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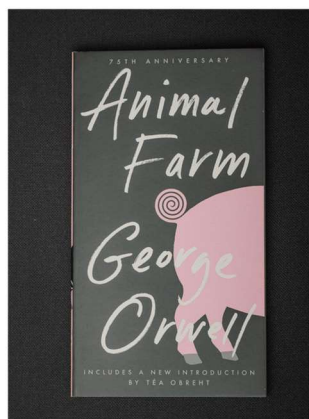


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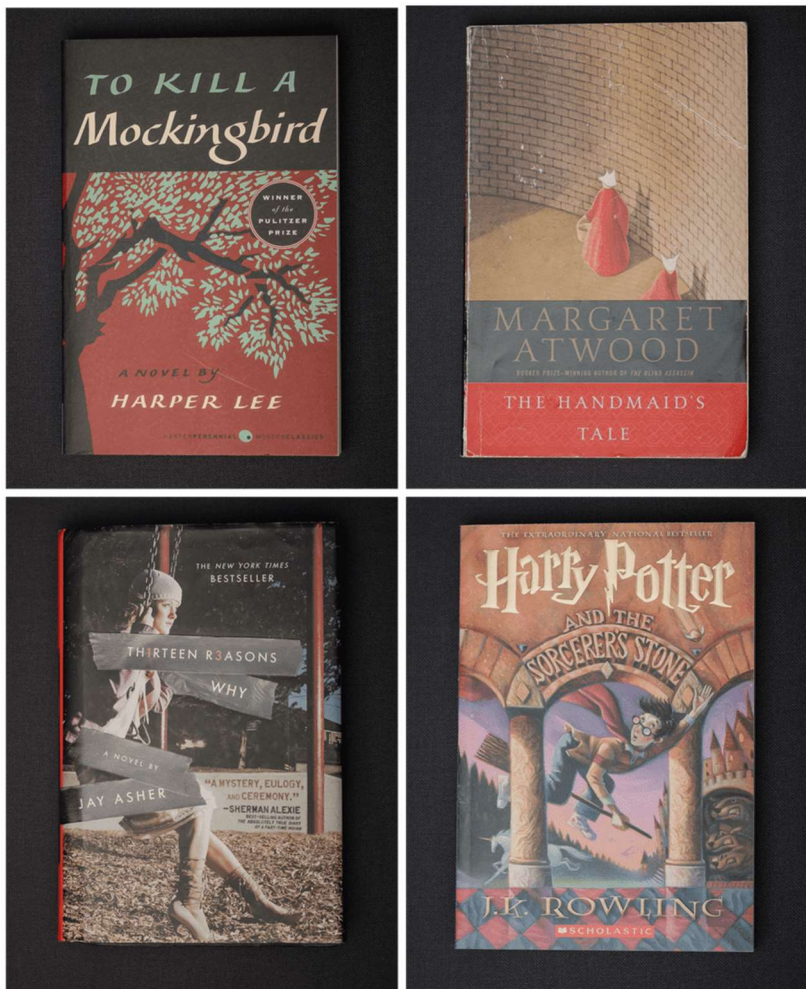
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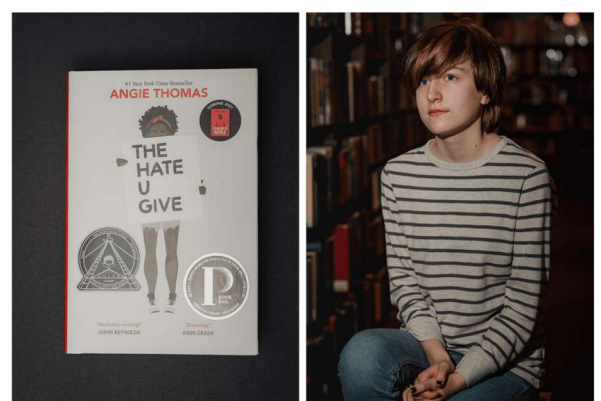
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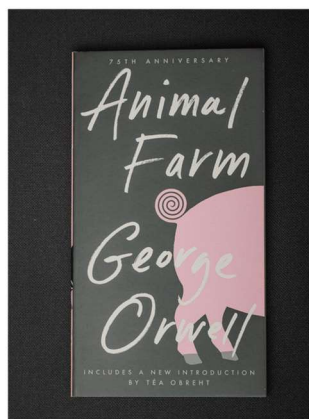


