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## **BANNED TOGETHER:** *Our Fight for Readers' Rights*

edited by **Ashley Hope Pérez**

illustrated by **Debbie Fong**

- ★ “Authentic and raw prose and poetry render an educational safe space for readers.”—*Publishers Weekly*
- ★ “An empowering and critically timely blueprint for action.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

A dazzling YA anthology that spotlights the transformative power of books while equipping teens to fight for the freedom to read, featuring the voices of sixteen diverse, award-winning authors and illustrators.

Books are disappearing from shelves across the country. What does this mean for authors, illustrators, and—most crucially—for young readers?

This bold collection of fiction, memoir, poetry, graphic narratives, essays, and other genres explores book bans through various lenses and empowers teens to fight back. From moving personal accounts to clever comebacks aimed at censorship, sixteen legendary YA authors and illustrators confront the high-stakes question of *what is lost* when books are kept from teens.

Contributors include Elana K. Arnold, Nikki Grimes, Ellen Hopkins, Kelly Jensen, Brendan Kiely, Maia Kobabe, Bill Konigsberg, Kyle Lukoff, Mari Naomi, Trung Lê Nguyễn, Ashley Hope Pérez, Isabel Quintero, Traci Sorell, Robin Stevenson, and Padma Venkatraman; the collection is a star-studded must-read that packs strength and power into every last word.

Striking illustrations from Ignatz-nominated artist Debbie Fong pair perfectly with the searing, impactful narrative. Resources include tips from the Vandegrift Banned Book Club and other teen activists, as well as extensive recommended book lists.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Maia Kobabe has met librarians who say they know exact patrons who would benefit from reading *Gender Queer: A Memoir*. How is matching the right book with the right patron the role of librarians? What has happened that causes some librarians to cease serving patrons in this way? Discuss the following quote from Robin Stevenson: “When authors and librarians are thinking about possible backlash rather than thinking about what books teens need, we are doing the work of book banners for them” (p. 26).
- Define pornography. Many censors claim books that deal with LGBTQ+ issues are pornographic. How are they using the word loosely or subjectively? Craft a statement that explains why books that deal with these issues aren't pornographic.
- In some cities and towns, politicians have threatened to defund libraries that purchase diverse books. What do these politicians fear? Public schools and libraries exist to serve everyone. How are segments of populations being left out when libraries don't purchase diverse books? Why is it important for all patrons to have access to books by and about people that don't look or live like them? Debate the issues related to funding and defunding libraries from the perspective of all tax-paying citizens.
- Explain this metaphor in “Extraordinary Hazards” by Nikki Grimes: “The kangaroo court of hate-mongers masquerading as sweet mama bears” (pp. 34–35). What is a kangaroo court? How have some school and public library board meetings become kangaroo courts? Who are the “sweet mama bears”? Role-play a conversation between a librarian and a “sweet mama bear” about the importance of books written by those featured in this anthology.
- There are organized groups with agendas to censor books claiming their “parental rights.” How are these groups attempting to violate the rights of parents of teens who don't support their agenda?
- Authors often write about their own lives. Which writers in this anthology are writing about past experiences? How does censoring their works deny the existence of their past? Discuss the danger of such denial. In “Groomer,” Bill Konigsberg says, “I realized that I needed to use the hurt I had endured to act in support of others” (p. 67). What is the “hurt” he endured, and how do his books support teens with similar issues? Define groomer. Why does Konigsberg say that book banners set up teens to be groomed?
- Ellen Hopkins, one of the most banned writers in America, believes that book banning is about power. What is the relationship between power and control? Explain the power that groups like Moms for Liberty are using to take control of the curriculum in schools. What type of education are they demanding? Debate whether this power and control is about anti-education, rather than education.
- Explain what Ashley Hope Pérez means in “Dancing with Haters” by “I use words to transform pain, to dance away hate” (p. 56). Konigsberg says that he makes a conscious decision not to be “engulfed in darkness” (p. 75). Discuss how darkness perpetuates hate and bullying. How do books offer light? In what way can books “dance away hate”? Isabel Quintero calls book banning “a form of violence” (p. 143). Debate the relationship between hate, darkness, violence, and censorship.
- Discuss the powerful message that Kelly Jensen conveys when she says, “I write because I am not nothing” (p. 233). How does this statement apply to all writers, especially the ones who are banned? Explain how Jensen's statement might also apply to teens and why they read.
- *Banned Together: Our Fight for Readers' Rights* is about what writers are doing to fight the censorship war. Why is it important for teens to join the battle and defend their own right to read? Consider information offered in this anthology and develop a battle plan.

## ABOUT THE CREATORS



**Ashley Hope Pérez** grew up in Texas and is the author of three award-winning novels for young adults, including *Out of Darkness*, which received a Printz Honor and the Tomás Rivera Book Award—and was one of the top ten most banned books of 2021 and 2022. In 2023, Ashley joined PEN America's lawsuit against Escambia County, Florida, and is still fighting to see books there and across the country returned to shelves. In 2025, she founded the Unite to Read Project with funding from the Mellon Foundation. This two-year initiative unites diverse stakeholders to combat book bans, defend and read banned books, and amplify access to literature and ideas. Ashley is a former high school teacher and Associate Professor of Comparative Studies at The Ohio State University, where she recently received the Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching. She lives in Columbus, OH, with her sweet blended family: a partner, three kids, and a famous cat named Honey Bun. Find out what she's been up to at [linktr.ee/ashleyhopeperez](http://linktr.ee/ashleyhopeperez) or contact her at [AshleyPerez.com](mailto:AshleyPerez.com).



**Debbie Fong** is an Ignatz-nominated cartoonist, illustrator, and author living in Brooklyn, New York. She is the author/illustrator of *Next Stop*, and the illustrator of *Banned Together: Our Fight for Readers' Rights* edited by Ashley Hope Pérez, and *What Can I Say?* and *How to Be a Person* by Catherine Newman. Debbie is the artist behind POMMO Press, an online shop where she sells colorful prints, stationery, and other fun goods. Find her online at [DebbieFong.com](http://DebbieFong.com) and [@pommopress](https://www.instagram.com/pommopress).