

Banned & Beloved

This is a complete classroom podcast project plan for “**Banned & Beloved**” — a discussion-based, research-and-argument podcast that engages students with the history and contemporary relevance of book banning, freedom of expression, and the right to read. It is written in a clean, print-ready format suitable for classroom or digital use.

Focus: Censorship and Freedom to Read

Project Type: Research and Discussion Podcast

Length: 4–5 class periods

Product: 6–8 minute group podcast episode

Mode: Small group (3–4 students)

Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Investigate the history and context of a banned or challenged literary work.
2. Analyze the social, political, and cultural reasons behind book censorship.
3. Evaluate arguments for and against banning books in schools or libraries.
4. Create and present a researched, discussion-based podcast episode that connects past controversies to modern issues of censorship and education.

Standards Alignment (CCSS):

- RI.9-10.8 – Delineate and evaluate arguments and specific claims in a text.
 - W.9-10.2 and W.9-10.7 – Conduct research and present findings clearly and accurately.
 - SL.9-10.1 – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions.
 - SL.9-10.4 – Present information and arguments logically, supported by evidence.
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Project Overview

Banned & Beloved gives students the opportunity to explore why certain books have been challenged or censored and to reflect on the enduring importance of intellectual freedom. Each group selects a banned or frequently challenged book, researches its historical context and reasons for censorship, and records a podcast episode analyzing both sides of the controversy.

The podcast combines research, literary analysis, and debate, encouraging students to connect literature to larger questions of democracy, diversity, and free expression.

Session Breakdown

Session 1 – Research and Background Study

Goal: Understand the controversy behind the chosen book.

Activities:

- Groups select a banned or challenged book (see list below).
- Research the book’s publication history, themes, and cultural significance.
- Investigate when, where, and why the book was banned or challenged using reliable sources (for example, the American Library Association’s “Banned Books Week” archives or PEN America reports).
- Identify key stakeholders in the debate (authors, educators, parents, political groups, students).
- Complete a **Book Controversy Research Sheet** including:
 - Title and author
 - Year(s) challenged and reasons cited
 - Summary of the book’s themes or messages
 - Public reactions and outcomes
 - Notable quotes from authors, critics, or legal cases

Sample Texts:

To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee

The Bluest Eye – Toni Morrison

Fahrenheit 451 – Ray Bradbury

The Catcher in the Rye – J.D. Salinger

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian – Sherman Alexie

Maus – Art Spiegelman

1984 – George Orwell

Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck

The Hate U Give – Angie Thomas

Session 2 – Outline and Scriptwriting

Goal: Develop a research-based discussion structure.

Activities:

- Groups outline their episode using the following structure:
 1. **Introduction (1 minute):** Introduce the book, author, and controversy.
 2. **Background (2 minutes):** Summarize the historical and cultural context.
 3. **The Debate (3–4 minutes):** Present opposing viewpoints—those who supported and those who opposed the book.

4. **Reflection (1–2 minutes):** Discuss the relevance of the controversy today.
 5. **Closing (30 seconds):** End with a thought-provoking question for the listener.
- Students write a conversational script that includes quotations from research sources, author statements, or news articles.
 - Incorporate at least two cited pieces of evidence and one direct literary reference from the book itself.
 - Ensure tone remains balanced, respectful, and analytical.

Example Excerpt:

Speaker 1: “When *The Bluest Eye* was challenged, many cited its difficult themes of race and trauma as the reason for removal. But Morrison’s intention was to confront the reality of internalized racism head-on.”

Speaker 2: “Exactly. Shielding students from discomfort doesn’t erase it—it erases empathy. Morrison wanted readers to question why beauty standards can be so destructive.”

Speaker 3: “The real question is: do we protect young readers by removing difficult books, or empower them by discussing them honestly?”

Session 3 – Recording and Production

Goal: Produce and edit the podcast.

Activities:

- Record the episode using school devices or free software such as Soundtrap, Audacity, or GarageBand.
- Each speaker should have a distinct role (for example, host, researcher, analyst, commentator).
- Include an opening title line such as:
“*Welcome to Banned & Beloved — where we explore the stories behind the books they tried to silence.*”
- Edit for clarity, transitions, and pacing. Optional intro and outro music may be used.
- Ensure audio is clear and polished (total time: 6–8 minutes).

Session 4 – Listening and Reflection

Goal: Reflect on freedom to read and modern censorship.

Activities:

- Share episodes in class or on a secure digital platform.
- Conduct a reflection discussion with prompts such as:
 - How do the reasons for past book bans compare to today’s?
 - What is the difference between “age-appropriate selection” and censorship?

- How can literature help us confront uncomfortable truths responsibly?
- Students submit a brief written reflection explaining their position on the value of intellectual freedom in education.

Group Roles

Role	Responsibilities
Host	Introduces episode, guides discussion, and transitions between segments
Researcher	Compiles facts, data, and quotes from credible sources
Literary Analyst	Connects the controversy to the book's themes and author's purpose
Producer/Editor	Manages recording, sound editing, and final submission

Assessment Rubric (20 points)

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Beginning (1–2)
Research and Accuracy	Extensive, well-cited evidence and historical accuracy	Accurate with strong supporting details	Basic accuracy with limited evidence	Lacks factual support or contains errors
Literary Understanding	Deep connection between text and controversy	Clear understanding of themes and issues	General connection to text	Minimal or unclear connection
Argument and Discussion	Balanced, insightful, and well-structured debate	Clear arguments with some balance	Uneven or one-sided reasoning	Simplistic or unclear arguments
Collaboration and Delivery	Seamless discussion, professional tone, excellent pacing	Mostly smooth discussion and delivery	Uneven pacing or minor collaboration issues	Disorganized or inconsistent
Production Quality	Clear audio, effective transitions, creative engagement	Mostly clear, minimal technical errors	Minor clarity issues or limited editing	Poor audio quality or distracting errors

Extension Options

1. **Freedom to Read Week Broadcast:** Publish all student episodes as part of a school “Freedom to Read” showcase or virtual gallery.

2. **Historical Comparison Episode:** Research a 20th-century banned book and compare it with a contemporary challenge (for example, *The Catcher in the Rye* vs. *Gender Queer*).
3. **Interview Edition:** Invite a librarian, teacher, or local author to discuss book challenges and censorship experiences.
4. **Civic Action Tie-In:** Students create a call-to-action segment advocating for diverse voices and intellectual freedom.