

My name is Iris Leaver and I grew up in the small town of Brookings, Oregon. As a kid I was an avid reader. I eventually became a youth volunteer at our local library where I worked with kids of all kinds. It was amazing to see the reaction when a kid found a book in the library that featured a character like them. I am now a parent and teacher who actively seeks out books for my children with diverse representation. Reading about people's experiences that are different than your own cultivates empathy and expands children's minds in a positive way.

One of my children also happens to be nonbinary. Being able to go to our local library and find a book on the shelf that features a nonbinary or LGBTQ+ character is an amazingly affirming experience. This could be said of any kid who feels like they may be a little different, but can still find a story that they can see themselves in. Imagine if a book that reflects your lived experience is deemed "pornographic", "negative", or "depressing". What message does that send to the child who connects with that story? Ask yourself, what is left when you remove books that feature the stories of characters who are Native American, of European, African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino, Middle Eastern or Jewish decent, have disabilities, are immigrants or refugees, or are LGBTQ+?

As a parent, you can already censor what your children have access to if that's what you want to do. But libraries and schools are meant to provide an education. Research has shown that students who receive a culturally responsive and racially inclusive education are more academically engaged, perform better in school, have enhanced self-perception and graduate at higher rates.¹ I urge you to support this bill and safeguard all our children's freedom to read.

¹[The Legal and Pedagogical Case for Culturally Responsive and Racially Inclusive Public Education for All Students | NEA](#)