

# BOOKS UNDER FIRE

A Hit List  
of Banned  
and Challenged  
Children's Books

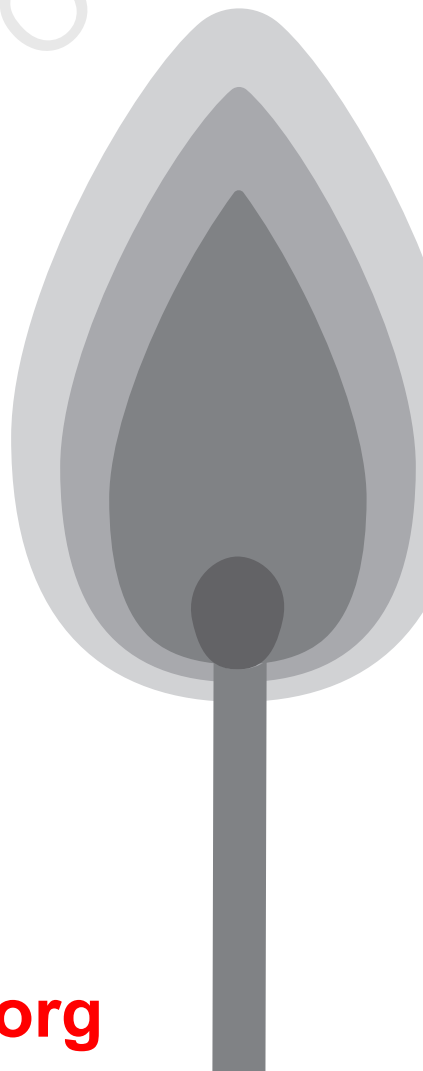
SECOND EDITION

**PAT R. SCALES**

For the Office for Intellectual Freedom

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## FOREWORD

**WHEN I SPEAK** about banned and challenged books, the question I am most often asked is “Which books are banned?” And my answer is short and simple: books that matter to young people. Books that speak to issues important to them, about racism, homophobia, and social justice. Books that assure young people that their struggles with identity and society are real and that they, like the book’s protagonists, have the power to persevere and triumph despite those struggles.

One of my most vivid memories is of the evening I sat in a rural high school gymnasium watching a high school freshman hold close a battered copy of Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* as the five-member school board voted to ban the book. Earlier he’d spoken about what the book meant to him—a book that for the first time talked honestly about the experience of growing up and coming of age in rural poverty and finding a path forward. As I watched him stuff the book in his shirt and leave the auditorium after the school board’s vote, I fully understood the power and promise of one book and one teacher to change a young person’s life and the tragedy of adult censorship that, in the name of “protecting the children,” forecloses that promise.

Pat Scales, over a long and stellar career as a librarian and educator, has fought such censorship and fiercely defended the First Amendment rights of young people to read the literature that speaks to them about issues

important to their lives. She has long been a mentor and guide for those engaged in the fight against censorship in the classroom and in the library. In this second edition of *Books under Fire*, she once again provides teachers and librarians with the resources for having open and honest discussions about challenged and controversial books with young readers and provides the tools for championing these books when they are challenged.

Most importantly, this new edition incorporates several new books that have become some of the most frequently challenged in the past decade—books that address racial justice and issues of importance to the LGBTQIA + communities. As schools and libraries work to become centers of tolerance and inclusion, Pat's guides to these books can provide a foundation for important discussions about equity, diversity, and inclusion, both in the classroom and library.

Conversations about controversial books are never easy. Defending those books and keeping them in the hands of children and young adults who want and need them is harder still. *Books under Fire* makes it far easier to tackle those challenges, and I am forever grateful to Pat Scales for creating this resource and for her wisdom and leadership in defense of the freedom to read.

P.S. Please support the work of the Office for Intellectual Freedom by reporting challenges to books, programming, and other resources via OIF's online form at [www.ala.org/challengereporting](http://www.ala.org/challengereporting). All reports are completely confidential. Challenge reporting supports the creation of books, guidelines, and other resources, such as *Books under Fire*, which promote and protect intellectual freedom.

—DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE

*Director, Office for Intellectual Freedom*



## PREFACE

**IT'S EASY TO** become intimidated when someone appears at the door of a school or public library and challenges a book. Librarians and teachers can develop more courage to face these challenges once they learn that there is a community of professionals and tools to assist them. The American Library Association's (ALA's) Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) offers a number of services, including strategies for dealing with challenges, tips for talking with the media, and when appropriate, they may even put librarians who have dealt with challenges in touch with one another.

Challenges or questions regarding the content in children's books are very common but rarely do they result in book banning. No public or school library is immune from those who want to deny children access to certain books and materials. That is why all libraries must have a "materials selection policy" that includes procedures for dealing with challenges. When procedures are followed, the library almost always ends up the winner. Trouble erupts when librarians, school administrators, or library directors bypass the appropriate procedure for the sake of avoiding a "civic debate." News about controversial books spreads like gossip, and an attempt to cover up challenges may actually result in a "public uproar."

This actually happened when PABBIS (Parents Against Bad Books in Schools) attacked a long list of books in Fairfax, Virginia. One vocal parent called for the school board to "prevent this unnecessary and harmful wave

of censorship.” The president of the student body at Thomas Jefferson High School spoke passionately about students’ right to read. Once the school administration and school board allowed the school district’s selection policy to become their armor, they were able to win the battle, and the books remained in the school libraries. A similar public outcry occurred when the state of Arizona banned the Mexican-American Studies Program in the Tucson Unified School District. Books, including *Mexican WhiteBoy* by Matt de la Peña, were boxed up and marked *BANNED*. Students were so angry that they invited de la Peña to come to Tucson to speak. These readers fought and won, and de la Peña awarded them the best possible prize—copies of his book. The Mexican-American Studies Program was reinstated three years later.

In 1993, copies of *Annie on My Mind* (1982) by Nancy Garden were burned in Olathe, Kansas, because of the book’s “homosexual” theme. The superintendent in that district removed the book from the junior high and high school libraries without due process because he wanted to “avoid controversy.” That’s actually when the controversy began. Four students sued the school district on grounds that their First Amendment rights had been violated. The case went to trial in 1995, and the students and the book won. This happened because articulate students convinced the judge of the book’s value and because the school board had violated their own materials selection and reconsideration policies. The school district did not appeal the judge’s decision, and the book was returned to library shelves.

In each of these cases, the Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Freedom to Read Foundation provided assistance and moral support, and in some cases legal support, to the students, their parents, and the school librarians. Attempts to censor books that kids read shouldn’t be hidden. When played out in full view, there are parents and children who are willing to speak loudly about children’s free speech rights, and there are a host of professional librarians, writers, lawyers, and organizations eager to help.

The Office for Intellectual Freedom maintains a database of challenged materials and regularly compiles and publishes a list of these titles. This serves to put book challenges front and center so that librarians and the public are aware of these attempts to abridge an individual’s freedom to read. Many of the books on these lists are children’s books. The titles in *Books under Fire: A Hit List of Banned and Challenged Children’s Books* are taken from ALA’s records and include challenged titles collected by the

National Coalition Against Censorship, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Texas ACLU, Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse, and the National Council of Teachers of English. All the books included in this volume have been challenged since 2015. This includes some titles that were featured in the first edition. The *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, the *Alice* series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, and *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz are among the books that continue to be challenged.

The Association of Library Service to Children (ALSC) serves library users from birth to age fourteen, and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) provides programs and services for ages twelve through eighteen. Since there is a two-year overlap, and because young adolescents read both children's and teen books, some of the titles in this book may also be ones that YALSA has included in some of their publications on censorship and intellectual freedom.

*Books under Fire: A Hit List of Banned and Challenged Children's Books* is meant to be a resource for librarians and teachers for their own professional growth and to use as a tool to help young readers become aware of the social issues that are most often at the center of the majority of book challenges for children. The featured titles appear in alphabetical order by author. For each title, there is a summary of the book or series, quotes from professional review sources and dates of reviews, and the details of recorded challenges. *Books under Fire* also includes, for each title, a section for: Awards (such as the Newbery and Caldecott and state children's book awards) and Accolades (such as the ALSC Notable Children's Books list and *Booklist* Editors' Choice: Books for Youth); Official Website for the author/illustrator or publisher; Further Reading, which includes print and digital resources about the author, the book, and censorship; and For Listening and Viewing, which includes recorded links to interviews with the writer/illustrator of the book and related videos and movies available on the internet.

