

# Florida bans books?

**Firestorm brings them right back!**

Fifth Estate Collective

2024

Firestorm Books, a fifteen-year-old collectively-run anarchist bookstore and community event space in Asheville, N.C., is sending back thousands of children's books banned from the Duval County Public School system in Florida.

The queer- and trans-owned bookstore has given away thousands of copies each of over fifty different titles exploring topics from racism and colonialism to social movement history and visionary organizing.

So far, volunteers have filled 600 requests for free book bundles from people across Florida. Shipments consist of six books each, plus short reading guides, two zines, and a "Trash Fascism, Not Books" sticker featuring a possum reading a copy of the banned book, *Maus*.

Firestorm has organized a network of several dozen grassroots partners such as indie bookstores, Food Not Bombs, mutual aid projects, and Little Free Libraries to help with distribution of the 22,500 copies. They've shipped about 60 boxes with approximately 60 books in each to these Florida groups.

The books themselves have an incredible story. In 2022, advocates raised alarm after Duval County school administrators ordered the removal of titles in the Essential Voices collection from classrooms and schools. These books were designed to update existing libraries with diverse and inclusive content featuring characters with a variety of ethnicities, religious affiliations, and gender identities. Of the books that were permanently removed, more than half featured LGBTQIA+ characters or history.

In November 2022, the contractor who originally sold the books to Duval County contacted Firestorm and offered to ship rescued books for free if the bookstore would freely redistribute them to kids again. If Firestorm couldn't take them, the books were destined for disposal. "When we were told that these books were at risk of being destroyed, we knew we had to act," noted Firestorm Books co-owner Esme Joy.

Firestorm's website makes clear the motivation behind the campaign. "We see resistance to book banning as inseparable from the fight against fascism, which seeks to erase ideas as a precursor to erasing people."

Under the campaign name "Banned Books Back!," bookstore staff and community volunteers began shipping books removed from Duval County schools directly to kids in mid-January. The campaign is focusing on getting the books back to Florida, and so far has had overwhelming success in gathering requests from people there. If there are still books left in a month or so, Firestorm will open Banned Books Back! up to the next four states with the worst book bans after Florida: Texas, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina.

"We're working to return these books as an act of solidarity with the kids from whom they were taken," explained Beck Nippes, another Firestorm co-owner. "We hope the campaign can connect with, and contribute to, a broader antifascist struggle, because book bans aren't happening in isolation. They're connected to attacks on reproductive and gender-affirming health care in a climate of escalating violence against queer and trans folks, especially youth."

Kids and their allies in Florida can request free books through Firestorm Books' website at [firestorm.coop/bannedbooks](http://firestorm.coop/bannedbooks), specifying either picture books for ages 4–8 or chapter books for ages 8–12, and requests will be fulfilled through a series of volunteer book-packaging parties.

“We’re expecting to spend around \$17,500 on postage alone,” said Firestorm co-owner Glenda Ro, noting that Banned Books Back is fully funded thanks to donations from across North America and beyond through the project’s online campaign.

Among the banned books that Firestorm Books will distribute are award-winning titles such as *New York Times* bestseller and Newbery Honor Book *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga, and Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Book *Memphis, Martin, and the Mountaintop: The Sanitation Strike of 1968* by Alice Faye Duncan and R. Gregory Christie. For a full list of titles, see the website ( <https://firestorm.coop/bannedbooks.html> ).

Yet as noted in the Banned Books Back! zine, “It’s less about the content of each specific book. It’s the notion that a few powerful adults can decide a singular—and singularly narrow-minded—worldview for everyone else, as part and parcel of them enacting actual harm and violence.”

It’s no accident that Firestorm took on this project, given its commitments as an anarchist and feminist collective to solidarity, direct action, and experimentation. As the Banned Books Back! zine asserts, “We need to collectively care for each other, and continually demonstrate the ways we can do that in the here and now. Yes, that includes handing out free books, but it also includes self-organizing access to abortion services and hormones, lending bail and jail support, offering trans-formative alternatives to calling the police, sharing and growing free food, squatting buildings to create housing, and the list goes on, limited only by our imaginations!” Banned Books Back! is an encouragement to think and act for ourselves in the larger struggle for a world without fascism.

# fifth Estate

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/415-summer-2024-2/florida-bans-books>  
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**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**