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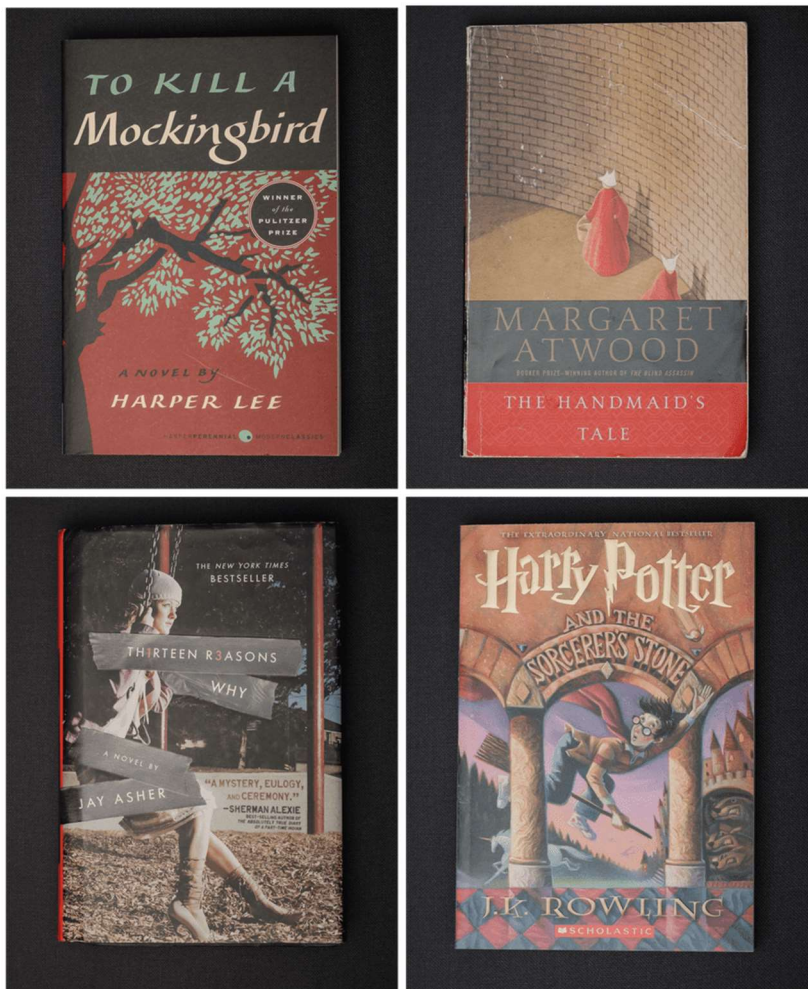
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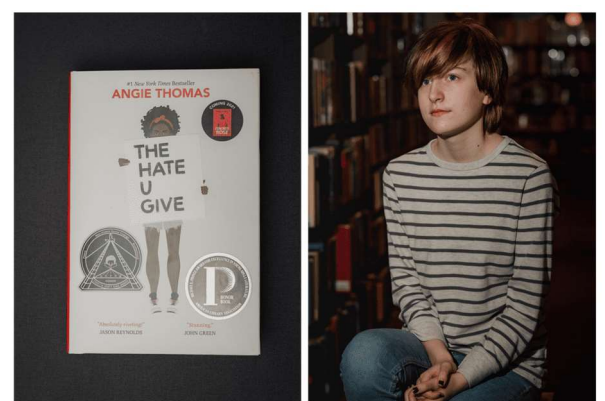
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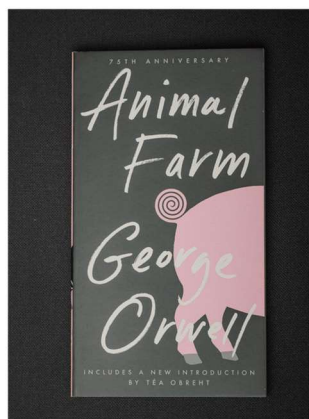


