



## **Facing Book Challenges Head-On: Benefits of Using a Multi-faceted Tool**

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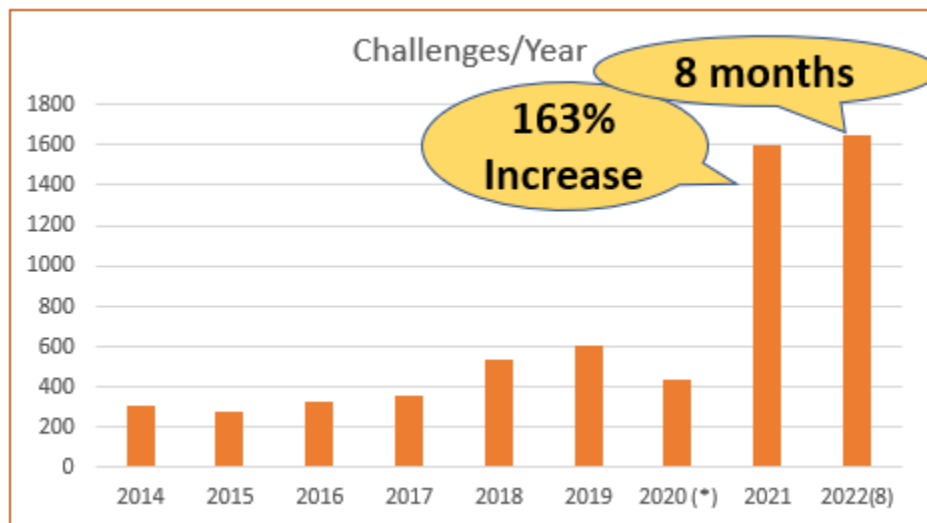
## Purpose

Book challenges are not new to schools and public libraries in the United States. Unfortunately, 2022 became a monumental year for book challenges. A drastic increase in challenges, banning books without following library policy, calls to fire library staff and close libraries, and creating legislation that targeted banning specific subjects in books for children and teens became part of the daily news.

Most school districts and public libraries have a procedure or policy in place to follow when a book in their collection is challenged. Typically, policies require a formal written request for removal along with an opinion and justification citing specific passages.

Many librarians are challenged to justify book purchases that align with their collection management policy. Librarians need a robust tool with various features, such as multiple professional review sources, awards, state reading lists, and varied book lists, to reinforce the book's acquisition.

When book challenges occur, sometimes a collection management policy is not enough to satisfy the challenge. A multi-faceted tool that collects multiple data points on a book can provide significant information in one place. In addition, the tool can provide a way to save time, money, and confusion and provide enough information to address a book challenge.



## Problem

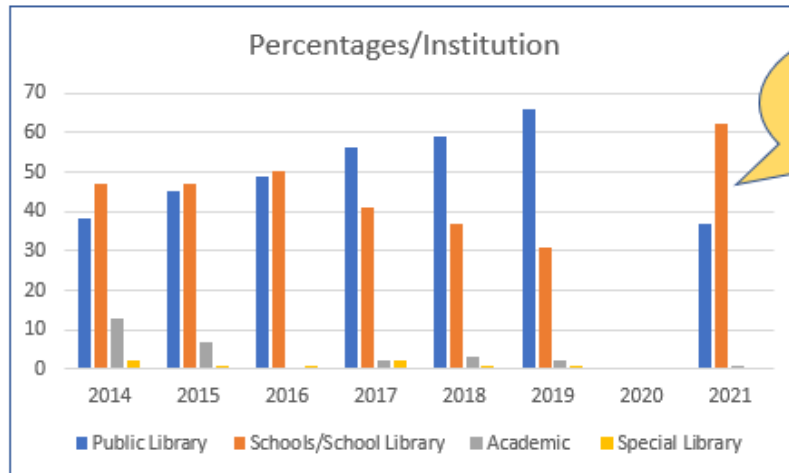
Over the last few years, especially following the October 25, 2021, letter from Matt Krause, Chairman of the Texas House Committee on General Investigating, to Texas school superintendents, asking for specific book titles to be investigated, the storm of challenges to school library books throughout the United States has exploded. Many groups have used Krause's booklist to create their own petition to remove books. This thunderstorm of book challenges has moved at an unprecedented pace, and books have often been removed from school bookshelves before following established procedures. If schools

