to humanity, often showing us parts of ourselves we’d rather not see.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in “Beloved,” a novel that includes sex, some of it consensual, much of it brutal and abusive. Such abuse constituted the horrific conditions of slavery. Nonetheless, sex in “Beloved” is not overly explicit, as Youngkin’s ad and the earlier campaign against it would have us believe, although it can make for difficult and painful reading. If her novel is “obscene,” that is because the institution of slavery was obscene. The novel is about slavery — including, but not limited to, the sexual abuse that it encouraged and relied upon as a tool of power. Significantly, “Beloved” is also about a mother, Sethe, seeking to protect her child from the horrors of that institution, which includes protecting her from sexual assault. For Sethe, murdering her child is better than having the girl face the terror with which she herself has lived as an enslaved woman.

Ultimately, Morrison’s work asks the question, what kind of people can be capable of such inhumane cruelty? The refusal to confront this question, let alone explore the answers it may yield, sits at the core of attempts to ban Morrison. Her writings and other historical and creative works expose the ugly parts of our history, including its crimes against humanity.

The resurgence of opposition to “Beloved” coincides with the right wing’s assault on critical race theory and, more broadly, on any attempts to discuss structural racism in classrooms. The history of slavery and its aftermath, which inspired “Beloved,” is directly related to examining the forms of systemic racism that inform every aspect of our society. Public schools have emerged as contentious sites in this ongoing battle because they, along with the voting booth, have long been places where ideological battles over the myths and meanings of our nation have been fought. In this instance, those who criticize “Beloved” and want to ban what they call critical race theory claim that any works addressing the country’s history of racial inequality and violence pose a threat to impressionable young minds. At best, this resistance is as uninformed as it is passionate. At worst, it is a distraction mobilized by political campaigns seeking to exploit age-old racial fault lines — a distraction that takes our attention away from the true threat to democracy posed by those who would dismantle voting rights, advance economic inequality and undermine the sustainability of our planet.

[*The panic over critical race theory is an attempt to whitewash U.S. history*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/critical-race-theory-history/2021/07/02/e90bc94a-da75-11eb-9bbb-37c30dcf9363_story.html?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_21)

Yes, parents — like Sethe in the novel — do want and should have the right to protect their children, but it is just as important for young people to explore difficult ideas in the context of a classroom, under the careful guidance of well-trained teachers dedicated to free expression and critical thinking. Studying literature offers us the opportunity to do just that.

Efforts to ban works like “Beloved”undermine democracy, even if they aren’t intended to. Encouraging students to encounter new and different contexts provides an opportunity for them to understand experiences beyond their own, forces them to confront the evil that human beings can do to each other as well as the decency, mercy and love we are capable of offering one another. Engaging such books also allows them to imagine other times, places and sets of possibilities. At this moment in our nation’s history, we are in desperate need of a generation that has been exposed to and guided through our history, both the difficult past and the extraordinary wisdom and beauty offered to us by our greatest artists. Only then will they be able intellectually, politically and morally to move all of us into a more just and democratic future.

**"Beloved" isn't the only book parents have challenged. Here's why and how books get banned.**

**BY CAITLIN O'KANE**

**NOVEMBER 17, 2021 / 2:19 PM / CBS NEWS**

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/banned-books-beloved-controversy-critical-race-theory/>

Last month, Glenn Youngkin, Virginia's Republican governor-elect, [targeted Toni Morrison's "Beloved"](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/virginia-governor-race-toni-morrison-beloved/) in a campaign ad that featured a parent upset that the 1987 novel was taught to her son when he was a high school senior.

It is not the only book of Morrison's, a Black woman, to be challenged in some communities — and as the debate over education again heats up, books [have become a flashpoint around the U.S.](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/decade2009)

A wide variety of books have been challenged or banned for a wide variety of reasons, according to the American Library Association, which keeps a running list of the [most challenged books in libraries and schools](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/decade2019).

Most of the [books on the 2020 list](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10) — the most recent available — are challenged, banned or restricted due to alleged "LGBTQIA+ content," "anti-police messages," themes of race, "divisive language" and "sexually explicit language," according to the ALA.

Deborah Stone, director of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, told CBS News there appears to be an organized effort to challenge books that deal with two broad topics: racism or Black American history and the LGBTQ community.

Stone said campaigns to ban books may be spreading more easily due to social media, and ALA has seen different people from different communities use the same language when arguing against books — a clue that they got the idea from someone else, possibly online.

She said campaigns to ban books are usually a coordinated effort by activists targeting school boards.

Books with themes about race are often banned under the "false claim" of critical race theory, Stone said. "We're talking about works of literature, we're talking about individuals talking about their experiences in society — not critical race theory," she said. "But there's a real effort to limit and restrict access to these materials."

Critical race theory [acknowledges racial disparities](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/critical-race-theory-teaching-kids-cbsn-originals/) that have persisted in U.S. history and offers an academic framework to understand how racism is reinforced in U.S. law and institutions.

There is [no evidence it is taught in K-12 schools](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/critical-race-theory-teachers-union-honest-history/), but its tenets have inspired [dozens of states](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/critical-race-theory-state-bans/) to pass laws that ban critical race theory, which often makes it easier for parents to successfully campaign against certain books.

Under [Texas](https://houston.cbslocal.com/video/5575488-a-look-at-the-debate-over-critical-race-theory-in-texas/)' new law banning critical race theory in the classroom, teachers cannot discuss the idea that "one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex."