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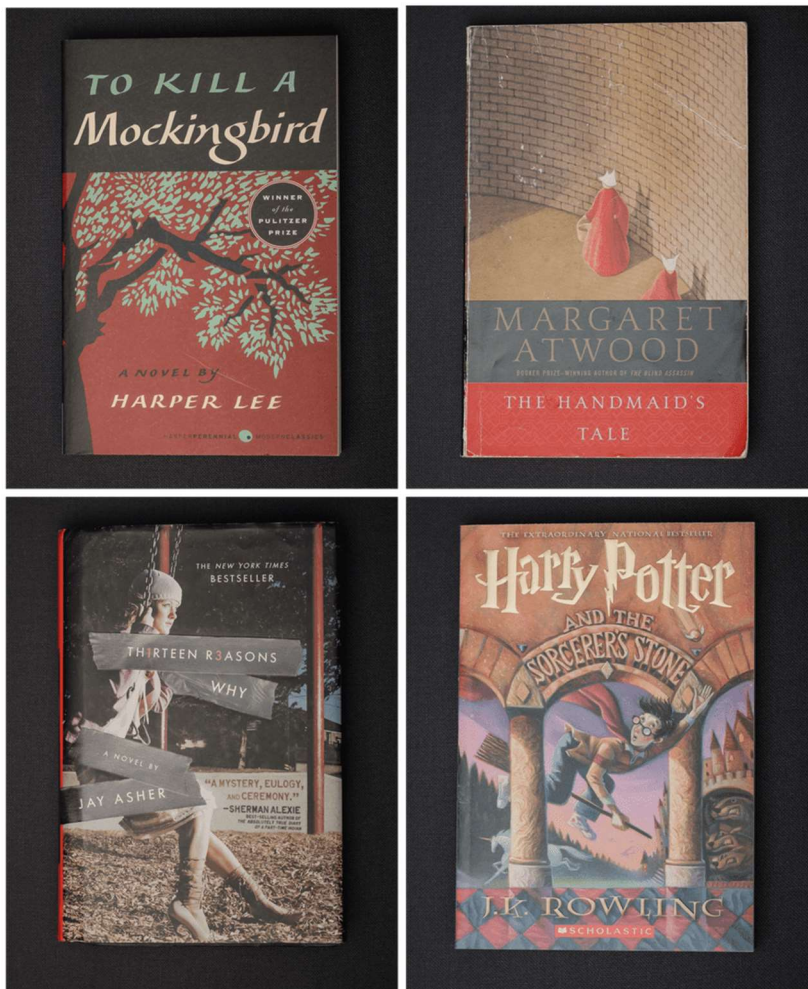
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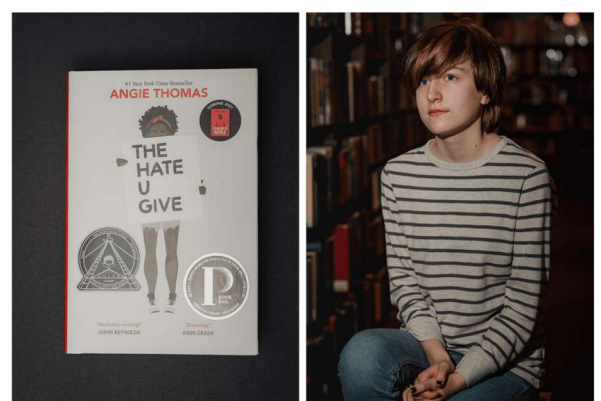
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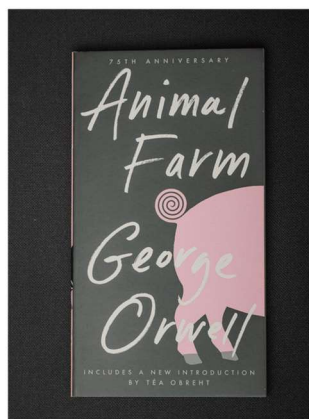


