

The New Florida Book Bill, Explained

By Zachary Baran



Schoolteacher Andrea Phillips' empty classroom bookshelf following the new guidelines from her school district.

New legislation was signed into law in July 2022 by Florida governor Ron DeSantis that many are worried about, especially teachers. The bill is being labeled as a general book ban, and a lot of misinformation is being circulated regarding what is and isn't allowed to remain in school libraries. DeSantis is a notoriously "anti-woke" politician, and many supporters of the bill see it as a defense against instructional material that they view to be liberal propaganda. This certainly can be seen in the [list of](#)

[books](#) that are being challenged as many include stories of prominent black figures, such as Harriet Tubman and Jackie Robinson. This is concerning for many reasons, as DeSantis is reportedly more popular than former President Donald Trump for the [2024 GOP nomination](#), and limiting access to information in any form is incredibly dangerous to democracy and free speech.

What does the actual legislation say?

The new [Florida House bill](#) places term limits on school board members as well as creates new regulations for instructional materials in schools. In addition to requiring that books be free of material that is harmful to children, it also stipulates that the school districts must provide for the removal of books for various reasons, including objection to the material by a parent or resident of the county. This means that anyone, regardless of whether or not they have a child that attends school in the area, can object to material they deem inappropriate. If enough members of the school board agree, the material will be subsequently removed. This is not a hard-and-fast ban on books, which many people might interpret the bill as. There is a lot of misinformation circulating the internet, including [fake lists](#) of banned books. While books are not being outright banned, access to reading material is in fact being limited in schools. Teachers who would supply students with any material from the list of books removed from classrooms face third degree felony charges, which could result in loss of teaching credentials and being unable to vote.

What books are being challenged, and why?

Currently, 176 titles have been removed from school libraries across Florida, with no information on when (if ever) they will be allowed to be returned to classrooms.

Among them, many of the books address the history of the United States with regard to people of color, especially the historical treatment of black people in America. This includes stories of slavery, such as *Before She Was Harriet*, a story about Harriet Tubman's life and legacy as an abolitionist and prominent black figure in American history. Other titles focus on topics of gender, sexuality, and non-traditional families, such as *My Two Moms and Me*. And a handful of books highlight culture, tradition, and religion, such as *The Gift of Ramadan* and *Eagle Feather*. The disheartening similarity between most of the books that are being removed from classrooms in Florida is that they all feature topics that deviate from the white, Eurocentric, heteronormative attitudes of conservatives like DeSantis. In fact, many supporters of the bill are glad that it is "anti-CRT." CRT, or critical race theory, is the idea that education should be both accessible to and inclusive of people of color and their histories in this country. The fact is that the majority of the books being challenged discuss the history of people of color, the LGBT+ community, and cultural/religious traditions. Unfortunately, this suggests that these books were removed for exactly the same reasons; that the Florida government decided that these stories did not belong in classrooms or curriculum. This is not a new trend, as books have been removed from classrooms for these reasons for decades.

Who is concerned about this, and why?

The group who is most immediately concerned about this issue is Florida school teachers. Teachers across the state have voiced concerns about the state interfering in their teaching, creating curriculum that is not accessible to all students, and relying on fear tactics to reinforce compliance. The third degree felony charges that teachers face for failing to comply with the new bill means that if a teacher were to give a student a

book that had been removed by the state government, that teacher could lose their job. Not only that, but as people convicted of felonies are not allowed to vote in Florida, this would effectively disenfranchise that teacher, barring them from voting for change in the future. In addition to teachers, many civil rights activists and politically involved people are concerned about the rise of DeSantis and his influence in America. Many fear that DeSantis will win the Republican nomination for the 2024 presidential election, and the results of his winning could be disastrous for democracy, given his support of legislation that effectively censors important cultural material. If such legislation was implemented nationwide, there would be significant drawbacks, as there would be a loss of important representation in education across the country.

What are the implications of this, and what can we do?

Overall, it seems as though DeSantis is attempting to garner support among conservatives who are against teaching material that does not comply with the status quo in America. He has already been incredibly successful, and it is likely that he will run for president in the next election. His strategies for keeping educational material that he and his supporters dislike out of the classroom are dangerous, and they border on fascism in the way that they censor material that should be free to read. As Americans, it is the least we can do to vote in favor of policies that are the opposite of what DeSantis is preaching. We cannot allow someone to control what our children are and are not allowed to read, as information is the most valuable resource one can be given at a learning age. Apart from voting, we can do our best to mobilize and raise awareness about the topic, and hopefully we can keep our classrooms safe for all students and teachers.