

NCSS notable trade book lesson plan: the great banned-books bake sale

Social Studies
Research and
Practice

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The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale

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Notable, 2024

Tilbury House Publishers

ISBN: 978-0884489672.

Review DOI [10.1108/SSRP-06-2025-0031](https://doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-06-2025-0031)

Book recommended for kindergarten to 5th grade

Lesson recommended for grades 3rd – 5th

This lesson plan requires 45 minutes per day over the span of 3 days

Book summary

The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale recounts the experience of Kanzi, an immigrant girl who sadly discovers that books featuring diverse characters who look like her and her classmates have been removed from the school library. In response, her classmates, in collaboration with their teacher, organize a bake sale to raise funds for purchasing the banned titles and donating them to the *Little Free Libraries*. This initiative unites the school and its surrounding community, and exemplifies the power of representation, collective activism, and community solidarity. The book focuses on themes of immigration and cultural pride.

NCSS themes

Theme 1: Culture.

Theme 5: Individuals, groups, and institutions.

Theme 6: Power, authority, and governance.

Theme 10: Civic ideals and practices.

C3 framework standards

D2.Civ.8.K-2. Students will describe democratic principles such as equality, fairness, and respect for legitimate authority and rules.

D2.Civ.10.K-2. Students will compare their own point of view with others' perspectives.

D2.Civ.12.3-5. Students will explain how rules and laws change society and how people change rules and laws.

D2.Civ.13.3-5. Students will explain how policies are developed to address public problems.

D2.Geo.4.3-5. Students will explain how culture influences the way people modify and adapt to their environments.

D4.7.K-2. Students will identify ways to take action to help address local, regional, and global problems.

D4.8.K-2. Students will use listening, consensus-building, and voting procedures to decide on and take action in their classrooms.



Social Studies Research and Practice
Vol. 21 No. 2, 2026
pp. 155-164
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1933-5415

Materials

- (1) One copy of *The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale* by Aya Khalil.
- (2) Copies of banned books, if deemed an appropriate strategy by the teacher. Some suggestions include:
 - *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman
 - *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson
 - *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White
 - *Matilda* by Roald Dahl
- (3) Chart paper or whiteboard and markers for mini lecture/discussion topics.
- (4) Journals or notebook paper (for questions/journal prompts, reflective poem/persuasive paragraph writing).
- (5) U.S. Constitution, First Amendment: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/amendments/amendment-i>
 - If needed, resources can be found here: <https://constitutioncenter.org/education/classroom-resources-by-topic/first-amendment-speech>
- (6) Art supplies: construction paper, colored pencils, markers, scissors, glue (for poster design). Chart paper, index cards, markers (for bake sale plan).
- (7) Index cards for exit ticket

Big ideas

- (1) Individuals can face different experiences and challenges throughout their lives, which can create unfair circumstances.
- (2) Individuals can compare their perspective with others.
- (3) When individuals encounter unfair circumstances, they can offer help to others through empathic action and brainstorming creative solutions.

Objectives

- (1) *Exploration*: Students will answer comprehension questions and analyze the feelings, actions, and themes exhibited in the book; *The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale*.
- (2) *Development*: Students will discuss the concept of book banning and its effects on individuals and communities and identify references to cultural identity and representation in the text.
- (3) *Expansion*: Students will write a short poem or persuasive paragraph expressing their own beliefs about freedom of speech, inspired by Kanzi's poem. Students will collaborate to design a simple protest poster or fundraiser plan (e.g. a classroom bake sale or awareness campaign) to support diverse literature.

Exploration

Estimated time to complete: 45 min.

Objective: Students will answer comprehension questions and analyze the feelings, actions, and themes exhibited in the book; *The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale*.

Assessment method: Student sample work.

Procedure:

- (1) Show students the front cover of the book and read the title, the author's name, and the illustrator's name. Ask students what they think the book will be about. Ask students to describe the children located on the cover. Then show the first pages of the book where the librarian rolls a book cart and the book section, "Diverse Books", is full. Ask students what they think "diverse" means. Then ask students if they have changed their minds as to what the book is about.