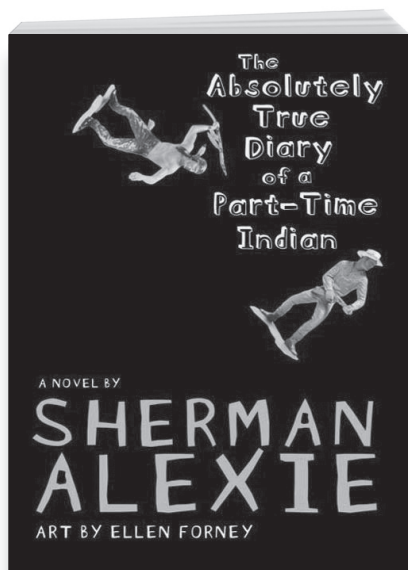
The final two sections for each entry are unique to *Books under Fire: A Hit List of Banned and Challenged Children's Books*. The Talking with Readers about the Issues section provides open-ended, age-appropriate questions for librarians to use with classes, children's book clubs, library-sponsored reading groups, and parents. Questions asked in this section focus on specific reasons for the books' challenges and are intended to engage readers in good conversations about the entire book rather than taking words or scenes out of context. When young readers learn to think, state their opinions, and

listen to the thoughts of others, they are likely to embrace the content in a mature manner. They may even be insulted that some adults have attempted to deny them access to the books.

The other section, *Related Books Challenged for Similar Reasons*, offers one or two book suggestions; these suggested titles have been challenged in public and school libraries based on the same issues. Some of these books were actually challenged many decades in the past. This is intended to reveal trends in book censorship, and how concerns such as “profanity,” “racism,” “sexual content,” “violence and horror,” and “religious viewpoint” are identical to the ones the Office for Intellectual Freedom have dealt with since they began tracking book challenges.

There are several appendixes: (A) Resources for Teaching Young Readers about the First Amendment; (B) Bibliography: Professional Resources about Book Censorship and the Freedom to Read; (C) Rankings of Children’s and Young Adult Books in the Top 100 Most Banned or Challenged Books List: 2010–2019; (D) Children’s Classics and Why They Have Been Challenged; (E) Caldecott Medal and Honor Books: Why They Have Been Challenged; and (F) John Newbery Medal and Honor Books: Why They Have Been Challenged.

Librarians and teachers have a responsibility to protect children’s right to read, but professionals also have the responsibility to promote these rights. This is quite possibly the best assurance that each generation of readers truly understands what it means to be intellectually free.



SHERMAN ALEXIE

## The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

*Illustrated by Ellen Forney*

*New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2007*

**FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD ARNOLD SPIRIT** Jr. lives and attends school on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington State. The reservation is riddled with poverty, and there is very little to eat in most households. The school resorts to used and outdated textbooks and most students have no aspirations or goals for the future. Junior, as Arnold is called, is a good basketball player and artist, and he needs to get out. Life has been especially tough for him. He was born with “water on the brain,” and his odd looks make him the ideal target of bullies. To make matters worse, he stutters, suffers from frequent seizures, and has very poor eyesight. Some of the bullies on the reservation think he looks and acts like the cartoons he draws.

Alcoholism is rampant on the reservation, and Junior’s family is no exception. His parents are drunk most of the time, and his sister, who does manage to get off the reservation, dies in a mobile home fire because she was too drunk to smell the smoke. The most positive role model in his life is Grandmother Spirit. Junior is devastated when she is hit and killed by a drunk driver while walking home from a powwow. She and Junior enjoyed a special relationship, and it is she who provided him advice and support.

