

English 3724G/SASAH 3390G: Banned and Challenged Books

Winter 2026

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Office Hours: M 12:30-2:00, By appointment

Calendar Description

Students will read a variety of banned, challenged, and controversial books for children and young adults. In focusing on such books, we consider the impetus behind challenging book, what it tells us about a particular historical moment, and what it tells us about literature in general.

Course Description

The American Library Association (ALA) defines censorship as “the suppression of ideas and information that some individuals, groups, or government officials find objectionable” (n.d.). Censorship includes “limiting or removing access to words, images, or ideas” and, generally, “decision[s] to restrict or deny access [are] made by a governing authority. This could be a person, group, [or] organization/business” (n.d.). In the U.S., “censorship by the government is illegal” (n.d.), and in Canada, while censorship isn’t absolutely illegal, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of expression, with “reasonable limits,” which include restrictions on hate speech, obscenity, defamation, and national security content” (Canadian Charter). Despite these legal limitations on censorship, widespread censorship, including book bans and challenges, have been a problem in children’s and young adult literature for decades, and, increasingly, books are being challenged throughout Canada.

In this course, we will study a variety of banned and challenged books. We will consider the differences between a book challenge and a ban, and we will also consider who most often initiates such challenges. As we read books that have been challenged, banned, or deemed controversial, we will also read news articles and court cases that address these challenges. Our goal is to consider what makes each book controversial, when and where each book has been challenged, and what the result of each challenge was. We will also analyze each book as work of literature, examining them through a range of critical frameworks. We will also consider how young readers respond to controversial texts versus how adult readers respond to the same texts. We will conclude the semester with a clear understanding of challenged books, banned books, and trends in book censorship. In addition, we will discuss a variety of topics, including, but not limited to:

- What issues and/or themes are the most challenged?
- How have the most challenged issues/themes changed over time?
- How are book challenges/bans treated differently in the US and Canada?
- Who most often initiates a ban or a challenge?
- How do issues like race, class, gender, and sexuality affect challenges or bans?
- Are there particular genres that are more likely to be challenged?
- What is the historical context surrounding a particular challenge or ban?

Course Objectives

In addition to gaining and sharing knowledge through the assigned readings, during the semester, successful students will

- Be able to define a book challenge, a book ban, and book censorship;
- Gain an understanding of the context surrounding book bans and challenges, including the differences in the US and Canada;

- Gain an understanding of which issues, topics, and themes are most often challenged;
- Gain an understanding of how politics influences literature and vice versa;
- Further develop knowledge of the way literature influences and is influenced by social constructions of age, race, class, gender, and sexuality;
- Further develop their close reading research skills; and
- Learn to assess, synthesize, and apply theoretical and critical sources to literature.

Required Texts and Course Materials

**Prince & Night* by Daniel Haack, LittleBee Publisher, 2018, \$11.99

**This Day in June* by Gayle E. Pitman, 2014, \$24.50

**Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, Magination Press, 2018, \$25.95

**And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Barnell and Justin Richardson, Simon & Schuster, 2005, \$11.99

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee, McIntosh & Otis, 1960, \$12.99

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor, Dial Press, 1977, \$13.99

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, McClelland and Stewart, 1985, \$22.00

This One Summer by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki, Groundwood Books, 2014, \$19.99

Melissa by Alex Gino, Scholastic, 2015, \$11.99

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas, HarperCollins, 2017, \$21.00

Gender Queer: A Memoir by Maia Kobabe, On-Lion Forge Publishing, 2020, \$33.99

***Students are encouraged to use these texts and editions are required, and students are expected to bring copies of books to class.** For example, on the days we discuss *Melissa*, students are expected to have a copy of that novel in class.

In addition to these texts, we will read secondary articles that will be posted to BrightSpace. Students are expected to print a copy of these readings and bring that copy to class. The reason for this is that we retain information better and are less distracted when we use hard copies of books and essays as opposed to digital copies.

***Students are not required to purchase picture books.** We will read and discuss these in class.

Course Requirements

*Please note: some assignments will be completed in-class. You will need to bring paper and pen or pencil to each class.

