

Banned Books 2019 School Toolkit

The aim of this initiative is to get Year 10 students reading by engaging them with a list of 20 'Banned Books'. The official Banned Books Week is in September.

This year's Banned Books list focuses on books published since the year 2000, whereas last year's list spanned 1951-2014. Each participating school should get 20 books from the current list but can also use the books from last year. Schools can decide if they get a complete set of the 20 books on the current list, or would prefer to order multiple copies of a few of the books.

Some of the books are also available as e books. Visit www.islington.gov.uk/ebooks and click on "Borrowbox".

Below are suggestions for two pre-reading lessons, one post-reading lesson and some ideas for involving the community.

Pre-reading Lesson 1

Aims:

- Understand what censorship is
- Discuss opinions about censorship

Questions for discussion

- What is censorship?
- What kinds of things get censored? (books, films, songs etc.) Why?
- Do you know of anything which has been censored?
- Why or when might censorship be considered necessary?
- Why or when might censorship be considered wrong?

Teacher Introduces Banned Books Week

Banned Books Week was created in response to a surge in challenges to books in schools, libraries and bookshops in the 1980s. The aim is to promote discussion about censorship and freedom of expression. A number of books have been banned in various contexts over the years. There is now an annual international Banned Books week in September which draws attention to banned books and invites discussion. Here is a list of 20 books, published since 2000, which have been challenged and in some places banned. Fortunately, they are all now available in England and you are invited to read and discuss them over the next half term.



Reading activity

Read the Daily Mail article about *The Fault in Our Stars*. Students can also read the comments by readers.

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2256356/The-sick-lit-books-aimed-children-Its-disturbing-phenomenon-Tales-teenage-cancer-self-harm-suicide-.html?ito=email_share_article-top

Questions for discussion:

- What objections are raised about this book and others like it?
- What benefits of reading such books are mentioned?
- How have other readers responded to this article?
- What is your response?

There are two other links below (Guardian and Gaystarnews) which provide different viewpoints on the banning of books and are worth reading. Perhaps you could compare how different publications deal with the themes of the books and banning in general.

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jan/18/stonewall-defends-vital-lgbt-childrens-books-after-spate-of-ban-attempts?CMP=twl_books_b-gdnbooks

<https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/teacher-bans-authors-books-because-she-retweeted-a-trans-support-group/#gs.2lqozt>

Pre-reading Lesson 2

Aims:

- Become familiar with the range of books on the Banned Books list
- Read and evaluate the opening of several books
- Identify which books you would most like to read

Banned Books List Task

Read through the blurbs (individually or in pairs). Identify 3-5 books which you would like to read the opening of.

In small groups, read the opening couple of pages of each of your chosen books. You could discuss:

- What happens on the first couple of pages or which characters are introduced?
- What questions are raised? Is there anything you don't understand?
- What captures your attention? What do you want to find out more about?

Individually, decide on three books you would like to read and list them in order of preference on a piece of paper or in your exercise book. Indicate if you would be willing to go to the school library, a local library or buy a book in order to read the one you really want.

Teachers take in preferences and allocate the whole collection to the class as fairly as possible. Some students will need to get their chosen book from a library or bookshop. OR teachers decide on the 5 most popular books and buy 4 copies of each.

Students have one half term to read their book. One lesson should then be dedicated to presentations and discussion.

You may want to create a space for students to read during lunchtimes. Some students may not feel comfortable taking a particular book home but may be keen to read it. The library is often available but you might want to create a special Year 10 Banned Books reading space in a classroom or more comfortable area if possible. This might also promote shared reading and discussion.

Post-reading lesson

Aims:

- Share reading experiences
- Identify the next book you would like to read

Each student should present their response to the book they read including what they liked, what they didn't like, an example of why it might have been banned and a censorship verdict (should it have been banned or not). Alternatively, students could do their presentations as they finish their book ie in the last 10 minutes of an ordinary lesson. This might help keep momentum for reading through the half term.

You might also want to build in space for students to free write in response to what they are reading, either as they go along or when they finish a book. This writing should not be marked – the focus is on being a space for personal expression.

Further questions

Are there any other books you have read which you think should be banned, or might attract censorship? Are there any other books which your book reminds you of which you would recommend to others? (The idea of these questions is to get students interested in reading books beyond the list).

It would be great if students inspired each other to read another book from the collection. However, if the collection is passed to another class, they may need to source their next chosen book from the school or local library or a bookshop.

Teachers could offer a book token prize for the most thoughtful response or best presentation, or something else.

The school can get another set of books next September and thus build capacity to engage Year 10 students in reading in this way.

Ideas to involve your community

Encourage students to talk to their parents about what they are reading and even to read the same book themselves (not all students and parents will be open to this).

Promote the books to staff. Encourage them to engage students in conversation about the book(s) they read. This may be particularly appealing/relevant to pastoral staff eg. tutors.

Ensure the school's local libraries stock and promote the books during Banned Books week (all Islington libraries do this already). Make sure students know where their local library is.

Organise a vote for the best book on the Banned Books list. Encourage everyone involved to vote – pupils, parents, staff.