Rowdy, Junior's best friend, is tough and tries to protect him from the bullies. But he can't assist Junior with the pent-up anger raging inside his head. At the beginning of Junior's freshman year in high school, he sees his mother's name in a math textbook and becomes so angry about the age of the book that he throws it and breaks the teacher's nose. This act of violence is a turning point for him. The teacher, known as Mr. P., realizes that Arnold has potential and encourages him to get off the reservation and create a better life for himself. To some on the reservation, Junior is abandoning his own culture when he enrolls in an all-white high school twenty-two miles away in Reardan. Now called Arnold, he struggles to fit in. There are times when his part-time life on the reservation and his part-time life in a school filled with spoiled rich kids do collide. He faces prejudices against Indians at school, and he is the only one enrolled. Back home, his status as a "traitor" makes him an outcast among his own people. Things turn around for him when he makes the high school basketball team, develops a crush on a popular white girl, and makes friends with a school geek who becomes his mentor.

Told in the first person from Arnold's point of view, his story contains sixty-five "comic-style" illustrations that contribute to both the humorous and tragic parts of his story as he struggles to bridge two very different cultures.

*School Library Journal* (September 1, 2007) says the book "delivers a positive message in a low-key manner." They recommend it for grades seven through ten. Ian Chipman, the reviewer for *Booklist* (August 1, 2007), states that Alexie "doesn't pull any punches as he levels his eye at stereotypes both warranted and inapt." *Kirkus* (July 15, 2007) calls the novel an "achingly clear-eyed look at the realities of reservation life." *Publishers Weekly* (August 20, 2007) comments on the "dark humor" and the "jazzy syntax and Forney's witty cartoons." *Horn Book Magazine* (September 1, 2007) recommends the book for middle and high school students and calls "Junior's spirit unquenchable and his style inimitable." A teen reviewer for *Voice of Youth Advocates* (August 1, 2007) says that the novel is "realistic and fantastical and funny and tragic all at the same time." Bruce Barcott, the reviewer for the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* (November 11, 2007), states that the novel is "a gem of a book." He praises Alexie by saying that this "may be his best work yet." *The Guardian* (October 3, 2008) praises the book and says, "It's humane, authentic and, most of all, it speaks."

## CHALLENGES

According to data collected by the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, Alexie's novel was #9 on the Top Ten Most Challenged Books List in 2018, #2 in 2017, #1 in 2014, #3 in 2013, #2 in 2012, #5 in 2011, and #2 in 2010. It also ranked #1 on the Top 100 List of Challenged Books for the decade 2010–2019. The reasons cited include “drugs/alcohol/smoking, offensive language, racism, sexually explicit, unsuited to age group.”

A parent objected to the book in Crook County, Oregon, in 2008 because of references to “masturbation.” The book was removed from the library shelves.

In 2009, the novel was retained on the summer reading list at Antioch (Illinois) High School despite objections from several parents who found the book “vulgar” and “racist.”

The book was banned in the curriculum but retained in the library at the Newcastle (Wyoming) Middle School in 2010. In the same year, the school board in Stockton, Missouri, voted to ban the book, and the novel was challenged at Helena High School in Montana. The challenge was withdrawn under pressure from the Montana ACLU.

The novel was challenged because of “coarse themes and language” in 2011 but later returned to the Richland, Washington school district. That same year, it was pulled from the Dade County (Georgia) library shelves and the required high school reading list because of complaints of “vulgarity, racism, and anti-Christian content.” It was also challenged as an eighth-grade English assignment at the Old Rochester Regional Junior High School in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts.

There were challenges to the novel as required reading in at least three freshman English classes at the Westfield (New Jersey) High School in 2012 because of “very sensitive material in the book including excerpts on masturbation amongst other explicit sexual references, encouraging pornography, racism, religious irreverence, and strong language (including the f- and n-words).” The school board voted to retain the book. In the same year, the novel was challenged in the Geraldine (Montana) public schools as “inappropriate for classroom because of sex and language.” The status of the challenge is unknown. The novel was also challenged but retained in Springfield, Massachusetts's public schools. The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund aided in this defense.

In 2013, the novel was banned at Public School 114 (middle school) in Rockaway, Queens, New York, because the topic of “masturbation” isn’t “appropriate for eleven-year-olds.”

The novel was banned in the Meridian (Idaho) high school in 2014 because it “contains language we do not speak in our homes.” It was challenged but retained in Billings (Montana) School District #2.

