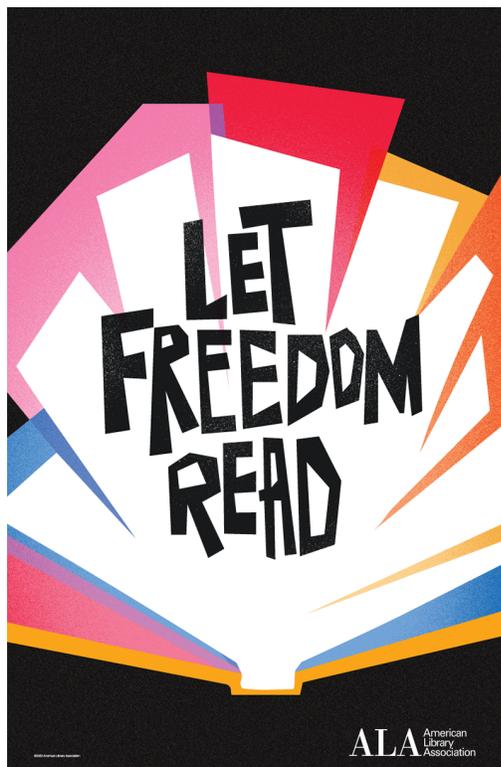




Promoting and Celebrating the Freedom to Read

Tuesday Topics: August 2023

Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to the IFC.



Banned Books Week

Fall brings the intellectual freedom celebration known as [Banned Books Week](#) (BBW), which some library staff now refer to as Celebrating the Freedom to Read – a more positive way to frame the event. While the observance usually occurs in late September, this year it runs from October 1-7. However, the [Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee](#) encourages libraries to participate anytime in September or October that works best for your library.

The 2023 theme is Let Freedom Read, and some library staff plan to highlight the “freedom” aspect of freedom to read. As a strategic move, they intend to connect verbiage and graphics to patriotism, the U.S. flag, and constitutional rights instead of to flames that represent burning and the red slash symbol that represents banning. Do what will work best in your institution and area!

First Amendment & Core Tenets of Librarianship

The purpose of the observance is to highlight and promote intellectual freedom and the freedom to read, core tenets of librarianship. The American Library Association (ALA) “actively advocates and educates in defense of intellectual freedom—the rights of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Intellectual freedom is a core value of the library profession, and a basic right in our democratic society. A publicly supported library provides free, equitable, and confidential access to information for all people of its community” ([source](#)).

In response to an increase in challenges to library materials in our state, the Oregon Library Association and the Intellectual Freedom Committee recently adopted the statement below. The ultimate intention is to consolidate and unify our message statewide and give library staff a go-to answer when asked for responses about intellectual freedom-related tensions within libraries.

First Amendment Rights Statement:

The Oregon Library Association adheres to the guiding principles of the American Library Association's [Code of Ethics](#) and [Library Bill of Rights](#). As such, we fully support the First Amendment rights of every individual to the intellectual freedoms to explore ideas, opinions, concepts, topics, and thoughts. Not every library resource is right for every patron, but the rights of every patron to make their own personal choices should be honored. We support the right of parents and guardians to guide their child's reading and viewing choices, but that right does not extend to removing choices for others. The work of libraries and librarians is to serve everyone in their community and provide resources that are reflective of the world around us.

Programming, Displays, and Social Media...Oh, My!

So, how do libraries participate in Banned Books Week/Freedom to Read Week? It's common to schedule related programming, displays, social media posts, and the like.

- *Programming*: Programming could include inviting a guest speaker or panel to speak about a related topic, organizing a book club to encourage reading books that are often or recently challenged, or touching on the concepts of book access or representation in books in a storytime for older children or a teen event.
- *Displays*: ALA has a [page](#) of display ideas that primarily focus on banned books, while in a [post](#) for Book Riot, Kelly Jensen, a librarian in New York, shared great suggestions and tips about incorporating advocacy and the freedom to read. There's also a [Pinterest collection](#) featuring pictures of displays.
- *Social Media*: Another option is to schedule a series of social media posts to highlight diverse authors, share quotes about the freedom to read, etc. ([ALA templates](#)). Or, repost what others have shared. For example, author [Kelly Yang](#) is vocal for representation and against censoring books, as seen in this [reel](#). Remember to tie the posts together by using a hashtag such as #FreedomToRead or #BooksForAll.
- *Promotional Tools*: Additionally, the organizers of BBW offer [promotional tools](#) to download and merchandise to purchase.
- *Your Ideas*: If your library participates, we'd love to know what you did! Please send a description, links, and/or pictures to ifc.chair@olaweb.org. Take a look at what Oregon library staff [shared](#) last year.

Easy-to-Prepare Displays and Activities

Here are some ideas for displays and activities that are aimed at specific audiences and that should not take much effort to implement. Some could be easily adapted for other age levels.

1) *Older Elementary/Children's Services*: What Do These Books Have in Common?

a) Activity:

- 1) Choose 3 to 5 elementary-aged books from the [Oregon Title Index to Materials Challenges](#) or [ALA's 100 Most Challenged Books of the Past Decades](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page).
- 2) Make sure the books are all different, such as a "scary" story (ex: a Goosebumps title), one with a main character that represents diversity (ex: *Melissa*, formerly *George*, by Alex Gino), and something silly (ex: a Captain Underpants title).
- 3) Gather the books from your library, or print the covers of each in color and glue each cover to the front of a file folder.
- 4) Locate a blurb or write a very short, high-level summary of each book. (Use the blurb on the book; or print each blurb or summary, and glue each to the inside or back cover of the relevant file folder.)
- 5) During a storytime or lesson, ask the children to listen to the summaries of each book and to think about what they have in common.
- 6) Read the blurbs while showing the book or printed cover image.
- 7) Ask students to guess what all of the books have in common. Entertain all answers for several minutes – yes, all were written by an author, but that's not what I'm looking for; yes, all were...
- 8) Let students know the answer – that all books were challenged, meaning some people thought the books should not be available to children in the library.
- 9) Ask students what they think about the fact that the books were challenged, discuss a basic definition of the concept of the freedom to read, and ask about other ways that people who may not appreciate a book could handle that (ex: they could ask their own child not to read the book).

b) Display: Modify the activity by creating a bulletin board or similar display.