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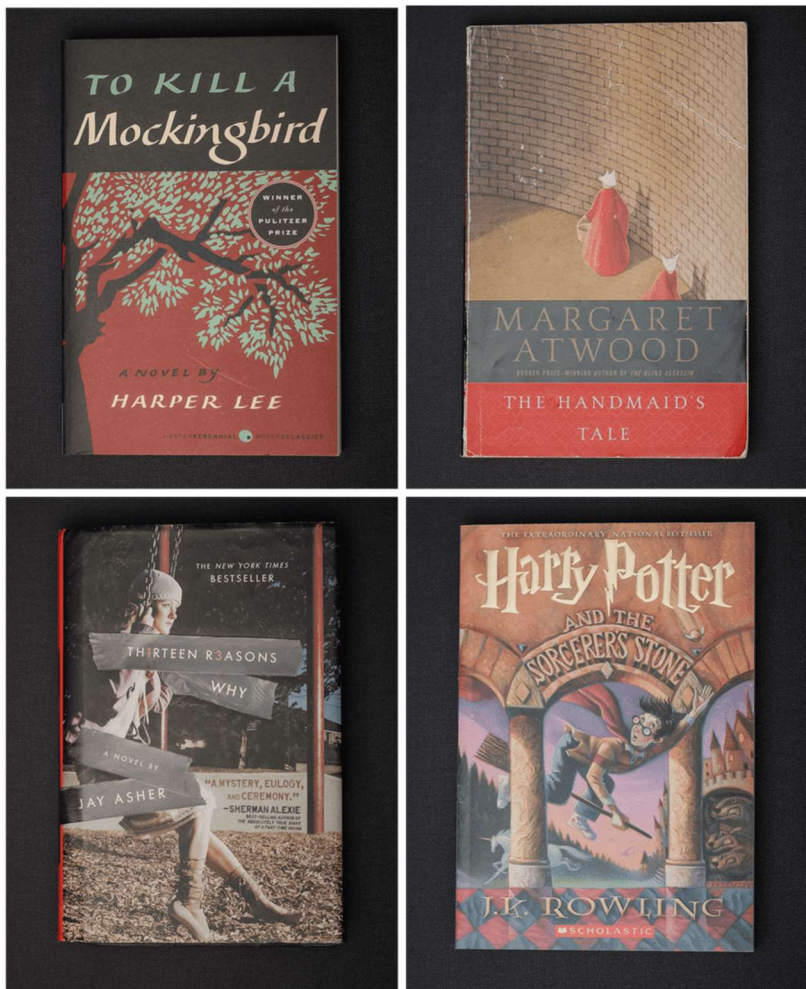
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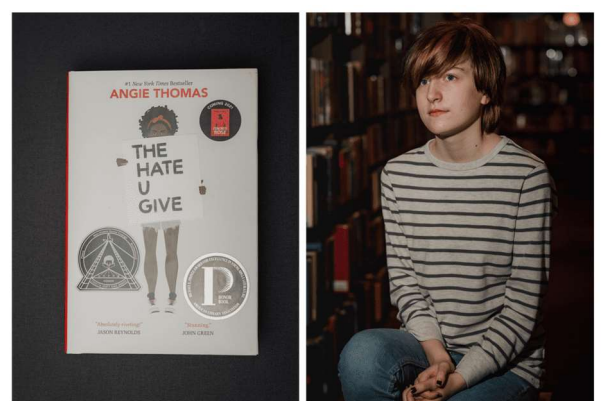
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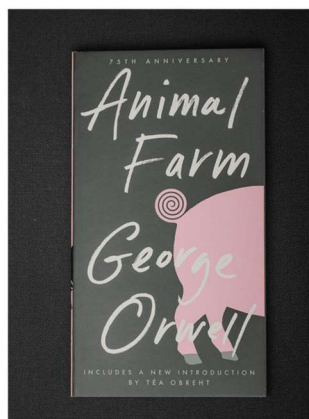