Jerry Craft's "New Kid," a book about an African American boy going to a new school that is majority White, "is not in any way racist or critical race theory," and has won literary awards, Stone said. But parents in Katy, Texas successfully stopped an October appearance by [Craft](https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?p=26995), and had "New Kid" temporarily removed from the school "by simply saying it represented critical race theory," she said.

"It is inappropriate instructional material," Bonnie Anderson, a former candidate for the Katy Independent School Board, told [CBS affiliate KKTV](https://www.kktv.com/2021/10/06/texas-school-district-cancels-black-authors-visit-pulls-books-over-race-fears/) in October about the book. "They are pointed at White children displaying microaggressions to children of color. The books don't come out and say, 'We want White children to feel like oppressors,' but that is absolutely what they will do."

Another parent, Omerly Sanchez, told KKTV her elementary school-aged son loved the book. "He said it was funny," Sanchez said.

Like other laws that ban critical race theory, a new [law](https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=SB0623&GA=112) in Tennessee bans teaching any concepts that would make someone feel "discomfort, guilt, anguish, or distress solely because of the individual's race or sex," and prohibits lessons that suggest anyone, based on their race or sex, is "inherently privileged, racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously."

Sharon Roberson, the president and CEO of the YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, denounced the law. In a letter to the Tennessee Department of Education, Roberson said it will have harmful effects on children's education and society as a whole.

"The intention is really to put us in this war against each other. For people to say that if you discuss these issues this is going to cause harm to children, whereas teachers are trained to teach and if you really want your students to have the advantage of a global society that we're in, they're going to have to know their history," Roberson said.

Stone said it's not just books with themes of race that are often challenged. "Coming of age" books that depict puberty, sexuality or sex acts are commonly considered "obscene" — even though these themes are just one part of the book, and the concern often misrepresents the piece of literature as a whole.

"'Beloved' is one of the best examples of that — that's in the headlines right now — it isn't pornographic or obscene, it just deals with sex," she said.

The book, which is set in the Reconstruction era and vividly portrays the horrors of slavery and its legacy, contains passages that are violent and sexually explicit.

Republican lawmakers across Texas are working to enforce a ban on what they consider "divisive concepts."

Republican State Representative Matt Krause put together [a list of 850 books](https://static.texastribune.org/media/files/94fee7ff93eff9609f141433e41f8ae1/krausebooklist.pdf) he believes should be banned, including "Rainbow, a first book of Pride," aimed at young readers, and "Underneath It All: A History of Women's Underwear," aimed at young adults. Krause, a candidate for Texas attorney general, sent a letter to Texas school districts asking them to report how many books from the list they currently make available to students.

Krause also asked districts to identify any other books that may include: human sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, AIDS, sexually explicit images or material that "might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex," [according to CBS Dallas](https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2021/10/27/school-libraries-scrutiny-texas-lawmaker-questions-kids-books-race-sexuality/). CBS News has reached out to a representative for Krause for comment and is awaiting response.

Another Republican state lawmaker in Texas, Jeff Cason [called on](https://twitter.com/JeffCasonTexas/status/1454102569920389127) the state's attorney general to investigate school districts that have sexually explicit books in their library. One of the books he deemed inappropriate is ["Gender Queer," by Maia Kobabe,](https://www.amazon.com/Gender-Queer-Memoir-Maia-Kobabe/dp/1549304003/&tag=cbs-news-20) which its publisher describes as a "useful and touching guide on gender identity."

Earlier this month, [Texas Governor Greg Abbott](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/TroxellDan.pdf) echoed Krause and Cason's concerns and asked the Texas Association of School Boards to remove books from school libraries that could be what he called "pornographic" or "obscene."

Stone said books "that reflect the lives of LGBTQIA persons and families," are often targeted as "obscene" or "pornographic" – which they are often not. "You might not be the audience, your child might not be the audience, but more often than not, there is an audience for the books and often they are desperately needed," she said.

Parents of students in North Hunterdon High School in New Jersey also challenged books with LGBTQ themes such as "Gender Queer" and another coming-of-age novel, "Lawn Boy," [according to My Central Jersey](https://www.mycentraljersey.com/story/news/education/2021/10/21/north-hunterdon-high-school-parents-want-certain-lgbtq-books-banned/8505737002/).

At a Hamilton County School Board meeting in Tennessee, parents turned out in large crowds over challenges to books on the reading lists for grades 8 through 12, including Angie Thomas' "The Hate U Give," CBS affiliate [WDEF-TV reports](https://www.wdef.com/hamilton-county-school-board-looks-at-controversy-over-school-reading-lists/).

In Virginia Beach, Virginia, school officials asked the superintendent to ban four books – "Lawn Boy," "Gender Queer," "A Lesson Before Dying" by Ernest Gaines and "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison — for "pornographic content," according to [The Virginian-Pilot](https://www.pilotonline.com/news/education/vp-nw-virginia-beach-banned-books-20211007-imqhy4n4cvfcvjlesp56gyx5ka-story.html), which obtained copies of their email to the superintendent.

Stone said censorship that forbids the reading of a certain book is a violation of library users' First Amendment rights. She also said every parent has a right to raise concerns about a book. "It's part of the First Amendment as well, the right to petition," she said.

ALA encourages libraries and school boards to hear concerns about books, but to also have a "reconsideration policy" in place that asks petitioners if they've actually read the book in its entirety and what the basis of their complaint is, Stone said.

Just because someone says a book is obscene or inappropriate, doesn't mean it actually is, Stone said. "It just means it doesn't meet their values or needs."