find that their established procedures carry little weight in keeping a book's current status at the school, then many schools need an additional handy tool to support further and reinforce their collection policy. Librarians also need a method to find alternative texts when a book is being challenged or removed, allowing instruction to continue without interruption.

Several states have faced immense scrutiny of school and public library collections. During the 2021-22 school year, PEN America, an organization committed to ensuring the ability to create, express, and access literature, documented 801 books banned in Texas, 566 books banned in Florida schools, and 457 in Pennsylvania alone. (<https://pen.org/press-release/new-report-2500-book-bans-across-32-states-during-2021-22-school-year/>). Two items to remember with these numbers: they are based only on reported bans, and they do not include the number of books that were challenged- the first step before banning.

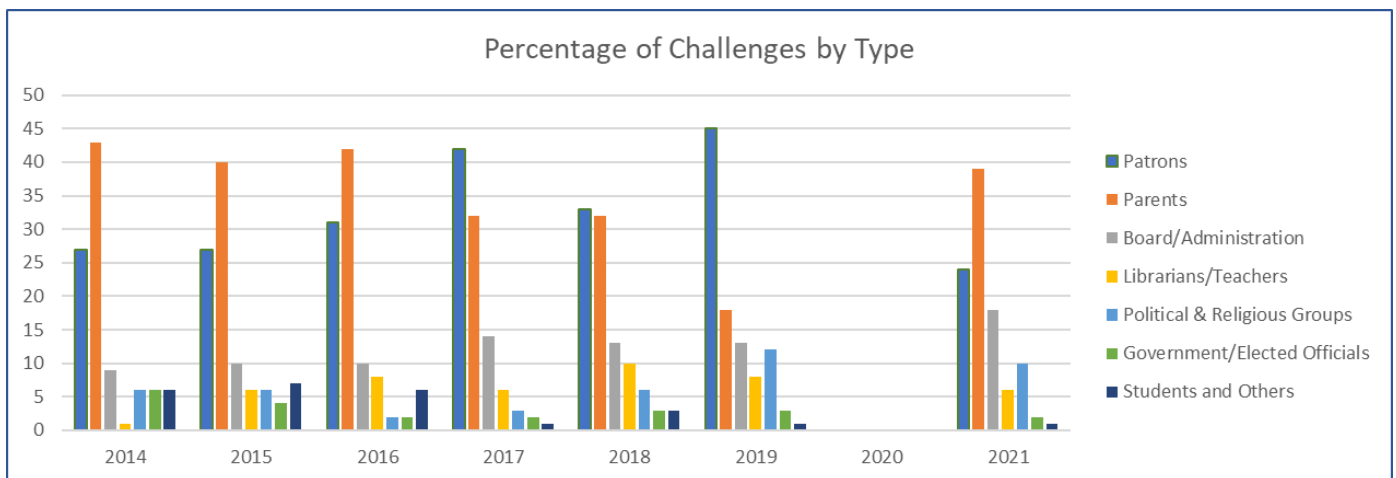
As if banning books is not alarming enough, librarians find themselves in difficult positions, sometimes at the expense of their jobs and safety, defending titles in their collections. While skilled librarians use review and educational sources along with their own expertise, an additional strong resource tool outside of the library or school's collection policy will afford additional neutral information that weighs in on a book's worthiness for a specific collection. Especially when closing school libraries is now on the table, such as when a superintendent proposed eliminating school libraries altogether, robust tools are absolutely necessary. (<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2023/03/31/shuttering-school-libraries-entirely-is-one-way-to-ban-books>)