Class Engagement and Reading Quizzes	15%
Context Assignment	15%
Group Project	25%
Position Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography	15%
Position Paper	30%

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Class Engagement

In my opinion, the most successful college classrooms have students and instructors equally engaged in a discussion about the readings and assignments. I expect that all students will complete assigned course readings and will be prepared to discuss those readings on the appropriate day as well as prepared to participate in any other in-class activities. Lecture, class discussion, and group presentations will comprise a large part of class, and while I recognize that not all students are comfortable speaking in class, I do expect that all students will be engaged and actively listening.

Students are required to complete an Engagement Achievements Worksheet throughout the term and to submit it electronically by the last day of class. Students who do not submit the Worksheet will receive a 0 for participation. We will review the Engagement Achievements Worksheet on the first day of class.

Reading Quizzes

We will complete pop Reading Quizzes throughout the semester as I deem them necessary. The purpose of Reading Quizzes is to ensure that students are reading, and as the term “pop” suggests, these will not be announced prior to the day they are given. Quizzes will be based on the any reading that has been assigned up to the day of the quiz, and they will take no more than 10 minutes. Students should anticipate at least one quiz per novel, and students who require accommodation may speak to me individually to ensure they receive accommodation.

Context Assignment

Students will write a 2-to-3-page informative paper outlining the context of a banned or challenged book, the context of a ban or a challenge, or the context of a court case about a banned or challenged book. A detailed prompt will be reviewed and posted in the first weeks of class.

Group Project

Working in groups, students will complete a project on a banned/challenged book that the students select from the ALA’s list of “[Top 10 Most Challenged Books Archive](#)” or from [PEN America’s list of Banned/Challenged books](#). The project must include an original infographic, and each student must submit a short paper on the assignment. A detailed prompt will be reviewed and posted in the first weeks of class. Groups will be assigned by the instructor.

Position Paper, Position Paper Proposal, and Annotated Bibliography

Students will choose a banned/challenged book, one we’ve read in class or one they have selected. They will then write a paper proposal and annotated bibliography; the proposal should outline their approach in their paper, and the annotated bibliography include information on sources students plan to use in the paper. Taking their instructor’s feedback on the proposal and bibliography into consideration, students will then write a 12-page paper in which they take a position on whether the book should be censored. A detailed prompt will be reviewed and posted in the first weeks of class.

Course Policies

Discussion Guidelines:

We will cover a variety of topics pertaining to young adult literature. Among other topics, we will consider how race, class, gender, sex, and sexuality are presented within the genre. Some of the materials we will consider may include topics that may be difficult to read about and to discuss. Ensure you are comfortable discussing this potentially sensitive material. Additionally, this class is a space in which students are free to express their views, to post questions, or to raise issues without reprisal. Students are expected to be thoughtful, respectful, and kind.

Students should also feel free to address any topics in their written assignments, taking care to do so within the parameters of the assignment.

Professionalism & Privacy:

Western Students are expected to follow the [Student Code of Conduct](#). Additionally, the following expectations apply to this course:

- Students are expected to be courteous and kind and to follow online etiquette expectations provided on OWL.
- All course materials created by the instructor are copyrighted and cannot be sold/shared.
- All course materials created by graduate students (i.e., presentations, handouts, discussion questions, etc.) are the intellectual property of the student creating the materials and cannot be sold/shared.
- Recordings are not permitted (audio or video) without the instructor's or the students' explicit permission.
- Permitted recordings are only to be used for class and are not to be distributed.
- All recorded sessions, if any, will remain within the course site or unlisted if streamed.

OWL/Brightspace:

The use of OWL/Brightspace is necessary for successful completion of this course. This includes accessing readings as stipulated in the course outline, downloading instructions and guidelines for assignments, and submitting assignments through OWL/Brightspace. All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website.

Communicating with Instructor:

Email is the best way to communicate with me. It may take up to 24 hours for me to respond to you during the week and 48 hours on the weekend. Note: all email communication to me should be respectful in tone. Be sure to include an appropriate subject line—e.g., Missing Class, Oct. 13 or Extension Request for Novel Chunk.