In 2014, the novel was removed from a required reading list in a Queens, New York, middle school because of the topic of “masturbation.” In the same year, a parent of a tenth-grade student at Skyview High School in Billings, Montana, asked that the book be removed from a reading list because it is “written by a Native American who reinforces all the negative stereotypes of his people and does it with the crude, obscene, and unfiltered viewpoint of a ninth-grader growing up on a reservation.” The novel was also pulled from schools in Jefferson County, West Virginia, after a parent complained about the novel’s graphic nature. It was challenged in the Sweet Home Junior High School in Oregon by parents who were concerned by the content, particularly the “objectification of women and young girls.” The eighth-grade students were offered an alternative assignment.

The novel was challenged in 2015 at the Cedar Grove Middle School in Wilmington, North Carolina, because of “sexual behavior, as well as incidents of racism, vulgar language, bullying, and violence.” It was suspended from the approved book list at the Highland Park High School in Texas by the superintendent. After a national backlash, the novel was reinstated. The controversy caused the school board to make policy changes on how the district selects books and how they handle parental objections. It was pulled from the supplemental reading list for high school students in Meridian, Idaho, because it “discusses masturbation, profanity, and it’s anti-Christian.”

In 2016, it was challenged but retained in Brunswick County (North Carolina) schools after a grandmother complained that the book “portrays bestiality and is pornographic.”

In 2017, the president of the school board complained about the book in Conejo Valley, California, because of “sexuality and profanity.” The book was retained. According to the 2017–2018 Texas ACLU Report, the novel was challenged because it was deemed “politically, racially, or socially offensive” but was retained in all the Yes Prep Public Schools.

The book was challenged by several parents in 2018 in the New London-Spicer (Minnesota) school district. Stating that the novel is “gratuitous and



unnecessary,” they objected to its use in the eighth-grade curriculum. It was retained. In the same year, the novel was challenged but retained at Democracy Prep in Nevada when parents complained that seventh-graders were required to read it. They objected to it being required reading due to “language and sexual references.” In the same year, it was retained at Sauk Prairie (Wisconsin) schools after parents complained about the book’s use in the ninth grade. They objected to “profanity, violence, and sexual references.” It was temporarily removed from the tenth-grade reading list at the Alton (Illinois) high school. It was reinstated to the curriculum after a teacher successfully worked with the parent who complained.

In 2019, the novel was retained but restricted to extracurricular book club use after parents objected to it being required reading in the Midland, Michigan public schools. They voiced concern about the content including “alcohol, bullying, violence, sexual references, profanity, and racial slurs.” In the same year, an English teacher at the Waverly (Kansas) high school was suspended for considering the use of the book in the classroom. The Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse reported a challenge in an eighth-grade language arts class at the North Albany Middle School because of “swearing, racial slurs, and reference to masturbation.” The novel was retained.

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- 2010 California Young Reader Medal: Young Adult
- 2009 Delaware Diamonds Book Award: High School
- 2009 Great Lakes Great Book Award: Grades 9–12 (Michigan)
- 2008 ALA/YALSA Best Books for Young Adults List
- 2008 *Boston Globe-Horn* Book Award: Fiction
- 2008 Washington State Book Award
- 2007 National Book Award for Young People’s Literature
- 2007 *New York Times* Notable Books: Children’s Books
- 2007 *Publishers Weekly* Best Books of the Year List
- 2007 *Publishers Weekly* Best Children’s Books List
- 2007 *School Library Journal* Best Books of the Year List

## AUTHOR'S OFFICIAL WEBSITE

<http://fallsapart.com>

## FURTHER READING

### The Author/Illustrator

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## For Listening and Viewing

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUs9Boyqqdc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUs9Boyqqdc), May 22, 2013. Sherman Alexie talks to the American Booksellers for Free Expression.

[www.c-span.org/video/?202083-3/the-absolutely-true-diary-part-time-indian](http://www.c-span.org/video/?202083-3/the-absolutely-true-diary-part-time-indian). November 3, 2007. Sherman Alexie speaks at the 2007 Texas Book Festival.