Public libraries are facing the same scrutiny with their collections. The American Library Association documented 2,571 titles targeted for censorship in 2022. While 58% of those were in school libraries, 41% were targeted materials in public libraries. (<https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2023/03/record-book-bans-2022>) This means a public library could be targeted for censorship just by providing books that are relevant and reflective of the community it serves. Such is the case for the Llano County Library System in Texas. According to Newsweek and other local Texas news outlets, after seven Llano County residents sued over book bans (this included books on Matt Krause's list) and won, instead of returning the books to the shelf as instructed by the judge, the county is now voting on eliminating the library system altogether. (<https://www.newsweek.com/texas-library-may-face-elimination-weeks-after-banned-books-return-1793510>) The back and forth between library supporters and those against the library continues in the courts. Clearly, we are seeing not only library policies being ignored but library users and judges' rulings as well! Additional tools are a must when community public libraries are on the line.



**100% Increase in Schools**

While some state personnel may not find themselves bombarded with dozens of book challenges now, they must prepare ahead of a challenge. If library collection policies are insufficient to save a book from being banned in one state, county, or district, libraries should preemptively decide how to supplement their collection policy. And this supplement needs to provide enough data points from various sources to satisfy various viewpoints on a book. No single opinion or review of a book is enough. Having defensible content for each title helps save time in building the case, specifically having award information, state or provincial or best books lists, two or more professional reviews, and teaching tools associated with the title. A subjective opinion can only be addressed with objective information. The more complete and comprehensive objective data about a book, the better equipped one is to address the book challenge.



**From 2014 to 2021:**  
**217 to 1006 by parents and patrons**  
**37 to 191 for political or religious reasons**

## Analysis

Book challenges and bans are increasing at an unprecedented rate. More importantly, the challenges and bans do not appear to be going away any time soon. EveryLibrary, a political action committee for and in support of libraries, is tracking legislation against books. In 2023 alone, legislation has been introduced in 32 states related to books and book access. (<https://www.everylibrary.org/billtracking2023>)

Some book challenges will be easier for libraries to win when the challenge is clearly bias based. But other books will need a wealth of defending arguments based on good old fashion data. Items such as award status, age range, and recognized reading lists help give weight to keeping a title in a library collection.

For this analysis, books on the Krause list (limited to publication years 2010-2021) and the American Library Associations' Top 100 Most Banned and Challenged Books: 2010-2019 and the Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2020 and 2021 were used. The reasoning for using Krause's list is due to its role in fire-starting dozens of book challenges and its partial replication by other groups and organizations in challenging school and public library books.

The analysis aims to count the many data points, such as awards, age range, and recognized reading lists, that are available on these frequently challenged and banned titles. The analysis was designed to answer whether these challenged titles were obscure titles targeted by a denoted subject or were these award-winning books used daily in classrooms. And with this knowledge, would a librarian deem this as enough information to counter a book challenge.

Each title from 2010 to 2021 was analyzed against Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD). CLCD is an online reference tool that supports librarians with collection management decisions based on multiple factors.

CLCD is an online reference tool that supports librarians with collection management decisions based on multiple factors. CLCD users can find the following information:

- Over 600,000 Professional Reviews from 53 different sources and opinions. Many titles have more than one review.
- Thousands of unique Awards with complete retrospective histories, with 245,000 award notations
- Best Books and Reading Lists: 239,000 Best Books Notations and 86,000 State and Provincial Lists notations
- Age ranges based on six parameters for more accurate ranges (Publishers, Lexile, AR, Reviews, Awards, Reading Lists)
- 34,000+ Curriculum Tools
- 11,500+ Author/Illustrator Links

This information provides 3.6 million data points for over 1 million book titles. CLCD is not a bookseller, does not omit bad book reviews, nor does it drop older titles. Therefore, it provides the most unbiased information possible.

