Defend the Right to Read!
Creating Book Events in Response to the Supreme Court Case *Mahmoud v. Taylor*
April 22, 2025

Abstract

Mahmoud v. Taylor

On April 22, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, which names nine LGBTQIA+ picture books. Religious parents have sued and filed an injunction against Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland, asking to be informed every time a book with LGBTQIA+ content is used and for their children to be excused from such access. Twice their injunction has failed because they showed no evidence their children had been coerced to change their views and they remain free to worship and teach their children. This case could significantly restrict access to LGBTQIA+ books in public schools. It could model separating and viewing children in the LGBTQIA+ community as dangerous, which would encourage rather than discourage harassment and bullying. Moreover, this ruling could open the door for restrictions on books about any identity or experience. The decision will be announced in June.

April 22 Rally for Inclusive Literature

Supporters for inclusive books will gather at the Supreme Court on **April 22, 2025**, for a **Rally for Inclusive Literature at the Supreme Court, 8 AM - 2 PM**. The event will be celebratory, with book give-aways, speakers, and music. Attendees are encouraged to bring rainbow or Pride umbrellas and signs. **Rally Social Media Toolkit** (includes **hashtags**)

Echo Events

Around the country, from **April through June**, supporters of the right to read are invited to host **echo story time events.** These can raise awareness of this case, support and celebrate inclusive books, offer children and families a safe and joyful space to gather, and inspire action!

- Possible event **settings**: libraries, bookstores, book clubs.
- Events might feature **teasers for the books** from the case and/or **full readings**.
- Events could include **drag storytellers** or opportunities for children to **dress up**.
- This **SCOTUS Right to Read Activity Packet** includes **free crafts and activity sheets** related to the picture books named in the case.
- This **Call to Action** resource provides **activities for children and adults** to do at events to advocate for the right to read and **resources for action after the event**.

Toolkit

This toolkit offers details about: the case, messaging, event planning, activities, discussion questions, the nine books, calls to action, advertising, accessibility, security and volunteer guidance, and additional responses to this case and resources.

Introduction & Information About the Case

Thank you for your interest in hosting an event to defend the right to read in public schools! This toolkit offers an overview of the *Mahmoud v. Taylor* Supreme Court case, event ideas, an activity packet, hashtags for events responding to this case, and considerations for accessibility and security, and ways to take further action. Every student deserves to see themselves reflected in the classroom. This case is about truth, equity, and the right of all young people — across race, gender, ability, and identity — to thrive.

Thank you for joining us as we gather in joy, resistance, and community power. **We will not be silenced. We will not be erased!**

Mahmoud v. Taylor

On April 22, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, which names nine LGBTQIA+ picture books and could affect access to all LGBTQIA+-inclusive content in public schools.

In 2022, Maryland Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) added LGBTQIA+ books to their curriculum after requests from the community for their diversity to be better represented in the classroom. The books could be kept in classrooms for optional reading or small groups, or story times as part of language arts lessons.

At first, some religious families were allowed to opt out of story times that used these books. But arranging opt-outs became disruptive. District leaders worried that the opt-outs were harming LGBTQIA+ children and children from LGBTQIA+ families. When MCPS ended opt-outs, a group of religious families sued the district and filed an injunction.

Twice their injunction was denied because the suing families offered no evidence that their children were coerced to change their views. The families remain free to practice their religions. The opt-outs single out and endanger children from the LGBTQIA+ community by suggesting that they are dangerous and offensive. Disrespect and bullying of LGBTQIA+ students in MCPS has already been reported, including death threats.

On April 22, the Supreme Court will consider whether public schools can use LGBTQIA+-inclusive books without advance notice to families and the option for their children to be removed from such lessons. SCOTUS will announce their ruling in June. This decision will affect access to LGBTQIA+-inclusive books across the nation.