- 1) Use cut-out letters for the title at the top: What Do These Books Have in Common?
- 2) Purchase the [Let Freedom Read poster](#) or create something similar to affix in the center of the board or surface.
- 3) Affix the book cover images with their corresponding blurbs, from the activity above.
- 4) Add a folded piece of thick paper, such as part of a file folder, centered near the bottom. On the top, add this: Answer. On the side that shows when the top is flipped up, add what you want the children/students to know about the fact that all of the books were challenged (asked to be removed from a library). Maybe end with this question: What do you think about challenging books?

- 5) Consider adding a translation of all text in the most common language/s spoken in your library. You could print the translations in smaller font on colored paper and affix them below the title and each blurb. Or, print the blurbs in more than one language from the start.

2) *Teens/Youth Services: Censorship by the Numbers (STEM connection)*

a) Activity:

- 1) Digitally display, or download and print, the 4 individual [ALA Censorship by the Numbers posters](#) (not the poster that combines all 4 into 1). (For printed posters, affix them to a flat surface. Or, lightly tape each to a separate page on a flip chart.)
- 2) During a teen time or a lesson, discuss the concepts of intellectual freedom, censorship, and book challenges. Perhaps have basic definitions prepared that participants can refer back to during the activity. (You could use a half-sheet handout with all definitions plus the URL or QR code for the ALA posters, or print individual definitions in large font and post them nearby, or...)
- 3) Then introduce one poster at a time, and “read” the information by reinforcing how to interpret and understand the charts and graphs.
- 4) Ask participants questions, such as these, and discuss as time and attention spans allow:
What surprised you about this data? (Possibility: It’s surprising to know that sometimes teachers or librarians challenge books.)
What more do you want to know? (Possibilities: What books have been challenged in my school or library? The data represents 2022; is the 2022 total number of challenges less, about the same, or more than previous years?)
- 5) Extension: Ahead of time, gather a few books about charts and graphs, data, infographics, and related topics, and display them during and after the activity/lesson.
- 6) Middle and high school extension: Collaborate with a math teacher on this lesson. Library staff can cover the intellectual freedom concepts, and the math teacher can teach about interpreting and understanding the charts and graphs. You could follow up with an assignment, such as using the [Oregon Title Index to Materials Challenges](#) spreadsheet to create a graph indicating the number of recorded challenges in Oregon by year or a chart indicating the percentage of total challenged books that were retained, reclassified, or removed.

b) Display: Modify the activity by creating a bulletin board or decorating a door.

- 1) On the display surface, affix cut-out letters for the title at the top: Censorship by the Numbers.
- 2) Print the word/phrase and definition for each of the 3 concepts listed above, and affix them under the title or along the sides of the surface. You could use the flip-up format as described in the elementary display section above.
- 3) Print each of the 4 posters used above, and affix them to the surface.

- 4) Print any points you may want to make (in lieu of the activity discussion), and affix those where appropriate.
 - 5) Alternative, especially for public or academic libraries: Share the 4 posters on social media with a concise message/point plus the hashtag #FreedomToRead or #BooksForAll – 1 per day and/or per platform.
- 3) *Adults/College-Age*: IF the First: Intellectual Freedom and the First Amendment
- a) Activity:
 - 1) Find a guest speaker who is knowledgeable about the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution – lawyer, professor, history teacher, etc. Can't find a speaker or don't want to take the time? Show relevant portions of a video instead, such as [this one](#) with the director of the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom.
 - 2) The guest speaker should collaborate with library staff as co-presenter/s to design a presentation and discussion about the intersection of intellectual freedom and the First Amendment.
 - 3) The presentation could be an interview in which the librarian asks the guest speaker questions. Format the questions so they tie into the presentation title: If the First Amendment is/says/addresses/etc. X, then...? Example: If the First Amendment protects the freedom of speech, what should a library do about a book that contains references that are now considered racist? If you show video clips instead of co-presenting with a guest speaker, ask an "If" question, show a relevant portion of the video, discuss the information with participants, and repeat.
 - 4) Extension for high school and academic librarians: Work with a history teacher or professor, and turn this into a lesson related to [Constitution Day](#). The observance is on September 17, the day the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1787. That day falls on a Sunday this year, but you could do the lesson before or after that date.
 - b) Display: Create a slideshow.
 - 1) Add a [BBW or ALA graphic](#) and the presentation title on the first slide: IF the First: Intellectual Freedom and the First Amendment.
 - 2) Add one of the "If" questions from the activity above to a slide. Follow that with a brief answer or response. Repeat for each question. Repeat in other languages as needed.
 - 3) End with a list of online resources and/or related books (cover images and QR codes that lead to catalog links).
 - 4) Set the slideshow on a loop to continually advance through the slides. It can be displayed on one or more monitors (such as wall-mounted "announcement" monitors) in the library or institution.

Thanks for promoting and celebrating the freedom to read. Let's flip the narrative!