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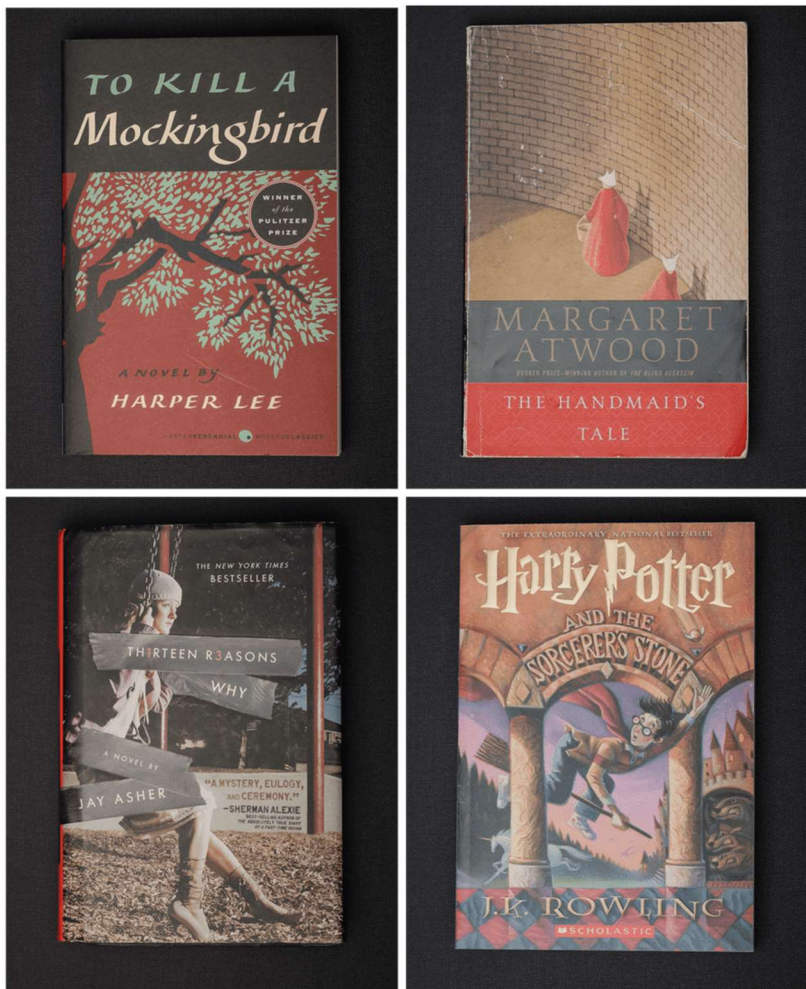
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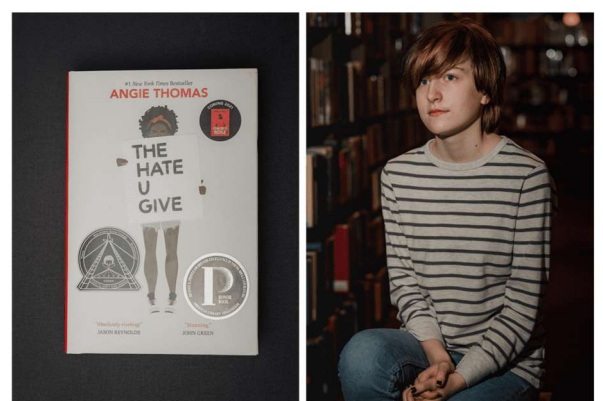
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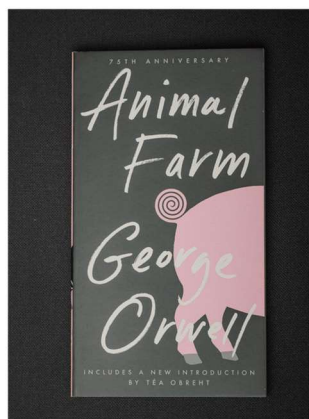


