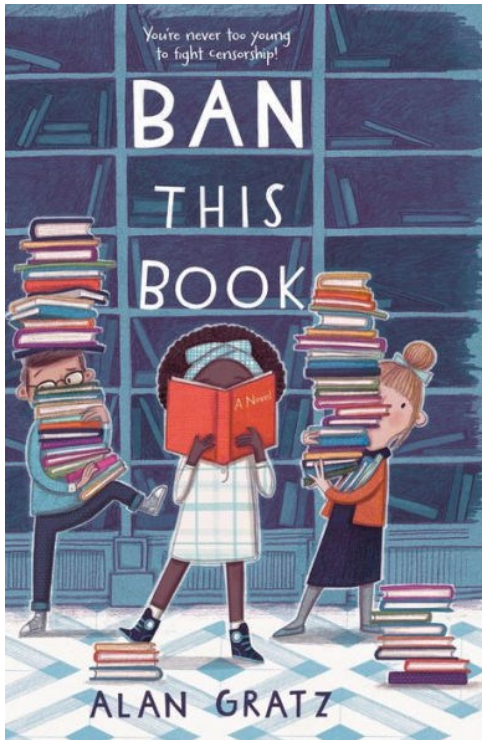


# BAN THIS BOOK



*Juvenile*

**By Alan Gratz**

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## **Book Summary:**

fourth grade girl turns her locker into a banned books library so elementary school children can read books removed from their school library which were deemed age-inappropriate by their school board.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book encourages activism of young children.

**1**  
/5

**Child Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
14	<p>“But—it isn’t inappropriate! It’s very appropriate! It’s a great book! It’s my favorite book!”</p> <p>“I know, honey. I agree. Nobody but your parents has the right to tell you what books you can and can’t read. I promise you, I’m going to fight this. But in the meantime I have to abide by what the school board decides, or I could lose my job.”</p>
32	<p>“More importantly,” said Mrs. Jones, “Mrs. Spencer and her husband are rich, which means the school board listens to her even more than they listen to me, the person they hired to do the job.”</p>
35	<p>“I’m not for censorship. I’m for common sense. We have to protect our children. It’s not censorship to keep things away from children that aren’t age-appropriate. It’s common sense. I’m sure Mrs. Jones wouldn’t call it censorship to keep adult magazines filled with S-E-X out of her library.”</p>
46	<p>“Why do you guys care so much?” Danny asked. “Are these books really good or something?”</p> <p>“They have to be,” Rebecca told him. “Why else do you think they banned them?”</p> <p>It took a few seconds, but the truth of that finally got through Danny’s thick helmet of hair. He nodded. “Yeah. Yeah, I bet they’re full of good stuff. Like all those channels my parents block on the TV.”</p>
48	<p>Like the main character in a book, I was finally going to do something. I was going to read every book Mrs. Spencer and her friends had banned from the school library. I found the list in the newspaper in the library, just like Danny said:...</p>
50	<p>Are You There God? had a cover that said sixth grade to me and I’d heard older girls whispering about it in the school bathroom, so I’d always stayed away from it. But I was resolved. I was going to read each and every one of the books Mrs. Spencer said I couldn’t, just to spite her. I knew she’d never know, and that it wasn’t like I was doing something that would help Mrs. Jones get the books back on the shelves. But I still felt a secret thrill at doing something an adult told me not to do.</p>
53	<p>So, it turns out It’s Perfectly Normal is not a novel. It’s a nonfiction book all about S-E-X, as Mrs. Spencer would say. With pictures.</p>
64	<p>“Janna borrowed The Egypt Game from me. But I think she wants to read a different one of the banned books instead.”</p> <p>“Which one?”</p> <p>I whispered. “The sex book. It’s Perfectly Normal.” I grabbed a braid and held it close to my mouth. “But I can’t buy that one!”</p> <p>“That was on the list?” Rebecca said. “You don’t have to buy that one. I’ve got it.”</p> <p>My eyes went wide. She had a copy? “At your house?” I asked.</p> <p>“Yeah,” she said. She acted like it was no big thing. “My mom gave it to me. I think that way I couldn’t sue her one day for not telling me everything before I needed to know it.”</p> <p>“Have you read it?” I whispered.</p> <p>Rebecca leaned in breathlessly. “Some parts.”</p>
65	<p>With Rebecca’s book, and Danny’s book, and my books, I could have almost half the books Mrs. Spencer banned from the library sitting in my locker by tomorrow, where anybody could read them, not just me.</p> <p>Which is when I got an even bigger idea than the one I had before.</p>