Analysis of these lists included the following parameters for each title:

- Did the title have:
  - o Subject Headings
  - o Awards or Honors
  - o Inclusion on Best Books lists
  - o Inclusion on State Reading lists
  - o Reviews
  - o Curriculum resources
  - o Reading Measurements (like Lexile)
  - o Books Like This (similar titles)

CLCD is not affiliated with a political party or religion. It presents data points and book information. Thus, CLCD is a neutral tool for both sides of a book challenge.

**"Of the overall number of books challenged, 90% were part of attempts to censor multiple titles."** (<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/book-ban-data>) Thus, libraries need an organized tool that is readily available and quick to search multiple titles with the same discerning criteria. CLCD is a tool that can search multiple titles with the same discerning criteria.

## **The importance of each parameter for the analysis**

The parameters chosen for the analysis are important in book selection and extremely helpful to know ahead of a book challenge.

Subject Headings: Subject headings may be initially determined by publishers, but catalogers enhance and broaden the scope of subjects covered in a book. This allows for a quick snapshot of topics readers will find when reading the book.

Awards or Honors: Awards and honors are given after extensive discussion. Awards usually have themes, criteria, and guidelines that books must meet to be eligible for a specific award. Award committees read each submission, and each book is judged against the criteria for the award and the positive effect the book will have on the reader. For example, the Mathical Book Prize is an annual award for fiction and nonfiction books that inspire children of all ages to see math in the world around them.

Best Books Lists: Best Book Lists are created by various sources. Like Awards, titles are often selected based on defined criteria, but one title is not judged as better than another. Some lists are generated only once to address a specific, timely issue, while others are generated annually. Reviewing sources often list their top contenders for the past year, while various editors select specific topics, like bilingual novels, graphic novels, or titles for reluctant readers.

State Reading Lists: Looking for a way to keep your students and community as educated as other places? Look no further than State Reading Lists. If a book appears on several State Reading Lists, you know there is authentic merit for the book. State Reading Lists are created by many sponsors but often by committees or task forces within the state's library association, school library association, or reading

association. Students are encouraged to read a variety of titles and then vote for their favorite. Many lists have multiple categories geared toward specific age ranges.

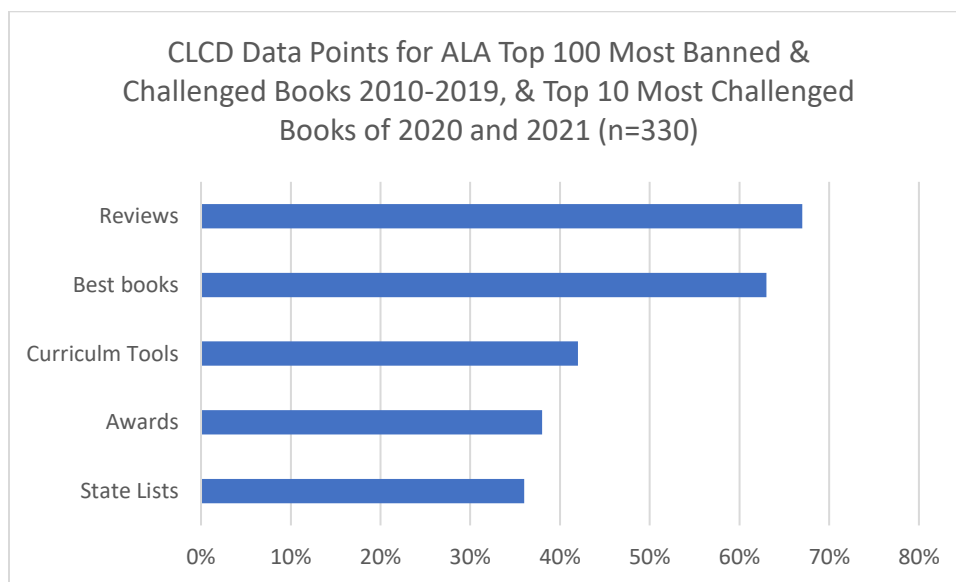
Reviews: As much as one tries to write an unbiased review, there can be bias due to the reviewer's background, beliefs, perceptions, etc. Reviews from various publications will ensure a broader net of reviews is available. Professional reviews are written by children's and young adult literature experts such as professors, reading specialists, librarians, authors, and others who can view the book through various lenses to provide a more thorough analysis of the text. These reviews can provide insight into how a reader can learn from the text and what group would benefit most. Reviews come from a variety of sources and organizations and professional review sources, such as Children's Literature, School Library Journal, and CCBC.

