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# Weeks that Fight Back:

## Freedom to Read Week & Banned Books Week

Freedom to Read Week and Banned Books Week are both intended to encourage individuals to think critically about freedom of speech and freedom of thought. They encourage individuals to support the opposition of censorship at all levels. Freedom to Read Week is celebrated in Canada, while Banned Books Week is celebrated in the United States. The Canada Council for the Arts supports the Canadian incarnation, while the American Library Association sponsors the American celebration.

### What do they do?

Both Freedom to Read Week and Banned Books Week are supported by a series of activities. In 2005, Freedom to Read Week began a very creative initiative called "Book Crossing: Free A Challenged Book". In this activity, Canadians were encouraged to choose a challenged book from their collection, label the book and register it on [www.bookcrossing.com](http://www.bookcrossing.com). They were then instructed to leave the book somewhere in their community for others to pick up. Individuals who picked the book up were encouraged (via the label) to read the book, register their find on the Book Crossing website and then re-release the book for others to pick up.

The Banned Books Week website provides users with a range of possibilities for celebrating. These range from activities as simple as wearing a Banned Books Week pin or reading a banned book to commitment intensive projects such as organizing a program about censorship and intellectual freedom, making speeches, or writing editorials and poems. Anything that draws attention to the existence of censorship or book banning is a possibility. For a full list of the ALA's suggested activities, visit their action guide at [www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/actionguide/actionguide.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/actionguide/actionguide.htm).

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### Books on Trial: *Gossip Girls* Series

Ziegesar, Cecily Von. *Gossip Girls*. Bolton, Ontario: H.B. Fenn & Company, 2002-2004. 208-240pp.

The *Gossip Girls* series is not carried by some local bookstores because of its content. Time to meet Blair, Serena, Nate and all their New York upper-crust friends! Watch as they plan parties, go shopping, and go to class at only the finest places in New York. But all is not fun and games in this seeming preppy paradise...relationships go bad, cheating happens, drunken friends get out of hand, and bulimia runs rampant! All of this is reported by the anonymous "Gossip-Girl" on her website and teen girls seem to be eating it up.

So what's the problem? Well, basically reading these books is the same as watching TV shows like *The O.C.* or *One Tree Hill*: no intellectual content, racy situations and various product placements. Some librarians, parents and bookstore owners feel that these books are not beneficial to teens because of this, so they don't carry the series. The series continues to be popular despite this, and the bottom line is that it's getting people to read. This is probably the best (and only) reason that you would ever want to buy these books.

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...Weeks continued

### How can you get involved?

There are many ways to get involved with Freedom to Read Week and Banned Books Week. Perhaps the simplest is to order the kits and display the posters that are produced every year. These kits are produced by the American Library Association in the United States and by the Book and Periodical Council in Canada. These kits can be ordered from the ALA website and the Canada Council for the Arts. If you have to work within a tight budget, you can always create your own materials. Posters are particularly easy to create and could make a great project for a teen advisory group. The Canadian website provides the opportunity to download the clip art included in the kits for free.

In addition, you can put on a program of your own, or attend one of the many programs put on by libraries in both countries during their respective celebrations. In a library, something as simple as creating a display of banned books can be highly effective. The ALA website provides visitors with an editorial which they can adapt and send to their local papers to gain attention for Banned Books Week. Also, many bookstores

and publishing companies are involved with Freedom to Read Week and Banned Books Week. Check your local media or visit organizations near you to find out what they are doing.

The Canada Council for the Arts website provides a selection of links to both Canadian and international organizations concerned with freedom of expression, free speech and censorship. If you are outside of North America contact your library association or arts council to see if they support similar programs.

### When are they?

Freedom to Read Week usually takes place in late February although the exact dates differ every year. Banned Books Week usually occurs in the last week of September.

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For more detailed information:

Freedom to Read Week

[www.freedomtoread.ca/](http://www.freedomtoread.ca/)

Banned Books Week

[www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/  
bannedbooksweek.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bannedbooksweek.htm)

**“Books won’t stay  
banned. They won’t  
burn. Ideas won’t go to  
jail. In the long run of  
history, the censor and  
the inquisitor have  
always lost. The only  
weapon against bad  
ideas is better ideas.**

~ Alfred Whitney Griswold

### The Reader’s Bill of Rights

In his 1994 book *Better Than Life* (Coach House), a collection of essays on books and reading (particularly the reading patterns and attitudes of young people), author Daniel Pennac offers a Reader’s Bill of Rights:

1. THE RIGHT TO NOT READ
2. THE RIGHT TO SKIP PAGES
3. THE RIGHT TO NOT FINISH
4. THE RIGHT TO REREAD
5. THE RIGHT TO READ ANYTHING
6. THE RIGHT TO ESCAPISM
7. THE RIGHT TO READ ANYWHERE
8. THE RIGHT TO BROWSE
9. THE RIGHT TO READ OUT LOUD
10. THE RIGHT TO NOT DEFEND YOUR TASTES

A former teacher, Pennac reminds readers of the delight of opening a book for no purpose other than pleasure. ■

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