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66	<p>Fourteen books banned by Mrs. Spencer and her friends, free to borrow for any student who wanted to read them.</p> <p>And that's how the Banned Books Locker Library began.</p>
67	<p>And she had another list of books.</p> <p>"More?" Mrs. Jones said. Her face turned the same color as her orange-and-white polka-dot dress. "Honestly, Mrs. Spencer. Have you read all these books? Have you read any of them?"</p> <p>I pretended to be interested in the magazine rack near the front desk so I could listen.</p> <p>"I don't need to read them," Mrs. Spencer said. "Once I took my concerns to the school board, a number of other parents brought other books to my attention. I looked up reviews of the books online and decided these books weren't appropriate for an elementary school library."</p> <p>"You decided," Mrs. Jones said. "I didn't realize you had a Library and Information Science degree."</p> <p>Mrs. Spencer stood straighter. It added an inch to her height, but still not enough to come up to Mrs. Jones's level. "I don't need a fancy library degree to know what's right and what's wrong for children."</p> <p>"I see," Mrs. Jones said. "Let me just get you some Request for Reconsideration forms then."</p> <p>"That won't be necessary," Mrs. Spencer said. "I've already spoken to members of the school board about these books, and they agree that they have no place at Shelbourne Elementary."</p> <p>"Well," Mrs. Jones said, "be that as it may, until I hear from the school board, these books will stay on the shelf." She handed the list back to Mrs. Spencer.</p>
69	<p>While Mrs. Jones wasn't looking, I snatched the list Mrs. Spencer had left on the counter and dashed out of the library. I needed it.</p> <p>Every time Mrs. Spencer took a book from the school library, I was going to add a book to my secret locker library.</p>
72	<p>I opened the B.B.L.L. (the Banned Books Locker Library) to show him. There were only six books left on the shelf. Everything else had been checked out. And even after I'd added another twelve books from Mrs. Spencer's new list. Mostly with Danny's help. He knew all kinds of people who had copies at home.</p> <p>..."You should have a list," Nikoli said. "Of all the books you have. So people know what they can check out."</p> <p>"And do what? Hang it on the outside of my locker with a sign that says, 'Here are all the books we're not supposed to read that I have hidden in my locker?'" I wanted to say.</p>
74	<p>"She gets caught, and it's lawsuit time."</p> <p>I felt the quicksand opening up underneath me again. "Lawsuit time?"</p> <p>"Sure. From all the parents whose children you've corrupted. Why do you think they banned all those books to begin with? Because the parents think they're going to rot our brains and turn us into violent criminals."</p>
77	<p>Why not tape a list of the books I had on my locker? I just didn't have to call it that!</p> <p>During language arts, I used one of the computers to type up a list, and I taped it to my locker after school. At the top, in big capital letters, it said, BOOKS BANNED AT SHELBOURNE ELEMENTARY. Underneath that was every one of the books Mrs. Spencer and the other parents had taken off the shelves, with a little dot from a green Magic</p>

