

Take a moment to think about the last book you read. Did the characters remind you of yourself? Do they live in the same kind of town, come from the same ancestry, or have the same family structure? If so, you were enjoying a story that children's literature professor Rudine Sims Bishop calls a mirror: it mirrored your own experience and was probably entertaining, inspiring and/or familiar. Mirrors make great stories!

Maybe the last book you read introduced you to a person or a place that you'd never encountered before. Maybe it took place in an unfamiliar part of the world or was about an experience you couldn't imagine happening to yourself. Bishop calls these books windows: they give us a look through a window into another world. Reading books that are windows can be challenging. They take our minds to places they've never been before, which requires a lot of thought and imagination.

Bishop wrote that for children especially, it's important to strike a balance between reading books that are windows and books that are mirrors. Mirrors put our experiences in greater context: we're not alone in how we look and feel. But you can imagine that if kids only read books that mirrored their own identity, they wouldn't learn as much about the wider world. By adding books that are windows, children can learn about all the different types of human experience that make our world so colorful.

Adults might also benefit from a balance between reading books that are windows and mirrors. If we read books that depict other cultures and viewpoints, we can learn not only about how others live but find similarities and commonalities that open our minds and our perspectives. During these tumultuous times, working towards a better understanding of where other people come from can cultivate empathy and bring about peace.

The idea of windows and mirrors is especially important to consider during Banned Books Week, an annual event that supports the freedom to seek and express ideas. Sponsored by the American Library Association (ALA) and 14 other organizations, it highlights attempts to challenge and ban items from libraries and schools. Challenges happen when a person or a group expresses a desire to remove materials or restrict their circulation from the library. Bans happen when the item is actually removed.

When library materials are banned, readers could be deprived of the chance to see themselves in a mirror or look out a window. Banned Books Week reminds us that we are all entitled to decide for ourselves what we would like to read. The role of a library is to offer its community a variety of materials that represent the diverse viewpoints of its patrons.

Here are a few books that have appeared on the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom list of the most challenged books. Whether they serve as a window or a mirror for you, consider the importance of allowing everyone to read them.

George by Alex Gino. George isn't sure how she fits in. She looks like a boy on the outside but, inside, she yearns to be a girl. Throughout the book, George searches for the courage to be her true self in front of her friends and family. This book for young readers is about what it's like to be transgender but the concept of feeling like an outsider is one that all can relate to.

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas. In this young adult novel, readers consider issues of racism, poverty, and police violence after the main character, Starr, witnesses the fatal shooting of her best friend by a police officer. If you've been following similar stories in the news these

days, reading a novel from a first-person perspective might give another viewpoint on the issues.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie. Throughout his career, Alexie has written bravely about the modern day experiences of Native Americans in the U.S. This book was challenged for profanity and sexual innuendo but is based on Alexie's own experience and addresses racial identity, poverty, bullying, and violence.

1984 by George Orwell. This 1949 novel is an interesting read in a time of political division, global pandemic, and social unrest. It is amazing to think that Orwell predicted the ubiquitous "Big Brother" that is watching and listening in our homes (does this sound like Alexa?) and the particular language of political propaganda that he termed "newspeak."

This year, Banned Books Week will be recognized from September 27 to October 3. For more information and to see lists of challenged and banned books, visit www.bannedbooksweek.org. To read Bishop's original article about windows and mirrors, visit <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>