Curriculum Tools: A text with several educational tools available provides a look into successful ways students can benefit from the book. Curriculum resources can include discussion guides, related activities, pairings with state learning standards, and other useful classroom and literacy tools.

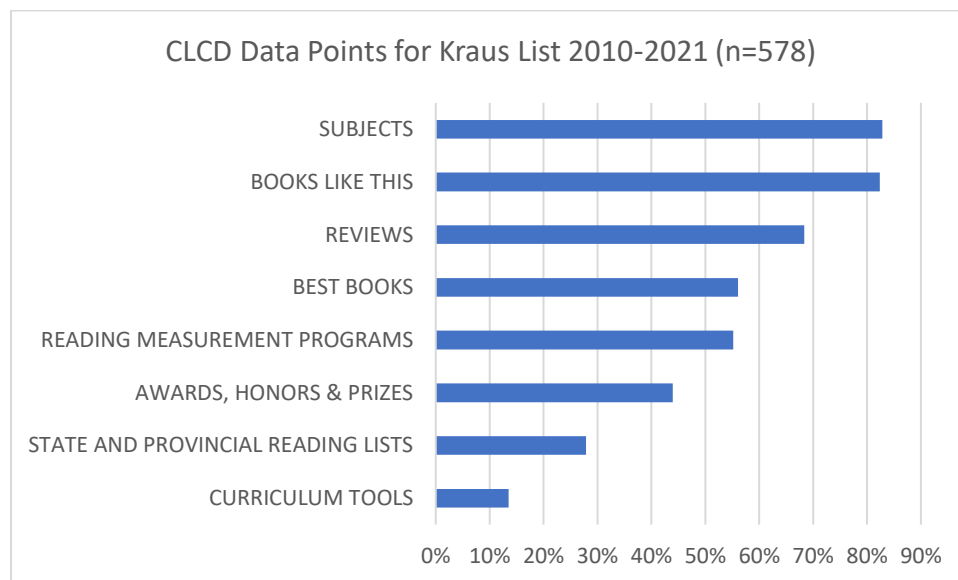
Reading Measurements: Reading Measurements such as Lexile, Reading Counts-Scholastic, and Accelerated Reader are commonly used in schools to determine a child's reading level and growth. Reading measurements on a book provide additional data points to categorize titles. Reading levels include criteria such as vocabulary, topics, and the ability to grasp simple or complex ideas.

Books Like This (similar titles): Providing additional books helps librarians find similar titles when additional titles are needed on a specific subject. School librarians may need more books on a specific subject for various reading levels. In many cases, when children read a title they love, they want more titles with either the same or similar characters or themes.

Upon analysis of the ALA banned and challenges lists, CLCD provided the following results:



Upon analysis of the Kraus list, CLCD provided the following results:



Examples of frequently challenged books and the details provided by CLCD:

Book Title	Subjects	Awards	Best Books	Reading Lists	Curriculum tools	Reading Measurements	Professional Reviews	Books Like This
The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas	13	55	44	33	4	3	5	5
George by Alex Gino (it is under this name in CLCD), aka Melissa	26	9	27	8	0	3	7	5
New Kid by Jerry Craft	33	40	34	42	3	3	4	5
Drama by Raina Telgemeier	10	26	31	32	6	3	13	5

## Solution

Librarians need a strong tool to be ready to defend every book in their libraries. This tool needs to include titles and information from a large variety of publishers, reviewers, and educational sources. Various sources will balance any personal, political, religious, or other biases. The information needs to include not just the latest published books but serve as a repository of children's/YA books with regular updates as books are published, gain recognition and win awards, become part of state reading lists, and gain more reputable, authoritative reviews. A repository of this depth is best because many older books are still being challenged. An easy-to-use children's and young adults' literature database capturing all this information is ideal for librarians to quickly provide a preliminary response about the stature of a



book. A preliminary response with a wealth of information about the book, including notable reviews and awards, establishes the importance of a book in a collection.

Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) provides this solution. With 3.6 million data points for over 1 million book titles, librarians can be assured they are ready with volumes of ideal information to supplement any library policy when facing a book challenge. The community will know their school and public librarians are more than ready to defend children's and young adult books that reflect all their community members. Teachers will find comfort in knowing their school librarian is ready to defend a book they want to use in their curriculum and help them find a suitable alternative if needed. And CLCD links to collection catalogs so that library users can view this information as well.

Two variations of CLCD are available based on libraries' individual needs: CLCD Enterprise and QuickFind. Both variations use the powerful 1 million+ database of titles; only the user interface is different. With 50+ filters, librarians can quickly and efficiently address specific questions about a title. Addressing these specific questions promptly may result in a far less negative impact on the collection and the community it serves.

## **Key Take Away**

Be prepared for book challenges before a book is challenged. While a collection policy may be in place, sometimes a community member or parent may still take issue with a book in the children's or young adult collection. The more substantial evidence for the validity of a book to be included in the collection, the more likely the book will remain on the shelf or in some way be available to library patrons and students. Awards, best book lists, and reviews from multiple sources form a stronger basis for retention. Using data of merit instead of emotion and personal bias goes much further toward showing governing boards, defensive community members, and school parents the quality of a book. An out-of-context passage does not stand a chance!

CLCD provides all the data of merit librarians need in an easy-to-use, searchable format and can be limited to your local collection allowing library users to also view this information.

Be ready with alternative texts for school instruction by purchasing multiple texts on specific subjects. CLCD's enumeration of subjects and the Books Like This feature are ideal. A public and school library can still serve a diverse community without sacrificing the elimination of specific subjects or topics. While it appears that subject bias is fueling some book challenges, all hope is not lost by being ready with compelling evidence on the validity of a specific book in a collection.



For over 20 years, Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) has been a leader in providing diverse, unbiased reviews and one search access to PreK-12 media of all types. CLCD staff compiles and creates information such as book reviews, thematic lists, award listings, and curriculum tools to provide an extensive collection of materials to meet libraries' needs, in an easy to use format. With Advanced Search, Power Search, and Award Listing search strategies, along with more than 50 other limiters, finding the information could not be any easier.

What began as a newsletter about new children's literature CLCD has expanded into a tool that can be used for reader's advisory, collection development, and curriculum development. Keeping subscribers informed through independent professionals in the field of libraries, education, and publishing, CLCD is constantly evolving into a tool that can meet changing needs.

### **Additional Sources**

[100 most frequently challenged books by decade | Advocacy, Legislation & Issues \(ala.org\)](#)

[Top 10 Most Challenged Books Lists | Advocacy, Legislation & Issues \(ala.org\)](#)

[krauseletter.pdf \(texastribune.org\)](#)

[Banned in the USA: Rising School Book Bans Threaten Free Expression and Students' First Amendment Rights - PEN America](#)

[Book Challenges Update - I Love Libraries](#)

[Formal Reconsideration | Tools, Publications & Resources \(ala.org\)](#)

[Frequently Challenged Books | Advocacy, Legislation & Issues \(ala.org\)](#)

[How Brooklyn Public Library Has Responded to Book Challenges \(nytimes.com\)](#)

[Issues and Trends | News and Press Center \(ala.org\)](#)

[Top 10 Most Challenged Books Lists | Advocacy, Legislation & Issues \(ala.org\)](#)

<https://pen.org/florida-book-bans-not-a-hoax/>