



ACLU

**AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
of OHIO**

Banned Brilliance Toolkit

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Dear Friend,

We're extremely pleased that you're considering hosting a Banned Books event in the future. This toolkit is designed to lead you through the process of planning your program, from start to finish. It includes a step-by-step timeline, a list of tips for the program's major components, and samples of all the letters and materials you'll need to make your event a success.

This toolkit is aimed at a general Banned Book event, but we encourage you to customize it to your liking. You can pique interest and build ties with other activist groups by focusing on subjects like:

- African-American Authors
- LGBT Literature
- Banned Children's books
- Political Censorship

Remember that Banned Books Week always takes place during the last week of September, and is the perfect time to host your program.

The ACLU of Ohio is a small organization with a big goal: defending the Constitution. Book censorship is a threat to everyone's First Amendment rights, and by celebrating controversial books we affirm our constitutional rights. We'd like to thank you for sharing our interest in protecting free speech.

As you move forward in planning your event, the ACLU of Ohio is here to offer advice, guidance, and support. Feel free to contact us at contact@acluohio.org or (216) 472-2200 with questions or concerns.

Warmly,

Checklist and Timeline

- **Decide your goals**
 - Will you have a theme?
 - What turnout are you aiming for?
 - What is your budget?
- **Pre-planning**
 - Obtain a cosponsor, identify what their role will be
 - Book your venue
- **Readers and Selections**
 - Find an emcee
 - Identify and send out inquiries to potential readers
 - Choose books and reading selections
 - Once readers are confirmed make sure they're comfortable with their selection
- **Publicity**
 - Choose official title, description
 - Design flyers, e-mails, etc.
 - Send out publicity
 - e-mails
 - flyers
 - web-listings / web calendars
 - press
 - Request short speaker bios to be read by emcee
- **Before the Event**
 - Confirm venue
 - Order any snack trays, etc.
- **Materials to Bring Day-Of**
 - Thank you notes and honorarium
 - Materials for your organization's literature table
 - 2 copies of bios, reading selections, and emcee notes
 - Water bottles for speakers
 - Evaluation forms for audience
 - Sign-in sheets

Choosing Your Reading Selections

Picking a Theme

The theme is the foundation upon which you will build your event, so selecting a topic that is important to you and/or your organization is crucial. Consider both the audience you are hoping to attract and the message you hope to communicate, and come up with a topic that satisfies both needs.

As you browse for potential book selections, try to find a variety of titles that address your theme from different perspectives. Choosing both male and female authors from different locations, racial backgrounds, and time periods will present your theme in a well-rounded capacity.

Finding Books and Excerpts

After selecting your theme, finding relevant books will probably be the easiest step in the planning process. There are many online resources which list banned and challenged books, several of which are listed on the “Online Resources” page. Don’t forget local librarians, who can offer valuable suggestions for relevant works.

It’s not necessary to read the entire book to choose an excerpt that will fit your event. Online book summary websites (e.g. Sparknotes, Cliffnotes, or Amazon.com) offer outlines and synopses to guide you to the most relevant sections of the books you have chosen. Be sure to read the passages aloud to verify that they fit your timeframe for each reader, and select several extra excerpts in case your readers are uninterested in reading a given passage.

Example

An organization has chosen the theme “Experiences of War” for their Banned Brilliance event. They are hoping to use three selections to show what the experience of war has meant to different generations. The sample book list (shown on the following page) accomplishes this goal by depicting the struggles of soldiers during various wars (the Vietnam War and World Wars I and II). Based on the excerpts they choose, they will enable the audience to consider the perennial reality of war without losing a sense of each excerpt’s unique identity.

Sample Themes and Book Lists

African American Authors

Their Eyes Were Watching God – Zora Neale Hurston
The Autobiography of Malcolm X – Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley
The Color Purple – Alice Walker
Native Son – Richard Wright

Growing Up LGBT

Geography Club – Brent Hartinger
And Tango Makes Three – Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson
Annie on My Mind – Nancy Garden

Coming-of-Age Novels

To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee
Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling
A Separate Peace – John Irving
The Catcher in the Rye – JD Salinger

Experiences of War

Slaughterhouse-5 – Kurt Vonnegut
Fallen Angels – Walter Dean Myers
Catch-22 – Joseph Heller
A Farewell to Arms – Ernest Hemingway

Science Fiction/Fantasy

The Lord of the Rings – J.R.R. Tolkien
The Fountainhead – Ayn Rand
1984 – George Orwell
Brave New World – Aldous Huxley

Reliving American History

Jazz – Toni Morrison
The Jungle – Upton Sinclair
The Grapes of Wrath – John Steinbeck
Gone with the Wind – Margaret Mitchell

Choosing a Venue

You should ideally book a location several months prior to your event, to allow plenty of time for publicity and to prevent last-minute scrambles for unbooked rooms. Space and price are significant considerations in scouting locations. Some venues will charge a reservation fee, but may waive or lower it for non-profit or community events.