Assignment Format, Submitting Assignments, Late Submission:

All assignments are due on the date stated on the class schedule. All assignments that are completed outside of class must be submitted to Brightspace as .doc or .dox files. Do not submit PDFs. Individual assignment prompts will include specific instructions for submitting assignments. Some assignments will be completed in class. All in class assignments must be handwritten on paper and submitted to the instructor upon completion.

It is your responsibility to submit assignments on time. ***Late papers will not be accepted.***

Note: If you need an extension, email me 48-hours before the assignment is due to request an extension. You do not need to share with me the intimate details of your life. That information is none of my business, and you should never have to disclose private information to get support. If you feel compelled to offer a reason for requesting an extension, I encourage you to be creative (e.g., your cat vomited on your rough draft or you're a Marvel super-villain who is planning an inter-galactic heist and need more time to plan.)

Electronic Devices in the Classroom:

Cellphones are not permitted in class. Laptops are not permitted unless it is your turn to serve as the designated note-taker. The reason for this policy is that screens and internet access detract both from the communal, social environment of the classroom and from your own learning experience. You will learn more and retain more of what you have learned if you work with your textbooks in class and write down notes by hand or listen actively and rely on the note-taker's notes. We will all communicate better with one another if we do not rely on screens.

Please note that this policy extends to students with approved accommodations. Because our class will always have at least two designated note-takers using a laptop, students with accommodations will not require their own laptops and will not be permitted to use them except when it is their turn to serve as designated note-take.

There will be two to three designated note-takers per class, and following each class, designated note-takers will email notes to the instructor, who will then post notes to the "Note" file in Brightspace.

Attendance and Illness Policy:

To do well in a literature class, you must attend class. I expect you to attend class and to participate in each class.

- You may miss up to three hours (the equivalent of one week of class) of class meetings during the term without explanation. This means that the first three class hours you will be recorded as absences but *excused provided you don't miss any more.*
- However, if you miss a total of four to nine class hours without academic consideration or accommodation (the equivalent of up to three full weeks of class), your grade will be reduced by 10% (e.g., an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a 72).
- If you miss more than nine hours of class without academic consideration or accommodation (the equivalent of more than three weeks of class), your final grade will be reduced by 15% (e.g., an earned final grade of 80 will be reported as a 68).
- Please do not come to class if you're feeling ill. As stated above, you will receive three hours' worth of excused absences.

Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism:

"Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, which can be found here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Plagiarism includes the use of ChatGPT and other kinds of generative AI.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently Western and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>."

Note: you may not submit any work for this class that you have submitted for another class.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies in English and Writing Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Generative AI:

"In this course, the use of AI (such as automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited, unless there has been discussion with and agreement by the instructor before beginning an assignment. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and/or other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them."

Prerequisites:

"Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course, and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees if you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites."

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1099 or permission of the department.

Academic Consideration Policy:

“University policy on academic considerations is described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation.

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests through the Student Absence Portal, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar’s webpage:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation, which may include a Student Medical Certificate. Recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation.”

General information about missed coursework:

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar:

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/academicconsiderationSep24.pdf>

This policy does not apply to requests for academic consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult: [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar’s webpage:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academicconsiderations/>

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this and, therefore, always require formal supporting documentation:

- Banned/Challenged Book Group Project
- Position Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography
- Position Paper

Intellectual Property and Copyright:

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students’ personal use within the course and remain the instructor’s intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without

securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites such as OneClass, Quizlet, or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accessible Education:

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf.

Please speak to me, either in person or via email, by the end of the second week in class to discuss any accommodations you may have.

Mental Health Supports

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519-661-3030 (during class hours) or 519-433-2023 after class hours and on weekends.

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays and should give reasonable notice in writing (email), prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Statement on Gender-based and Sexual Violence:

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Other Student Support Services:

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support and Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Class Meeting Schedule

*OWL: Readings are posted to OWL.

* Readings may be amended with notice from the professor.