## TALKING WITH READERS ABOUT THE ISSUES

- Analyze the title of the book. At what point in the novel do you recognize the meaning of "part-time?" Why is it so difficult for Arnold to be "part-time" in the two worlds in which he lives?
- Alexie opens a window for readers when he reveals the character of Junior and details his life on the reservation. What do you see? Why is it important to have an open mind when reading about other cultures, people, or environments that are different from yours?

- What prejudices does Junior face when he attends the high school in town? How does he deal with these prejudices?
- How does Alexie use humor to soften the “dark” side of Junior’s life? Explain how the cartoon illustrations contribute to the novel. How do they expand the text?
- This novel has been challenged and banned because of “offensive language, drugs/alcohol/smoking, sex, and racism.” How are these issues a very real part of Junior’s life? Why is talking about these issues better than denying that they exist?
- The novel received many more challenges after Alexie was accused of sexual misconduct while on the speaking circuit. Debate whether this is an appropriate reason to challenge or ban a book.
- How is the novel about courage and hope? Focus on these themes and prepare a statement in defense of the novel.

## RELATED BOOKS CHALLENGED FOR SIMILAR REASONS

Aquado, Bill, and Richard Newirth, eds. *Paint Me Like I Am: Teen Poems from WritersCorps*. New York: HarperTeen, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2003.

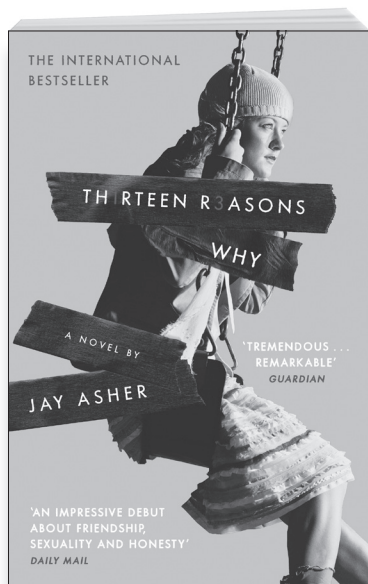
In 2009, the principal at the Landis Intermediate School in Vineyard, New Jersey, removed two pages that included the poem “Diary of an Abusive Step-Father” after a thirteen-year-old Landis student’s mother questioned its appropriateness. The thirty-one-line poem is peppered with profanity and details a violent relationship between an adult and a child. San Francisco-based WritersCorps, an art organization linking writers with teens in urban areas to provide outlets for their experiences, produced the anthology.

It was also challenged in 2009 in the combined middle and high school library in the North Fond du Lac School District in Wisconsin. The book was retained provided it has a label designating it as appropriate for high school students. Younger students can also access the book with prior parental permission.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 1994 (originally published in 1984).

This book about a twelve-year-old Chicana girl who dreams of a different life than the one she is living on Mango Street, a poor area of Chicago, was removed from the middle school curriculum at St. Helens Middle School in Oregon in 2012 because of “concerns for the social issues presented.” A former student pressured the school board to reinstate the book.

It was also one of more than eighty books removed from the curriculum in Tucson, Arizona, when the Mexican-American Studies Program was disbanded in 2012.



JAY ASHER

## Thirteen Reasons Why

*New York: Razorbill, an imprint of  
Penguin Random House, 2007*

**HIGH SCHOOLER HANNAH** Baker is a new girl in town, and she wants more than anything to have a new start. Instead, she becomes the target of bullies and mean girls, which causes her severe emotional stress. She does attempt to talk with Mr. Bryce, the school counselor, but he doesn't offer to get help for her. She ultimately commits suicide. The puzzling thing for classmate Clay Jenson is that two weeks after Hannah's suicide, he receives a series of audiotapes in the mail that unfold the thirteen reasons why Hannah ended her life. As he listens to Hannah name students who bullied her, he wonders what he could have done to help her. She calls out Justin, who is responsible for rumors about her; Alex, who told others that Hannah had the "best ass" in town; and Jessica and Courtney, who pretended to be her friend when they were only using her. Also mentioned is Ryan, who stole Hannah's poem "Soul Alone" and published it in the school newspaper. Clay, who was kind to Hannah, contemplates her audio suicide message. Hannah's words cause him to reach out to another student who he believes is suicidal.