- Ask students: "Have you ever felt like something important to you was taken away? How did that make you feel?" "Was this fair?"

Students turn and talk for 1–2 min, then share a few responses with the whole class.

Purpose: connect to Kanzi's initial reaction.

- (2) Read-Aloud using a Monitoring Reading Strategy

- Read *The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale* aloud, stopping at key points and ask the following questions open-ended questions about the text to gauge understanding and note how students respond:

When passing the quilt in the hallway, ask students: "What does *connected* mean?" "How does the quilt make Kanzi feel?" "Why do you suppose she feels this way?"

After Kanzi discovers the empty bookshelf, ask students: "Why might these books have disappeared? How would you feel?"

When Kanzi shares her idea for a school-wide bake sale idea, ask students: "What is important about solving problems as a group?" Purpose: begin to see that people can have different perspectives.

- As a class, read the poem that Kanzi wrote. "*Books are for everyone. Am I not important? Am I invisible? Books make us think. Books make us imagine. Books make us compassionate. Books make us creative. Books make us LOVE. You have banned important books, but you can't ban my words. Books are for EVERYONE.*" How does Kanzi's poem show her finding her voice? What does it mean to find one's voice?

- (3) Comprehension Check and Whole Group Discussion/Questions

- Record key ideas on chart paper under headings "Feelings," "Actions," and "Themes." Ask students questions, such as:

"What is a banned book? Why do you think some people ban books?"

"Why is Kanzi especially upset about her favorite books being banned?"

"How do Kanzi's classmates and teacher support her? What does this teach us about friendship and community?"

"What is fairness?"

"What is the message in Kanzi's poem?"

"Why did the students and crowd chant, 'No banned books!'?"

"What does 'reverse' mean?"

Purpose: connect to differing perspectives; see how listening, consensus-building, and voting procedures help us take action.

(4) Assessment: Quick Write in Reflective Journal

- Writing Prompt: “Write 3–4 sentences about a time you stood up for something you believed was right.”

Collect journals to gauge understanding of empathy and activism.

Development

Estimated time to complete: 45 min.

Objective: Students will discuss the concept of book banning and its effects on individuals and communities and identify references to cultural identity and representation in the text.

Assessment method: Student sample work.

Procedure:

- (1) Review the chart from Day 1. Invite three students to read aloud their “Quick Write” (Write 3–4 sentences about a time you stood up for something you believed was right.) Ask students, “What are beliefs?” “In the story we read, in what ways did Kanzi and her classmates stand up for their beliefs?” “Do you think it is important to stand up for your beliefs?”

Mini-Lesson: Understanding Censorship, Representation, and Fairness

- Prepare chart paper with words and definitions in advance.

CENSORSHIP: What it means using student language: Censorship is when a book or story is taken away or hidden because some people don’t want others to see it. It’s like putting a lock on a book so you can’t read it.

REPRESENTATION: What it means using student language: Showing different kinds of people, cultures, and experiences in books, movies, or other media. Student language: Representation is when you see characters in stories who look like you, talk like you, or share your background. It’s like seeing yourself on the page and knowing your story matters.

IMMIGRATION: What it means using student language: Immigration means moving from one country to another to live there. People become immigrants when they leave their home country and go to a new country to live, work, or be with family. Sometimes, they move because they want a better life, a new job, or a safer place to live. Imagine packing up your favorite things, saying goodbye to your old home, and traveling to a new place to start fresh. That’s what many families do when they immigrate. Kanzi was an immigrant from Egypt.

CULTURAL PRIDE: What it means using student language: Cultural pride means feeling happy and proud about where you come from and the special things that make your family and traditions unique. It can be the food you eat, the holidays you celebrate, the language you speak, the music you listen to, or the clothes you wear. Everyone’s culture is different, and that’s what makes the world so interesting! When you have cultural pride, you feel good about your family’s traditions, and you like to share them with others. Kanzi’s language is Arabic, and she feels proud of her language and is happy to share with her classmates in the quilt she helped bring to life (and hangs in the school hallway).