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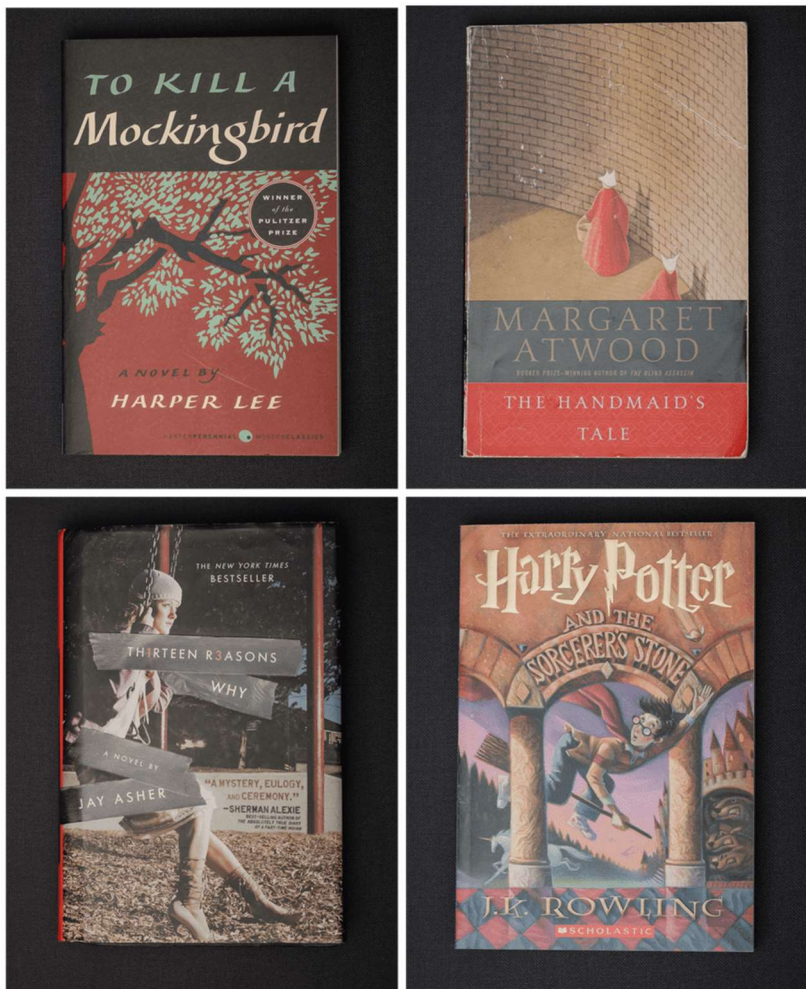
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Conservatives are pushing to ban books from school libraries. At a time of crisis, a group of Pennsylvania teenagers are fighting back by [Adam Gabbatt](#) with photographs by Hannah Yoon Mon 7 Feb 2022

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“Especially for young kids who are queer, or are people of color, it’s really important to see representation in books, and if you aren’t allowed access to that then that can be detrimental.”

As well as the impact on people who might have found kinship with banned authors, or representation in now-restricted books, Hastings says there is another unsavory aspect to all of this.

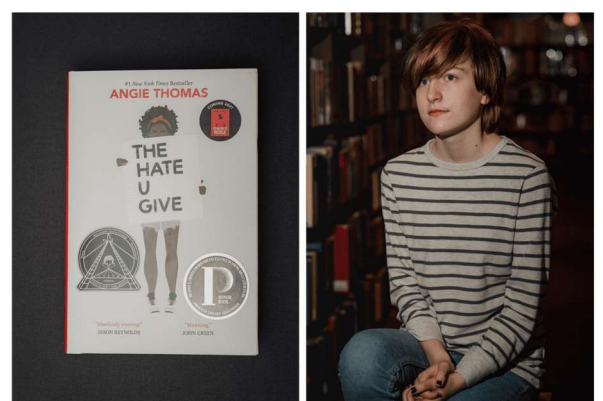
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“Napoleon’s use of the sheep was notable,” says Jordan Daughtry, 14. She’s clutching a copy of *Animal Farm*, and referring to the authoritarian Berkshire boar who seizes control of an English acreage, before bending his fellow animals to his will.