In considering a venue, there are several questions to ask:

- How many people do you anticipate attending?
- Where are similar events held?
- What place would serve as a great backdrop for the subject matter?
- Can you re-imagine or reappropriate an unusual space?
- Is the location accessible, with adequate parking for attendees?

It's also important to consider the audience you want to draw in. Your event's immediate audience will be those who live in the area or frequent your venue. For example, an art space may work best for a younger crowd. Using a co-sponsor's space will attract their membership base.

Some ideas for possible venues:

- Public libraries
- Theatres
- Large independent bookstores
- Music venues
- Art spaces
- Churches or congregations
- Community centers
- College campus
- Coffee houses

For others, check the entertainment listings of your local newspaper. After booking a location, remember to verify details like:

- Will the venue staff set-up the room?
- Will you need a key to get in?
- If you want to provide light snacks, are food and drink permitted?
- Do you need to request microphones or other AV equipment?

Co-Sponsors

In our experience partnering with another organization can broaden the reach of the event and help you gain access to new and different audiences. Doing so may also be helpful for finding readers and publicizing the event. Depending on what organization you work with, your partnership can lend your event more weight and authority.

Types of organizations to approach:

- Local writing associations or nonprofits
- Local Artists Guild
- PEN American Center
- National Writers Association
- University writing, poetry, or multicultural centers
- For themed events like banned works of African-American or LGBT authors, consider partnering with related activist organizations

Readers

Lining up readers is likely the aspect of your banned books program that will take the most time and effort. We've included a Sample Ask Letter to demonstrate one way to approach prospective readers. The sooner you reach out and the more lead-time you allow, the easier it will be to find performers.

It's also important to choose an emcee to introduce each reader and keep the program running smoothly. If you choose an individual with name recognition in your community, their involvement can be a big draw.

Some people and organizations to approach:

- Local Writers Association
- Writers Guild of America
- Prominent theatres and theatre companies in your area
- Poetry slam competitors
- Local notable persons, like television personalities and politicians
- Professors and other academics
- Students, if the event is being held by a school or student group

If you are focusing on a particular topic, like banned works with LGBT themes, be sure to approach notable community members in that demographic.

Publicity

Once your venue is booked and your event title and description are set, you can begin publicizing your event. If any of your readers are well-known in your community, make sure to highlight their participation.

It's best to use a variety of media so that you can reach the greatest number of people.

- **Members.** If you belong to an organization, this is a great event to advertise to your members in e-mail and print newsletters. Make sure you get the word out early and often. Don't forget the members of your cosponsoring organization.
- **Press.** Check the publishing schedule for your state or city's weekly and monthly magazines – they may require a submission many weeks in advance. Send a media advisory and send it to the daily papers and reporters about a week in advance.
- **Web.** Place it prominently on your own website, add your listing to Craigslist and contact local bloggers to let them know the event is happening. Check the websites of activist and local groups for community calendars to which you can post the listing.
- **Fliers.** Distribute fliers to bookstores, colleges, coffee shops, libraries, music venues, art galleries, and other local stores to make sure you reach a large number of people.
- **Venue.** Be sure to inquire if your venue has a newsletter or bulletin board where you can post information about the event.

Online Resources

The American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio – Banned Brilliance Event Footage

www.acluohio.org/webcast

We at the ACLU of Ohio have many resources online to help you plan your Banned Brilliance event, including video from our 2009 event. Follow the link above, select “video” or “audio”, select the “October 2009” link in the left-hand column, and scroll down to find the clip.

The American Libraries Association – Banned Books Week

www.ala.org/bbooks

The ALA keeps records of official book bans/challenges, and maintains a list of the most frequently challenged books. There is a specific list of banned books by authors of color, and several organized by year. A separate page explains why and when the books were challenged.

Wamego, KS Banned Books Reading List

<http://www.usd320.k12.ks.us/whs/lmc/bbooks.html>

This Kansas high school library lists hundreds of banned books and cites reasons why they were banned/challenged. Though it doesn't include dates, the list is extensive and includes many titles not listed on the ALA site.

First Amendment Center – Banned Books

www.firstamendmentcenter.org

The First Amendment Center has a large list of resources as well as a short history of Banned Books Week in their Free Speech and Libraries section.

Sparknotes

www.sparknotes.com

Sparknotes provides outlines of a wide variety of books, many of which include detailed summaries of individual chapters, character analyses, and explanations of major themes.