



<https://pen.org/report/narrating-the-crisis/>

Across the United States, censorship increasingly threatens intellectual freedom, especially within contexts of literacy learning. In 2023, book bans nearly doubled from 1,841 in the spring to over 4,300 unique instances by the end of the calendar year (Meehan et al., 2023). Moreover, such bans extend to the work of educational gag orders, like anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) laws, that censor texts that talk about race, racism, and other so-called divisive concepts tied to U.S. history (Friedman & Tager, 2022). Wide ranging, these laws are being implemented at federal, state, and district levels and have proven consequential for literacy education across contexts. In the U.S. state of Georgia, teacher Katie Rinderle was recently fired for teaching an LGBTQ+-themed picture book (Associated Press, 2023); concurrently, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed House Bill 2789 to outlaw book bans across the state (Illinois.gov, 2023). Across geographic scales, context is intimately shaping which texts, topics, and teachers are being censored across the U.S. and globe. Indeed, meaning-making practices are now mediated by various forms of censorship (e.g., algorithmic, media, self-censorship, and more) across national and international contexts. Crucially, this proliferation in censorship rates and forms presents new considerations for literacy and reading research.

Reading Research Quarterly (RRQ) invites scholarship for a special collection, titled "Contextualizing Censored Literacies," that will explore the effects of censorship on literacy practices in situ, and it will highlight needed research on what we refer to as censored literacies. As we define them, censored literacies are meaning-making practices that have been impacted by the removal, redaction, or restriction (i.e., censorship) of texts, topics, and teachers in community- and school-based contexts of literacy learning. For instance, papers might explore how students' reading and writing practices in the U.S. South shifted following the removal of *The 1619 Project* due to nationwide mandates (Friedman & Tager, 2022), or research might chronicle curricular shifts necessitated by book-banning policies. For instance, the U.S. state of Iowa's Senate File 496 removed hundreds of books from schools, forcing teachers to alter text selection, standards sequencing, and other forms of literacy curricula just days prior to the start of the school year.

However, even as books are removed from shelves and teachers from classrooms, students and educators have responded with freedom-oriented literacy practices. Young people, in tandem with community members and various educational stakeholders, have mobilized across digital media, from Instagram to Twitter/X to TikTok, to stage walkouts, advocate for inclusive curricula, and protest restrictive education policy across the globe. Honoring this resistance, this special collection also invites contributions that chart freedom-oriented literacy practices that challenge the suppression of intellectual freedom and the fascism portended by censorship today.

“Contextualizing Censored Literacies” brings together an array of epistemologies, conceptual frameworks, and methodologies to research how censorship is shifting meaning-making practices across geographical and temporal contexts. Selected papers will critically explore a variety of research inquiries relevant to various local, national, and international contexts, and will include questions such as the following:

- How does region/space/place shape the censoring of literacies in and beyond schools?
- How do censorship practices within literacy learning contexts impact students’ access to diverse texts and perspectives?
- How does censorship impact the development of students’ empathy for diverse perspectives and understanding of social justice issues?
- What are the psychological and emotional effects of censorship on students’ and teachers’ self-expression, identity development, and overall well-being?
- In what ways do censored literacies shape students’ understandings and interpretations of historical and current events, social issues, and cultural representations?
- What strategies can educators employ to promote literacy practices of freedom within contexts of censorship?
- How do teachers navigate and resist censorship mandates while promoting critical thinking and inquiry-based literacy practices in their classrooms?
- How do students and educators use digital media platforms to advocate for inclusive curricula and challenge restrictive education policies in the face of censorship?
- How can schools and communities collaborate to create spaces of intellectual freedom and open dialogue, despite efforts of censorship?
- How does literacy policy and its implementation shape reading practices and pedagogies in public libraries and classrooms?
- What is the role of institutionalized literacy sponsorship (e.g., book publishers, universities, etc.) and the ways in which literacy is mediated?
- What theoretical frameworks might we consider and/or create to reimagine policy around instruction (e.g. text selection) and book bans?
- What might be the long-term consequences of censorship on literacy education, learning, and research?
- What is the role of fugitivity in book banning? What resistance is possible in response to local literacy policies that censor or ban texts?

We invite the submission of 500-word abstracts by **September 15, 2024**, to tatiana.becerra@mcgill.ca, with “RRQ special collection abstract” in the subject line. Authors of approved abstracts will be invited to submit full manuscripts for peer review and adjudication by both the editors of RRQ and the guest editors of this special collection. Invitations for full manuscripts will be sent by **October 15, 2024**, with full manuscripts due by **December 31, 2024**. Full manuscripts can target one of two available strands: 1) shorter, conceptual manuscripts that respond to the call with a future-facing orientation (4,000–5,000 words), or 2) longer, empirically driven manuscripts that present original research related to the call (10,000 words).

Timeline: Due to the urgency of this work, we anticipate a typical schedule of moving from abstract acceptance to manuscript development, through review and revision and, ultimately, to publication. Acceptance of an abstract does not guarantee publication; all manuscripts will go through the peer review process. Authors who are asked to submit manuscripts will be expected to work quickly through this process.

- **September 15, 2024:** Abstracts due
- **October 15, 2024:** Abstract authors informed of whether they can proceed to submission of a paper
- **December 31, 2024:** Final date for manuscript submissions
- **February 15, 2025:** The first peer review phase should be completed and decision letters sent to authors
- **April 1, 2025:** Final date for revised manuscript submissions
- **June 15, 2025:** The second peer review phase should be completed and decision letters sent to authors
- **August 1, 2025:** Final date for final manuscript submissions

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