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	<p>Marker next to all the books I had in the B.B.L.L. Once everybody knew how to read it, I could just add a new green dot to any book that got added.</p> <p>...Looking at the list again, I realized there were still a lot of books I needed to add, and Danny was running out of people to ask. What I needed was money to buy books with.</p> <p>“Bake sale,” Rebecca said.</p>
90	<p>“First,” Principal Banazewski said, “I don’t like the word ‘banned.’ Those books weren’t banned from the library. They were removed from the library.”</p> <p>“What’s the difference?” I asked.</p> <p>...“The difference,” Mrs. Banazewski said, “is that in one case, books are banned arbitrarily. Do you know what arbitrarily means?”</p> <p>“For no good reason?”</p> <p>“In a way, yes. It can also mean based on just one person’s opinion, not the opinion of others. In this case, the books weren’t removed arbitrarily. They were inappropriate, and more than one person agreed that was true. A whole school board, in fact. So they were removed.”</p> <p>“But it was just one person—Mrs. Spencer,” I wanted to say. “She didn’t like one book, and she got the school board to ban it. Then she helped other people who didn’t like other books do the same thing, when there might be lots more people out there who do like them. Or just don’t care.”</p>
91	<p>And that’s when I remembered why I started the B.B.L.L. in the first place. Good books shouldn’t be hidden away. They should be read by as many people as many times as possible. But that wasn’t exactly true. It wasn’t just good books that shouldn’t be hidden away. It was all books. Any books. It didn’t matter what they were about, or whether I liked them, or Mrs. Spencer liked them, or the school board liked them.</p> <p>I was lucky. My parents would buy me any book I wanted if I asked them to. But not everybody’s parents would do that. Not everybody’s parents could do that. That’s what libraries were for: to make sure that everybody had the same access to the same books everyone else did. That’s why I started the Banned Books Locker Library, and that was why I was going to get every last book Mrs. Spencer had banned. Even Captain Underpants.</p>
110	<p>“You do know that freedom of the press means you can print anything you want, and the government can’t tell you not to, right?”</p> <p>...“The right to assembly says—”</p> <p>“That we can get together in public and protest stuff if we want,” Trey said. “I know, I know. I drew a real one for the right to petition. I couldn’t think of anything funny for that.”</p> <p>His picture of the right to petition showed a clipboard with lots of signatures on it. So there were at least two usable pictures. I ran down my list of the rights protected in the First Amendment. There was only one we hadn’t done. The right to free speech. Trey said he had a picture for that one too, and he flipped through his sketchbook looking for it.</p> <p>I expected Trey to have drawn a picture of somebody giving a speech without charging for it, or maybe a speech bubble or the word SPEECH breaking out of jail and going free. Instead what he showed me was a drawing of a locker with a sign on it that said, BOOKS BANNED AT SHELBOURNE ELEMENTARY.</p> <p>My locker.</p>

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	<p>I looked up at Trey in surprise. He wasn't smiling this time, or even looking at me. He was staring at his hands. He was right though. Making me take down my sign was against the freedom of speech. I hadn't even thought of it that way.</p>
130	<p>My heart was racing as I asked, "What do you think about your books being banned from our library?"</p> <p>The room got very quiet, and I tried very hard not to look at Principal Banazewski. Mr. Pilkey smiled. "Well, I wish they were on the shelves, where everybody could read them," he said. "I think it's important that libraries be a place where you can find all kinds of books. Good ones, bad ones, funny ones, serious ones. Every person should be free to read whatever they want, whenever they want, and not have to explain to anyone else why we like it, or why we think it's valuable. I hope you all get a chance to read my books someday."</p>
191	<p>"But how are we going to find something wrong with every book?"</p> <p>"Trust me," Trey said, "books have been challenged for all kinds of crazy reasons. I looked up some challenges on the Internet. The easy ones are anything that's got witchcraft or supernatural stuff in it, anything with bad words, anything with gay characters, anything with violence, and anything that mentions sex in it." He blushed when he said the last one, and we all found somewhere else to be looking.</p> <p>"That's a lot of books," Rebecca said, "but not nearly all of them."</p> <p>"But look at this." Trey unfolded a piece of paper on the table. "The Stupids got challenged because it 'reinforces negative behavior' and 'might encourage children to disobey their parents.' Here's a riddle book that got banned because it made kids who couldn't figure out the riddles feel bad. My Teacher Is an Alien got challenged because it 'portrays the main character as handling a problem on her own, rather than relying on the help of others.' Here's 'destruction of property,' 'teaches kids to lie,' 'a real downer,' 'anti-family,' 'lewd,' 'twisted,' 'too mature,' 'too immature,' 'bad grammar,' 'promotes poor nutrition,' 'includes the word fart twenty-four times—'"</p>
193	<p>Anything about sex or the human body or reproduction: gone.</p> <p>Anything with gay characters in it: gone.</p> <p>"This one says 'Oh lord' in it," Danny said. "My mother won't let me say God's name unless I'm praying."</p> <p>"Ban it," I told him.</p> <p>"This book has the word 'scrotum' on the first page!" Trey said.</p>
194	<p>"Goodnight Moon? The mouse in the room is a health-code violation, the red balloon is a choking hazard, and look at this picture of the illustrator on the back—he's holding a cigarette! That encourages kindergarteners to think smoking is cool.</p>
254	<p>Design a cover for one of the books on the American Library Association's List of Challenged Children's Books (<a href="http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/childrensbooks">http:// www.ala.org/ bbooks/ frequentlychallengedbooks/ childrensbooks</a>).</p>