The sheep, who represent the unwitting masses in George Orwell’s critique of Joseph Stalin’s totalitarian rule, are “ignorant buffoons”, Daughtry says.

Jordan’s sibling, Kiara Daughtry, 16, continues the thought.

“It did kind of remind me of the whole ‘stop the steal’ thing,” Kiara says, referencing the January 6 insurrection, when Donald Trump’s supporters, spurred by a wave of lies by the then president, besieged the US Capitol. “And all that nonsense.”

The Daughtrys are sitting in the back of Firefly bookstore, a gem of new and used literature in the small town of Kutztown, central [Pennsylvania](#). Huddled together on foldout chairs, facing down a table laden with muffins, pretzels and a stuffed toy pig, they’re members of Kutztown’s Banned Book Club, which meets every two weeks to read and discuss literature that conservatives across the country are working to ban from school libraries.

The book club members, all aged between 13 and 16, are gathered at a time of crisis. In the past year the book-banning movement has already seen works that mostly address race or LGBTQ issues removed from libraries in Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wyoming and Pennsylvania.

Like many young people in the US, the members of the Kutztown Banned Book Club feel the censorship closing in. In December, the Pennridge school district, 30 miles from Kutztown, removed the children’s book *Heather Has Two Mommies*, a picture book about a lesbian couple and their child, from elementary school libraries.



Kiara Daughtry, left, and Lena Cackley.

Last year, Pennsylvania’s Central York school board [banned a long list of books](#), almost entirely titles by, or about, people of color. The ban was overturned in September after [students protested](#).

“I love to read, so it’s kind of frustrating to see the bans, especially because a lot of adults are banning it, but they’re not asking teenagers our opinion on these books,” Joselyn Diffenbaugh says. A softly spoken

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14-year-old, sporting bangs and a plaid shirt, she founded the Banned Book Club in response to the sweeping prohibition in the US.

“It’s scary to know that all these people who might need these books for a reason, because maybe they’re just learning about themselves, and they need something to read, they don’t have access to that.”

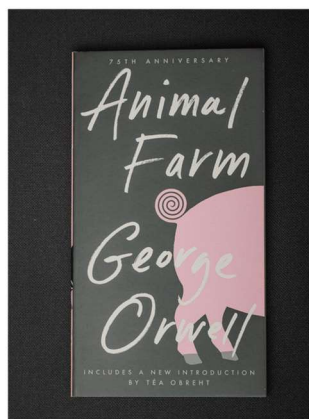


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Last week the issue gained extra attention, after the Pulitzer-winning Holocaust graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* was [banned](#) from classrooms in McMinn county, Tennessee, by the local school board. The board objected to “rough, objectionable language” in the book, which describes the experiences of author [Art Spiegelman’s](#) parents in Nazi concentration camps, and his mother’s suicide. *Maus* has [since become a bestseller](#) on Amazon.

At Firefly, the book club is discussing Animal Farm when I join them. The allegorical novel has not been targeted in the recent banning wave, but it was banned in the USSR until the Soviet Union fell, and in the UK during the second world war – when the government felt its publication could anger their Soviet allies. It was later banned in Florida – where it was seen to be “pro-communist”.

Next on the reading list will be *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, an award-winning young adult novel about the shooting of a young unarmed black man by a white police officer, which has been removed from various school libraries. But right now the conversation moves from Napoleon’s hold over *Animal Farm*’s sheep to why none of the animals simply left the farm.



A copy of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Right, Jesse Hastings.



Bridget Johnson, who at 13 is the youngest in the group, shows no fear in joining in the conversation: “I can kind of see that happening with real people in real life. Not knowing, not risking it, not changing anything.”