FAIRNESS: What it means using student language: Fair means everyone gets what they *need*, based on visible gaps in opportunity. And sometimes people will have different needs because we are unique individuals. Some children may receive a different lunch in school because they have food allergies. That’s not equal, but it’s fair. It’s what that child needs to be healthy and safe.

PUBLIC DEBATE: What it means using student language: A public debate is when people talk about something they disagree on in front of others. Each person shares their opinion and gives reasons why they think they are right. For example, when people argue about banning books, some say certain books should be taken out of school. Others say books should stay because everyone deserves to learn different ideas. In a public debate, people don't always agree—but they try to listen, talk respectfully, and explain their thinking so others can understand.

BOOK BANS: Bans are often challenges, not formal bans: Book challenges are attempts to remove or restrict access to books based on objections. These challenges can be successful, leading to removal, but they are not always official bans with legal force. Explain that sometimes books are challenged because they include characters of different races, religions, or cultures. While book bans can happen, they are often not government-mandated and may violate First Amendment rights. The government's ability to restrict speech is limited, and book bans often trigger legal challenges and public debate.

- a. Reveal the main example from the story: books about immigrant kids like Kanzi were banned (e.g. stories featuring diverse characters). Ask students, “Why do you think these books were banned/censored?” “Who decides which books are banned/censored?”

If deemed appropriate, share books that have been banned and explain why some people have caused these books to be banned/censored. Below is short list of suggestions, however, the ALA Banned Children's Books provides a long list. See <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/childrensbooks>

- a. *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman: This book, featuring a child with two mothers, has been targeted for its LGBTQ + content.
- b. *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson: This picture book tells the story of two male penguins who adopt an egg and raise it as their family. It has been challenged in numerous states and is one of the most frequently banned picture books.
- c. *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White: Banned by a few school districts, primarily due to objections to the talking animals and the portrayal of the spider's death. Some religious parents felt that animals should not be portrayed as having the ability to speak, and the death of the spider was deemed inappropriate.
- d. *Matilda* by Roald Dahl: This book has been challenged in schools and libraries due to its portrayal of adult figures and its message encouraging children to disobey authority. Specifically, the book is criticized for its disrespect towards adults, including the parents of Matilda and the school principal, Miss Trunchbull. Additionally, the story's depiction of Matilda's defiance of authority and her use of her special abilities to harm the adults have been perceived as a negative influence on children.

(2) Exploring the U. S. Constitution First Amendment (freedom of speech and press).

- Read the First Amendment: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

Explain Freedom of Speech: This protects the right to express oneself freely, including the right to speak, write, and publish

Explain Freedom of the Press: This protects the right of the media to report news and information without government interference.

- a. Ask/discuss: “How does banning books relate to freedom of speech?”
- b. Ask/discuss: “If the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment allows for freedom of speech and freedom of the press, how can people ban books?” [While the First Amendment protects freedom of speech and press, book bans can still occur. These bans are often attempts by individuals or groups to restrict access to specific books, which may violate the First Amendment rights of others to read and access information. This is often done in a public forum, known as a public debate.]
- c. Ask/discuss, if appropriate: “When in our world history has book banning occurred?” [Book banning has happened many times throughout world history, often when people in power wanted to control ideas, limit knowledge, or stop others from learning about certain topics. Here are some important examples:

- (1) Ancient China – Qin Dynasty (around 213 BCE)

Emperor Qin Shi Huang ordered the burning of books and even buried some scholars alive. He wanted to get rid of ideas that challenged his rule.

- (2) The Catholic Church – Middle Ages (1100–1600s)

The Church created the Index of Forbidden Books, a list of books that people were not allowed to read, including books by scientists and philosophers like Galileo and Copernicus.

- (3) Nazi Germany – 1933

The Nazis burned thousands of books written by Jewish authors, political opponents, or anyone they thought was “un-German.” It was a way to control what people could think and learn.

- (4) Soviet Union (1917–1991)

The government banned books that did not support communism. Writers who told the truth about life in the Soviet Union were often punished.

- (5) United States – Various Times (20th–21st Century)

Books have been banned in schools and libraries for reasons like “bad language,” “challenging authority,” or discussing race, gender, or identity. Examples include *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *The Hate U Give*. Other examples suitable for younger audiences are found above, p. 5.

