

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "If all printers were determined not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed." Book challenges at both public and school libraries are prominent in the news today, sometimes close to home. These challenges occur because concerned citizens feel that specific materials are offensive. September 18-24 we'll be celebrating Banned Books Week at the library. It may sound odd to call it celebrating. However, taking the time to consider why certain books are challenged helps to remind us why we put them on the shelves in the first place. Reasons for selecting a book could include that it's an award winner, a patron asked for it, or it serves a particular need in the community. For these reasons and many others, we celebrate. We celebrate your right to read what you want to read, and we support your right to guide your family's reading according to your own principles. We absolutely do not support or celebrate censorship. Censorship is when a group or a person decides what's not okay for others to read and then tries to prevent access to those materials through official removal, destruction, or theft.

Libraries (and librarians) are bound by the tenets set forth by our mother organization, the American Library Association (ALA). Library patrons being able to freely read what they want and the responsibility of libraries to ensure that patrons can find what they need- these are not new ideas. The ALA adopted the Library Bill of Rights in 1939 and the Freedom to Read Statement in 1953. Both documents can be read in full on the ALA's website. At West Liberty Public Library, we follow the guidelines set forth by the ALA. We do our level best to provide a wide variety of perspectives, life experiences, and tastes to more fully represent the community. Those different points of view are naturally going to contradict one another sometimes.

In addition to Banned Books Week, September is also National Library Card Sign-Up Month. If you don't have an account, come in and sign up! If you don't find what you're looking for at the library, let us know. Often, if an item isn't in our physical collection, we can order it, or help you access it as an e-book or borrow it via interlibrary loan. Celebrate with us! Learn more about the freedom to read, pick up a free bookmark, and browse the displays.