There are echoes of *Animal Farm*’s manipulation, mistruths and – as one book club member put it – “gaslighting” in the movement to outlaw books in the US. The effort has been spearheaded by groups, which claim to be grassroots efforts, petitioning school boards or elected officials to remove certain books. In reality, many of the groups involved in banning books

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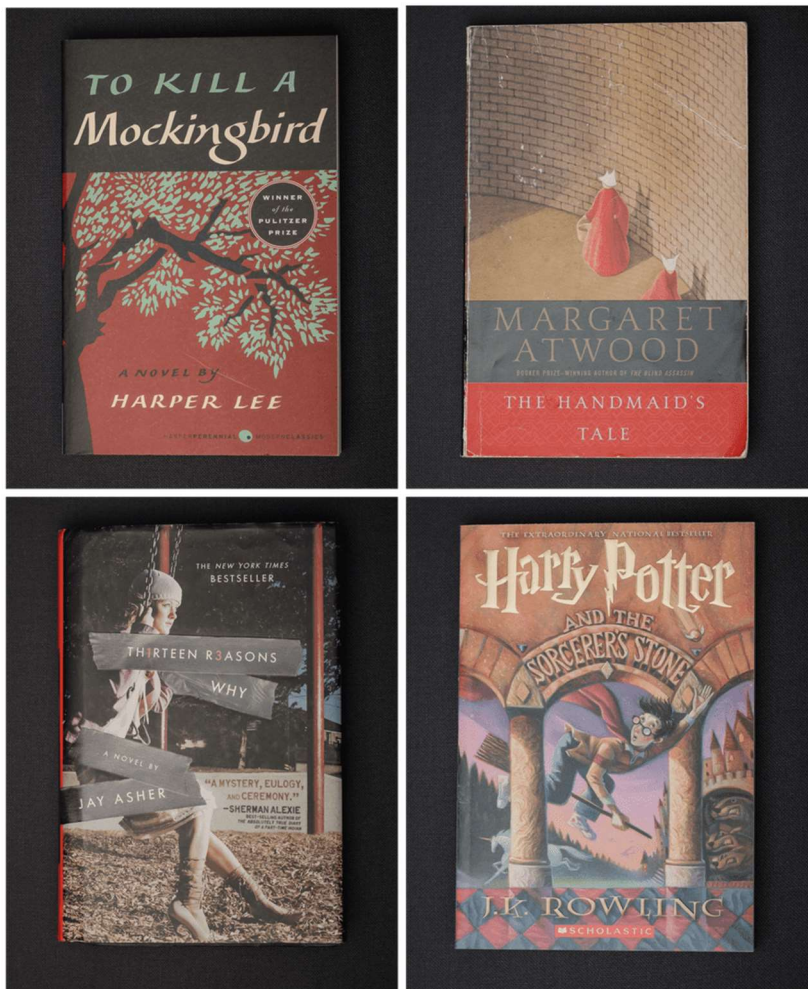
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are linked to and backed by influential conservative donors.

Most of the books relate to race or gender equality, at a time when some [Republicans](#) are mounting an effort to prevent teaching on race in schools by launching a loud campaign against critical race theory, an academic discipline that examines the ways in which racism operates in US laws and society.

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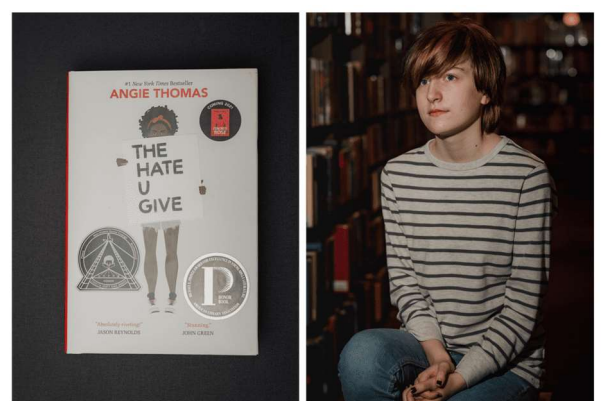
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