- (3) Assessment: Quick Write

- Reflective Journal Writing Prompt: “Why is it important to have characters we can relate to in books?” and/or “Why is it important to have a public debate about societal issues such as book banning?”
 - a. Collect journals to gauge understanding of equality, justice, and respect for individuals.

Expansion

Estimated time to complete: 45 min.

Objective: Students will write a short poem or persuasive letter expressing their own beliefs about freedom of speech, inspired by Kanzi’s poem. Students will collaborate to design a simple poster or fundraiser plan (e.g. a classroom bake sale or awareness campaign) to support diverse literature. **Assessment method:** Student work samples graded with rubrics (provided in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)).

Procedure:

(1) Collaborative Activity: Plan a Classroom Bake Sale or Awareness Campaign

- Divide class into small groups of 3–4.

Task Prompts (posted on board):

- Group A:* Design a simple poster or flyer that says, “No Banned Books!” including at least one slogan and an image.
- Group B:* Create a plan to hold a “Bake Sale for Banned Books” at the school (real or hypothetical). Decide:

What baked goods or items will be sold.

How they will advertise (where to hang posters, how to talk to classmates).

Which organization or library would benefit from the proceeds.

Table 1. Persuasive letter writing rubric. Topic: Why everyone deserves access to diverse books

Category	4 – Exceeds expectations	3 – Meets expectations	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Role and voice	Clearly writes as Kanzi with a strong, personal voice that reflects real emotion and urgency	Writes in Kanzi’s voice with a mostly clear voice and perspective	Attempts to write in Kanzi’s voice, but it may be inconsistent or unclear	Does not stay in character or voice is missing
Purpose and persuasion	Clearly explains why diverse books matter with strong reasoning and emotional appeal	States why diverse books matter with some reasons or feelings	Mentions diverse books but gives weak or unclear reasons	Purpose is missing or unrelated to the topic
Feelings and empathy	Shows deep emotion about losing access to books and asks readers to think how it would feel	Shares some personal feelings and encourages empathy	Mentions feelings briefly but doesn’t develop them	Does not express personal feelings or empathy
Organization	Well-organized 5-part letter (greeting, introduction, body, conclusion, closing)	Mostly follows 5-part letter structure	Some attempt at letter structure but parts are missing or confusing	No clear organization or missing major parts of the letter
Conventions	Few or no errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, or capitalization	Minor errors that don’t distract from meaning	Frequent errors that distract the reader	Many errors that make the letter hard to understand

Note(s): Scoring Guidelines

- 18–20 points = Excellent: Strong voice, clear purpose, well-structured, emotionally persuasive
- 13–17 points = Proficient: Good effort with clear ideas and structure
- 8–12 points = Developing: Needs more support with purpose, voice, or organization
- 5–7 points = Beginning: Needs significant support; unclear or off-topic

Source(s): Table created by author

Table 2. Poetry writing rubric. Topic: Why everyone deserves access to diverse books

Category	4 – Exceeds expectations	3 – Meets expectations	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Voice and role	Clearly writes as Kanzi with strong personal voice and emotional depth	Writes as Kanzi with some personal voice and perspective	Some attempt to write in Kanzi’s voice, but voice may be unclear	Voice is missing or not written as Kanzi
Theme and message	Poem strongly communicates why diverse books matter with deep insight	Poem explains why diverse books are important with some supporting ideas	Poem mentions diverse books but lacks clear or strong message	Message about diverse books is missing or unclear
Emotion and empathy	Effectively shows strong feelings and invites the reader to imagine losing books	Expresses some personal feeling and encourages empathy	Mentions feelings briefly but does not explore them deeply	Little or no emotional impact or sense of empathy
Creativity and language	Uses rich, vivid language, figurative devices, and creative expression	Uses clear language and some creative or poetic devices	Language is plain with little poetic expression	Limited creativity and or lacks poetic elements
Structure and conventions	4–6 lines, well-structured with few or no grammar or spelling errors	4–6 lines, mostly clear with minor errors	Too short or long; some distracting grammar or spelling errors	Lacks structure; many errors make the poem hard to understand