*Publishers Weekly* (October 2007) says that the novel is “uncommonly polished.” The reviewer for *School Library Journal* (November 1, 2007) comments on the “complex and soulful characters.”

## CHALLENGES

According to the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, the novel was #3 on the Top Ten Most Frequently Challenged Books List in 2012, #1 in 2017, and #6 in 2018. It was ranked #3 on the Top 100 Most Challenged List in the decade 2010–2019. Teen suicide was the primary reason cited.

According to the Texas ACLU, the novel was challenged but retained in the 2009–2010 school year at the Round Rock Independent School District because of “profanity or horror.”

In a report issued by the National Council of Teachers of English in 2013, the novel was challenged because of “obscene language” and “sexual content” but retained in the ninth-grade curriculum in Michigan. It was also challenged in a Pennsylvania eighth-grade classroom library because of the topic of “teen suicide.”

The novel was challenged because of “sexual activity and violence” but retained in the 2012–2013 academic year at the Lee-Davis High School in the Hanover County Public Schools in Ashland, Virginia.

In 2017, the novel was labeled “pornographic” by a parent at Lemont High School District 210 in Illinois. It was put under formal review. The outcome is unknown. In the same year, students at Stone Lakes Elementary School in Orange County, Florida, were instructed not to bring the book on campus. It was also pulled from middle school classrooms in Anderson, Kentucky.

In 2018, the novel was temporarily removed from school library shelves in Colorado at the Mesa County School District. The curriculum director was concerned about the content of the book since there had been recent teenage suicides in the community. After school librarians protested, the book was returned to the shelves. In the same year, the book was banned at the Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division in Canada over concerns that the TV series “glamorized teen suicide.” The principal at Stone Lakes Elementary School in Florida banned the book because of the “graphic

nature of the suicide and the frequent use of profanity, alcohol and sexual material.” It was challenged after a mother voiced concerns about “the tone of the main characters’ expressions, lack of mental health care, and author’s lack of moral lesson for those suffering depression” but was retained in a high school in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After the Netflix series aired, the superintendent of schools in Anderson County, Kentucky, banned the book from middle school libraries and classrooms. The novel was challenged in all middle schools and in Livingston High School by the Livingston, Texas, Independent School District because of “language, sexual content and violence.” It was retained but restricted to certain students.

In 2019, the novel was challenged at the Westwood Regional Middle School in New Jersey because it could do “irrevocable harm.” The book was removed from the language arts classroom library but retained in the school library.

## **AWARDS AND ACCOLADES**

- 2013 Abraham Lincoln High School Book Award (Illinois)
- 2012 ALA/YALSA Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults: Sticks and Stones
- 2012 Iowa High School Book Award
- 2011 Delaware Diamonds Book Award: High School
- 2010 Garden State Teen Book Award (New Jersey): Fiction (Grades 9–12)
- 2010 Gateway Readers Award (Missouri): High School
- 2010 Georgia Peach Award for Teen Readers Honor Book
- 2010 Sequoyah Book Awards (Oklahoma): High School Books
- 2010 South Carolina Book Awards: Young Adult Books
- 2009 Heartland Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature (1926–2010)
- 2009 Kentucky Bluegrass Award: Grades 9–12
- 2009 Texas TAYSHAS Reading Lists
- 2008 ALA/YALSA Best Books for Young Adults
- 2008 ALA/YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers



## OFFICIAL WEBSITES FOR THE NOVEL AND AUTHOR

[www.thirteenreasonswhy.com](http://www.thirteenreasonswhy.com)

<http://jayasher.blogspot.com> (Jay Asher's official blog)

## FURTHER READING

### The Author

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Bott, C. J. "Bullied to Death: An Interview with Julie Anne Peters and Jay Asher." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 32 (December 2009): 366–369.

Brunner, Rob. "Why Teen-Suicide Novel 'Thirteen Reasons Why' Is Saving Lives: An Interview with Jay Asher." *Entertainment Weekly*, June 13, 2011. <https://ew.com/article/2011/06/13/jay-asher-thirteen-reasons-why>.