Mon., Jan. 5	First Day of Class
Wed., Jan. 7	Read: <i>And Tango Makes Three</i> OWL: “ Escambia School Board wins ‘And Tango Makes Three’ book ban challenge ” <i>Prince & Knight</i> OWL: “ The 23 Most Banned Picture Books of the 2023-2024 School Year ” OWL, Green-Barteet, “Censorship”
Mon., Jan. 12	Read: <i>Something Happened in Our Town</i> OWL: Collins, “ My Book Was Banned. Here’s My Story. ”
Wed., Jan. 14	Guest Lecture: The History of Banned Books by Jason Dyck *Class Meets in the Weldon Community Room Today!
Mon., Jan. 19	Read: Lee, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> , Ch. 1-11 OWL: Wells, “ Book Banning in Canada ” Crawford, “ Surrey schools pull <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>... ”
Wed., Jan. 21	Read: Lee, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> , Ch. 12-16 OWL: Lee, “ Censorship or Protection ”
Mon., Jan. 26	Read: Lee, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> , Ch. 17-end OWL: Johnson, “Efforts to Ban Harper Lee’s <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> ”
Wed., Jan. 28	Read: Taylor, <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> , Ch. 1-Ch. 6 OWL: “ Letter From NCAC to Protest the Challenging of <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> ”
Mon., Feb. 2	Read: Taylor, <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> , Ch. 7-end
Wed., Feb. 4	Read: Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 1-Ch. 9 (p. 1-p. 163) OWL: Jamison, “Preserving Equity of Young Adult Readers”
Fri., Feb. 6	Due: Context Assignment Submit to Brightspace by Midnight
Mon., Feb. 9	Read: Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 10-Ch. 14 (p. 164-257) OWL: Falcon, “ This is the most banned book in Georgia ”
Wed., Feb. 11	Read: Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 15-21 (p. 256-370) Bishop, “ Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors ”
Mon., Feb. 16	Reading Week
Wed., Feb. 18	Reading Week

Mon., Feb. 23 Read: Thomas, *The Hate U Give*, Ch. 22-end (p. 373-end)
OWL: “Nova Scotia Schools remove *The Hate U Give* due to profanity”

Wed., Feb. 25 Read: Gino, *Melissa*, Ch. I-VI (p. 1-p. 94)
OWL: “Banned Books 2022—George (Now Published as *Melissa*)”
*Class meets in FIMS & Nursing Room 1250 Today!

Fri., Feb. 27 **Due: Position Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography**
Submit to Brightspace by Midnight!

Mon., Mar. 2 Read: Gino, *Melissa*, Ch.VII-XII (p. 95-end)

Wed., Mar. 4 Read: Kobabe, *Gender Queer*, p. 11-115
OWL: Yurcaba, “More than half of books banned last year featured LGBTQ characters or people of color, report finds”

Mon., Mar. 9 Read: Kobabe, *Gender Queer*, p. 116-203
OWL: Abcarian, “I read ‘Gender Queer, the most banned book in America’”

Wed., Mar. 11 Read: Kobabe, *Gender Queer*, p.204-end

Mon. Mar. 16 Read: Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Ch. I-Ch. V (p. 3-p. 86)
OWL: Williams, “The Handmaid’s Tale among more than 200 books to be pulled at Edmonton public schools”

Wed., Mar. 18 Read: Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Ch. VI-X (p. 87-218)
OWL: Tias, “‘The Handmaid’s Tale’: A Must Read Banned Book”

Thur., Mar. 19 Virtual Reading and Talk: Banned Books with Maia Kobabe
Time: 3:30-5:30
More Details to Come!

Mon., Mar. 23 Read: Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Ch. XI-XII (p. 219-304)

Wed., Mar. 25 Read: Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Ch.XIII-end (p. 305-end)

Mon., Mar. 30 Group Presentations

Wed., April 1 Group Presentations

Mon., April 6 Read: Tamaki and Tamaki, *This One Summer*, p.1-141
OWL: Gandhi, “Graphic Novel Tops 2016 Most Challenged Book List”

Wed., April 8 **Last Day of Class**
Read: Tamaki and Tamaki, *This One Summer*, p.142-end
Due: Position Paper
Submit to Brightspace by Midnight