

# Banning Books Isn't Just Morally Wrong. It's Also Unhealthy

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*Adapted by Fishtank Staff*

- 1 When I was in practice as a pediatrician, I wrote daily [prescriptions for reading](#). I had an actual notepad to help me prescribe books to families of young infants and toddlers. On that pad, I would write things like "read to your baby for 20 minutes," and along with that prescription I'd give that family an age- and language-appropriate book to read together. I did this because I knew, as pediatricians and family practitioners who continue this practice across the country know, that [stories are good medicine](#).
- 2 Reading aloud, or being read to, bonds families together—it promotes attachment. [Children who are read to](#) produce and understand language better and become better readers later in life. Reading to young children can also help them develop attention, deal with difficult emotions, and control behavior like aggression. But more than that, books help build young people's imagination—in fact, they help build radical imagination. Think about it: in children's and YA fiction, mice talk and fight with swords, little girls have [big red dogs](#) as best friends, witches and wizards fly on brooms, and young people [overthrow corrupt and unjust governments](#) through grit and wit and a belief in themselves and each other. So in a sense, children's and YA fiction are roadmaps to the future, they are blueprints for tomorrow, because it is in their pages that young people get the tools and the imaginative practice to envision what they want their world to look like.
- 3 If there's any time in history that our young people have been in critical need of radical imagination, it's now. If humans are to deal, as a collective, with everything from religious bigotry to racial injustice to environmental disaster, our future leaders, teachers, artists, and politicians need to imagine radical possibilities for the world. They will need to enact a radical empathy, a radical love toward those both like and unlike themselves.
- 4 It is partially for this reason that children's and YA fiction is under such [intense assault from book banners](#). They recognize the power of literature to shape not just individual minds and hearts, but also the architecture of the future.
- 5 When I transitioned from the work of pediatric patient care to that of Narrative Medicine, a clinical and scholarly discipline dedicated to honoring the role of story in the healing encounter, I only deepened my understanding of the power of story. Telling your story, and having your story heard, is a fundamentally human act. Yet book banners are attempting to silence the voices of certain communities in order to effectively tell us we don't have the right to tell our stories, or, perhaps, the right to even exist.

- 6 As an immigrant daughter who rarely got to see brown girls like me in the stories I was exposed to growing up, there was a part of me that believed, deep down, that maybe I wasn't worthy of [representation](#); that maybe I couldn't be a hero, even of my own story. Being [deprived of stories](#) about people like those in your own community is not simply unfair or unjust, it is also deeply unhealthy. Narrative erasure is a kind of psychic violence.
- 7 [Book banning](#) is an assault on our individual and collective health—our imaginative health, our intellectual health, our [physical](#) health, and the health of our society. Luckily, we already have a cure: fighting for the freedom to read. Stories allow us all to give meaning to the world around us and to envision something better. They have the ability to show us new superheroes, new ways of leadership, new paths to building community, and new ways to love and be loved. They are the building blocks to the future—the tool through which young people will learn how to heal this hurting world. We must ensure young readers have access to the books that will open their minds and fuel their imaginations.