Diaz, Shelley. "Raw Honesty: Author Jay Asher Talks to SLJ about 'Thirteen Reasons Why.'" *School Library Journal*, February 27, 2014. [www.slj.com/?detailStory=raw-honesty-author-jay-asher-talks-to-slj-about-thirteen-reasons-why](http://www.slj.com/?detailStory=raw-honesty-author-jay-asher-talks-to-slj-about-thirteen-reasons-why).

"Interview with Jan Asher." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 54 (April 2011): 542–545.

Smith, Cynthia Leitich. "Author Interview: Jay Asher on *Thirteen Reasons Why*." Cynsations (blog), February 5, 2008. <https://cynthialeitichsmith.com/2008/02/author-interview-jay-asher-on-thirteen-reasons-why>.

### The Book

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Chisholm, James S., and Trent, Brandie. "Everything... Affects Everything: Promoting Critical Perspectives toward Bullying with *Thirteen Reasons Why*." *English Journal* 101 (July 2012): 75–80.

"Jay Asher Tells Why the Thirteen Reasons Why Anniversary Edition Contains the Book's Original Ending." Penguin Teen. [www.penguin-teen.com/thirteen-reasons-why-anniversary](http://www.penguin-teen.com/thirteen-reasons-why-anniversary).

Tasman, Allan. "Why Not Thirteen Reasons Why?" *Psychiatric Times* 34 (June 2017): 1–2.

Walter, Brooklyn, and Boy, Ashley S. "A Threat or Just a Book? Analyzing Responses to Thirteen Reasons Why in a Discourse Community." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 62 (March 2019): 615–623.

## Censorship

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- Blundo, Joe. "No Good Reason to Ban 'Thirteen Reasons Why' Book." *The Columbus Dispatch*, September 23, 2018. [www.dispatch.com/entertainmentlife/20180923/joe-blundo-no-good-reason-to-ban-thirteen-reasons-why-book](http://www.dispatch.com/entertainmentlife/20180923/joe-blundo-no-good-reason-to-ban-thirteen-reasons-why-book).
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- Gomez, Betsy. "Banned Spotlight: *Thirteen Reasons Why*." Banned Books Week, September 17, 2018. <https://bannedbooksweek.org/banned-spotlight-thirteen-reasons-why/> (September 17, 2018).
- Strum, Lora. "Banning Books like '13 Reasons Why' Makes it Harder for Teens to Open Up to Adults, Author Says," PBS News Hour, September 28, 2017. [www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/banning-books-like-13-reasons-makes-harder-teens-open-adults-author-says](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/banning-books-like-13-reasons-makes-harder-teens-open-adults-author-says).

## For Listening and Viewing

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- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w6N9qaZ5cc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w6N9qaZ5cc). Jay Asher talks about writing *Thirteen Reasons Why*.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZZUxkfdHAs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZZUxkfdHAs). This is a discussion of the ten differences between the novel and the television series.

## TALKING WITH READERS ABOUT THE ISSUES

- Clay Jenson was always kind to Hannah. Why does she mail the tapes to him? Discuss the effect the tapes have on Clay.
- At the end of the novel, Clay tries to help another student whom he believes is suicidal. Explain why he thinks the student is troubled. What warning signs were there that Hannah was suicidal? Why is it important for teens to recognize such warning signs?
- Hannah goes to Mr. Bryce for help, but he blames her for her own problems. What should he have done? How is it the responsibility of school personnel to deal with bullying?

- Discuss the claim by the person who challenged the book in 2019 that it could do “irrevocable harm.” What good might the book do?
- Some adults are uncomfortable with their teens reading a book about suicide. Debate whether the book is about suicide or bullying.

## RELATED BOOKS CHALLENGED FOR SIMILAR REASONS

Hopkins, Ellen. *Impulse*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Set in a mental hospital, this novel, written in verse, explores the lives of three troubled teens who attempted to take their lives. In 2009, the author was uninvited to a middle school in Norman, Oklahoma, after a parent objected to the “inappropriate content” of the book.

LaCour, Nina. *Hold Still*. New York: Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2009.

According to data collected by the ALA, this novel about a high school girl who is struggling with a friend’s suicide was banned from the Blue Springs (Missouri) school libraries and classrooms in 2013 because it is “riddled with obscenities.”

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