Note(s): Scoring Guidelines

- 18–20 points = Excellent: Expressive, thoughtful, and clearly in Kanzi’s voice
- 13–17 points = Proficient: Solid message and structure with some creativity
- 8–12 points = Developing: Needs more clarity, feeling, or poetic elements
- 5–7 points = Beginning: Lacks structure or clear message; minimal effort shown

Source(s): Table created by author

- a. *Group C:* Write a short skit (3–4 lines per student) depicting how Kanzi would convince the school principal to help her, and her classmates raise money to purchase banned books and donate them to the Little Free Libraries.
- (2) Writing Assessment: Compose a Poem or Persuasive Letter
 - *Instructions:* Pretend you are Kanzi, and you have something important to say. Write a poem (e.g. 4–6 lines) or a 5-part persuasive letter (e.g. 5–7 sentences) to the American Library Association (225 N Michigan Ave., Ste 1300, Chicago, IL 6060) about why everyone deserves access to diverse books. Encourage students to talk about how they might feel if books were taken away.
 - Poems may range in format, based on prior experiences students may have with this form of writing. One suggestion is for acrostic poems using key words like beliefs, respect, diversity, equality, and justice. For more advanced students, perhaps free verse poems would be more appropriate.
 - Collect poems and letters. Grade according to a rubric (provided in [Tables 1 and 2](#)).
- (3) Closing
 - Ask three volunteers to read aloud their poem or 5-part persuasive letter.
 - Each group will present a 2-min summary of their plan, show their poster, or perform their skit.
 - Exit Ticket (index card): “Name one way you can support the reading of diverse books. Why is it important?” Collect exit tickets.

Assessment

The following assessments from the lesson plan align to the standards and objectives:

- *Introduction:* Students' quick write responses should reveal that they understand that they are allowed to stand up for what they believe is right, learning empathy and activism. This quick-write response can also help students to understand how culture influences the way people modify and adapt to their environments.
- *Development:* Students learn that different people have different perspectives. Their "quick write" responses should expose that they have the right to have relatable characters in books, understanding the concepts of equality, justice, and respect for individuals.
- *Expansion:* Students project collaboration and individual writing should result in their ability to see how rules and laws change society and how people change rules and laws. Further, through project collaboration students will experience the different ways in which they can engage to take action to help address local, regional, and global problems. They will have experience using listening, consensus-building, and voting procedures to decide on and take action in their classrooms.

Suggested extension activities

(1) Social Studies/Civics:

- Explore the First Amendment (freedom of speech and press) in more detail. Research local or national book-banning cases in detail.

(2) Art:

- Create a collaborative mural in the school hallway with students' protest posters.
- Host a "Banned-Book Character Art Show," where each student illustrates a character from a book that has been challenged or banned.

(3) Language Arts:

- Partner with the school library to host a read-aloud of another book that was once banned.
- Write letters to the principal or local media explaining why diverse books belong in the library.
- Read *The Arabic Quilt* by Aya Khalil and other stories of immigrants or refugees such as *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of the Sudan* by Mary Williams or *Hannah is My Name* by Belle Yang.

(4) Home/Family Connection:

- Send a note home inviting families to donate gently used diverse books for a classroom Little Free Library box.
- Encourage students to interview a family member about a time when they stood up for something.

Digital resources

The following sources provide more information on book banning, fairness, and the law:

ALA. *Frequently challenged children's books*. (2016). <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/childrensbooks>

- Reading Rockets. (2025). *An introduction to letter writing*. <https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/writing/articles/introduction-letter-writing>
- Nesbitt, K. (2025). *Poetry writing lessons for kids*. <https://poetry4kids.com/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons/>
- Song, S. (2023). “*That’s not fair! Teaching the meaning of fairness*”. <https://betterkids.education/blog/thats-not-fair-teaching-the-meaning-of-fairness>
- U.S. Constitution. (2025). *First amendment*. <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/amendments>

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- Williams, M. (2013), *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of the Sudan*, Lee & Low Books, New York, NY.
- Yang, B. (2004), *Hannah Is My Name*, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA.

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