

Reading & Activity Guide to *Ban This Book*

By Alan Gratz

Ages 9–12

About this guide

The following questions and activities are intended to enhance your reading of *Ban This Book*. Please feel free to adapt this content to suit the needs and interests of your readers.

PRE-READING DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

1. What does it mean to “ban” something? Have you ever encountered a ban in your home, school, or community? Can you think of something you would like to see banned? Can you think of something that you feel would be terrible to ban? Explain your answers.
2. Family relationships play an important role in this story. Who are the members of your family? Are you the oldest, youngest, middle, or only child? Do you share a bedroom or study space? Do you have responsibilities, such as watching a baby cousin, or rules, such as staying out of an older sister’s bedroom? What are your parents’ or guardians’ expectations of you? What chore or family activity do you find difficult? What is your favorite thing to do with your family? Write a paragraph describing the best or most unique thing about your family. Illustrate your paragraph with a family photo or drawing.
3. The main character in *Ban This Book* has a favorite book, which she has read many times. Do you have a favorite book? What makes this book special to you? How did you first discover this book? How many times have you read the story? Write a paragraph recommending this book to a friend, classmate, or family member. Explain what the story is about and why you think someone else should read it.

4. How often do you visit your school library? Your local library? What is the last book you checked out of the library? With friends or classmates, make a brainstorm list of important needs you feel libraries serve in your school and community. If possible, visit your local library or go online to learn about upcoming library events you may want to attend with friends or family members.

POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what does Amy Anne compare her favorite book on the first page of the novel? How does this comparison help you understand the character of Amy herself? What is Amy Anne's favorite book and why does she love it? What do you think your favorite book (or your feelings about reading) might tell people about you?
2. What things trouble Amy Anne about her family life? What advice might you give to Amy Anne about dealing with her sisters and about getting her parents to understand her concerns?
3. What are the main reasons Amy Anne is upset by Mrs. Spencer's decision to remove books from the school library? If you had been a student at Shelbourne Elementary, would you have been upset about this situation? Why or why not?
4. The first School Board meeting happens in the chapter titled "Common Sense." How does the description of the meeting room make you feel? How do Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Spencer challenge each other during the meeting, and what arguments do they use for and against the removal of library books? What does Amy Anne do (or fail to do) before the vote about removing books from the library?
5. With whom is Amy Anne partnered for the Bill of Rights school project? What upsets her about this situation? With whom would she have preferred to be partnered?
6. What is Amy Anne's big idea in the chapter titled "The Big Idea"? Do you think it is a good idea? Why or why not? Which of Amy Anne's classmates help the idea to grow even bigger until it becomes the B.B.L.L.?

7. Were you surprised by Amy Anne's attitude in the chapter titled "The Banana Room"? What thoughts or emotions is Amy experiencing in this scene? What order does Amy Anne receive from Principal Banazewski at the chapter's end? How might you explain the difference between the words "banned" and "removed"?
8. In "Tools of the Trade," what does Amy Anne learn about library science that helps her improve the B.B.L.L.? Later, how does Amy Anne use the library's "Request for Reconsideration" paperwork to make a point about the hazards of banning books? Do any of these elements of the story make you want to consider getting a doctorate in Library Science, like Opal Jones? Explain your answer.
9. Who does Amy Anne hold responsible for getting her suspended? Who is really responsible and why? What emotions does Amy Anne feel when she learns this truth? What does it teach her about the power of books?
10. What plan does Amy Anne make in the chapter "The Biggest Idea"? Which character surprises her by helping her make this plan?
11. What book does Amy Anne mention to Mrs. Spencer that changes the direction of the second School Board meeting? How did Amy Anne discover Mrs. Spencer's relationship to this book? How does this revelation affect your attitude toward Mrs. Spencer?
12. In what ways can a family be seen as a small community? How are the roles of parents similar to (and different from) the roles of educators in the school community and board members in a town community? What similarities and differences do you see between Amy Anne's family and school communities and your own?
13. Do you agree with Amy Anne's statement that ". . . for all the amazing things books can do, they can't make you into a bad person"? If you agree, then why does anyone believe that books can be dangerous?
14. One important thing the author does is to create a banned books list that includes titles that Amy Anne doesn't like, and even some that she feels uncomfortable reading. Why might this be important to the story? What do you think the author is trying to say about the things people choose to ban?

15. In the course of the novel, Amy Anne learns to speak up for herself. What other characters find ways to better express themselves as the story comes to an end? How does the fight against banning books particularly help these characters find their own strengths? How might *Ban This Book* be read as a story about learning to express oneself through words, art, action, and even in the books we choose to take from a library shelf?

POST-READING WRITING, RESEARCH, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

1. POINT-OF-VIEW: *Ban This Book* is told in first-person (“I”) by Amy Anne, a character who often finds herself unable to speak up for herself. Make a list of at least four moments in the story where Amy Anne stays silent. For each moment, write a short paragraph describing how the story might have been different had Amy Anne voiced a question or concern, what you think she would have said, and how the story might have changed had she spoken up.
2. THEME: Throughout the novel, the author explores the question of “intentions.” What are “good intentions”? Do “good intentions” always lead to good outcomes? What should you do if a person with “good intentions” causes a bad situation? Cite examples from the story in which Amy Anne, her sisters, friends, and parents unintentionally cause harm. Write a paragraph explaining how Mrs. Spencer, the book-banning mom who school librarian Mrs. Jones also calls “a pillar of our fair community,” represents the tension between intentions and outcomes.
3. RESEARCH & PRESENT: DAV PILKEY. In *Ban This Book*, real-life author Dav Pilkey visits Shelbourne Elementary. Go to the library to learn more about Dav and his books, making sure to read his 2014 online article entitled, “My Book Makes Kids Laugh, And It Was Banned Anyway” (www.huffingtonpost.com/dav-pilkey/captain-underpants-banned-book_b_5863980.html). Create an informational poster about Dav’s life and stories. Be sure to include a quote from his article, as well as an illustration of your own.
4. TEXT TYPE: NARRATIVE. In the character of TREY McBRIDE, write a journal entry describing how you feel about Amy Anne’s battle with your mom and/or a journal entry about your dream of becoming a comic book artist.

5. RESEARCH & CREATE: BOOK COVERS. In the chapter “What’s in a Name,” Amy Anne and her friends make up fake book titles, with M.J. designing corresponding covers. Using a graphic design program, colored pencils, or other visual art materials, create a new cover for your favorite book. Design a cover for one of the books on the American Library Association’s List of Challenged Children’s Books (www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallenged/childrensbooks). Or, design a cover for Amy Anne’s made-up title, *Friend or Foe*. Create a classroom display of your custom-designed covers.

6. A READING COMMUNITY. As she works to get banned books back on her school library’s shelves, Amy Anne discovers that she is not alone. In fact, she is part of a community of booklovers that includes friends, classmates, and her school librarian. Can you recognize the booklovers in your home, community, or classroom? Join together to celebrate the printed word. Choose a date and time, and send out invitations. Plan activities, such as a book exchange, dramatic reading, or story character costume contest. Serve hot fudge sundaes (a treat mentioned in Amy Anne’s favorite novel, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*) or other book-themed treats. If desired, spread more book love. Host a book drive for a local family shelter; read aloud to younger siblings or classmates; celebrate Children’s Book Week; or make a giant “READ” poster to display in your community.

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