



## Books Unite Us: The Importance of Banned Books Week

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As a former English teacher and school librarian, my favorite week of the school year was Banned Books Week. I made it a point to incorporate it into my lesson plans, not because I wanted to force students to read banned books but because I wanted them to be aware of why censorship is an issue.

Banning books has become a hot-button topic at school board meetings and among parents who fear that certain books will harm their children or lead them down a path of immorality. Kids are able to handle and digest all kinds of content as long as they have an adult there to

help them. The fears of one group of parents should not dictate what other kids have access to.

Banning books is the perfect way to guarantee that kids will want to read what adults tell them not to read. Many students I have had over the years who read banned books have been underwhelmed by the content deemed controversial.

Years ago, Jay Asher did an author visit in the district I was working in at the time. Many students had read "13 Reasons Why," a book that was turned into a Netflix series. Side note: the book is better. This book explains 13 reasons why one of the characters died by suicide. There were fears that the book could promote suicide ideation or that the topic of suicide was not appropriate for kids. These fears overshadowed what many students learned from the book.

When I asked students how they felt about the book 13 Reasons Why, they shared that the suicide part didn't bother them. Instead, what resonated with them most was how your actions can impact other people without you even knowing.

Allowing children to understand censorship and then having them draw their own conclusions about banned books is powerful. It is a uniting action that will help students critically analyze any materials they come across that are censored. Every book is not for every person. Just like television shows, people have the genres they prefer. However, kids need to learn what books they like, and if that book is a banned book, they shouldn't be kept from reading it.