



Banned Books

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Written by Sabrina Walker, Jan Humphrey and Denise Frick, June 2023

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.

Personal Check In: Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Words:

If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise [men] reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all—except the censor. We must know all the facts and hear all the alternatives and listen to all the criticisms. Let us welcome controversial books and controversial authors. For the Bill of Rights is the guardian of our security as well as our liberty. ~John F. Kennedy, Response to questionnaire in Saturday Review, October 29 1960

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. If you read a banned book before it was banned, why do you think it became banned and do you agree with its being banned?
2. Have you ever unknowingly read a banned book, or read one intentionally? What was your reaction?
3. Do you think explicit books (sexually, racially, violence) should be banned at all? Or perhaps just shelved in the “Adult Sections”? Who should be the deciders: Politicians, Librarians, parents?
4. What actions do you feel drawn to that address the banning of books? Share your experiences.

Readings: see next page

Sitting in Silence

Sharing: This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions or the readings.

Open Discussion: This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing words:

“I am here only because I represent a belief. The belief that stories can transform the way that we see the world. And that everyone’s—everyone’s—story deserves that opportunity. The belief that the books that contain those stories should be accessible to the readers that seek them. And that the libraries—the school libraries, the academic libraries, the public libraries, and yes, the prison libraries—that contain the books that contain those transformational stories should always be free and open to the public that they were built to serve...these words stand as a vision of the American Library Association will always ring true: Free People Read Freely.

~Tracie D Hall, American Library Association Executive Director. Quote from speech given at Time 100 Most Influential people of 2023 gala.

Announcements/Plans

Check out: As we close our meeting today, how are you feeling?

Extinguish the Chalice - *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Readings:

"What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist." ~Salman Rushdie

"A dangerous book will always be in danger from those it threatens with the demand that they question their assumptions. They'd rather hang on to the assumptions and ban the book." ~ Ursula K LeGuin

In books I have traveled, not only to other worlds, but into my own. I learned who I was and who I wanted to be, what I might aspire to, and what I might dare to dream about my world and myself. More powerfully and persuasively than from the "shalt nots" of the Ten Commandments, I learned the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. ~Anna Quindlen (*How Reading Changed My Life*, 1998)

The only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little farther down our particular path than we have yet got ourselves. ~E.M. Forster (*Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951)

Banning books give us silence when we need speech. It closes our ears when we need to listen. It makes us blind when we need sight. ~Stephen Chbosky, author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech.
~Benjamin Franklin

Censorship is the child of fear and the father of ignorance. ~ Laurie Halse Anderson

2 weeks ago my book *The Hill We Climb* and 3 others were removed from elementary school shelves @MDCPS Bob Graham Education Center in Florida. But when they go low we go high. I've helped purchase 1,200 copies of these challenged books to be given away for FREE today at 6pm. They'll be @ the Sanctuary for Banned Books @ The Coral Gables Congregational Church, along with a free poetry reading featuring amazing authors!

~Amanda Gorman, tweet on June 6, 2023

Having the freedom to read and the freedom to choose is one of the best gifts my parents ever gave me.
~Judy Blume

[I]t's not just the books under fire now that worry me. It is the books that will never be written. The books that will never be read. And all due to the fear of censorship. As always, young readers will be the real losers.
~ Judy Blume

"Yes, books are dangerous. They should be dangerous - they contain ideas." ~ Pete Hautman

Please read this Pro/Con summary at the link below before the Covenant Circle session:

<https://www.procon.org/headlines/banned-books-top-3-pros-and-cons/>