The Stakes

- Should the suing families prevail, **this ruling could require public schools to seek special permission *every time* they include a book with LGBTQIA+ content.**
- These extra requirements would likely pressure many educators to censor LGBTQIA+ representation altogether. A staff member at MCPS has reported that many teachers there are doing just that, even though the suing families have failed twice at court.
- **This case may open the door for restrictions on books about any identity throughout the entire country.**
- **This ruling could block educators from addressing bullying and supporting students from the LGBTQIA+ community.**
- "Attending a school with **even one anti-LGBTQ+ policy is associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and past-year suicide attempts for young LGBTQ+ students**" (The Trevor Project)
- **Publicly labeling certain identities as "different" and "dangerous" puts these students at even greater risk of harassment. It teaches children to discriminate.**
- We know children with access to inclusive books:
    - Are better prepared to interact positively with classmates
    - Better understand how to navigate the world
    - Demonstrate better learning outcomes
    - Show greater interest in reading.

This case could have profound implications for all students in the United States, and especially those whose identities are being targeted.

Book Events Can…

- Inform people about *Mahmoud v. Taylor* and the possible implications.
- Delight children with joyful, affirming story times.
- Offer a safe space for people to gather and connect with a supportive community.
- Educate the public about the quality, age-appropriateness, and importance of these books for *all* children.
- Rally people to defend reading freedom in concrete ways.
- Support educators and librarians who use inclusive books. Support will become especially crucial if the Supreme Court adds extra barriers for using diverse books.

Messaging

The core messaging from the Social Media Toolkit for the Rally for Inclusive Education is:

- *Inclusive education is under attack.*
- *We're hosting this event to say:* ***Every student deserves to see themselves reflected in the classroom. This is about truth, equity, and the right of all young people — across race, gender, ability, and identity — to thrive.***
- *Join us as we gather in* ***joy, resistance, and community power. We will not be silenced. We will not be erased.***

Suggestions for discussing this case with children are included in Event Planning.

Event Planning

While our communities are protesting outside the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., you can participate in celebrating the freedom to read in your hometown by hosting an echo event. Echo events are a way to inform your community about the importance of the *Mahmoud v. Taylor* case, educate them about the quality, age-appropriateness, and importance of inclusive books that represent all families, and offer ideas on how to take action to foster welcoming learning environments. These events can take many forms such as partnering with a local library or bookshop to host a Drag Story Hour, reading inclusive books during a book club meeting, or more.

Timeline

The U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments for *Mahmoud v. Taylor* on **April 22, 2025**. A Rally for Inclusive Education at the Supreme Court will be held that day from **8AM - 2PM** (registration here). Echo events and Drag Story Hours are encouraged for **the days directly before and after April 22, but also from April through June**, perhaps in connection with Pride events. Events that fall after the ruling (in June) will still be meaningful and important.

Event Ideas

Events might include some or all of the nine LGBTQIA+ picture books named in the case, along with child-centered activities. As you tailor your event to your community, here are ideas to consider:

- **Drag Story Hours**: Drag storytellers bring extra fun, sparkle, and even bubbles!
- **Dress-ups**: Hosts can invite children to dress up or provide costumes and accessories. Playfulness opens children to imagination, inclusiveness, and joy!
- **Possible Event Structures**:
    - **Book Sampler Structure**: One option is to share the opening or a teaser for some or all of the books. Ending with suspense or a question can spark interest in the whole book.
    - **Combination: Full Readings + Book Talks**: Another option is to select a few books to read completely. The host might share book talks on the other books between readings.

Sample Event Order

- **Welcome**: Welcome songs and/ or a greeting time sets the tone of fun and inclusion.
- **Brief Statement of Purpose**: Introduce *Mahmoud v. Taylor* and why defending students and inclusive books matters. This can be simplified for children.
- **Share Books**: (Usage permission information and website links below.)
- **Creative Activities**: This packet offers free activities for all, some, or individual books involved in this case: **"Defend the Right to Read" Activity Packet"**
- **Calls to Action**: Provide ways for children and adults to advocate for the right to read. This could include activities for the event itself and/or handouts of resources and actions to take home. (See "Calls to Action at Events" below or at this **link**.)

Communicating with Children

- Keep the focus positive and concrete.
- Avoid "us versus them" language. This case is about protecting books about *everyone*, including the families bringing this lawsuit. We are in this together!
- Avoid describing people as "different." Rather, invite children to think about how everyone has unique experiences, while sharing common humanity.
- Explore their experiences with books and what books mean to them.
- **Discussion Questions for Children**
    - ***What do you like about books with people like you?***
      (They may focus on common feelings and experiences rather than identity.)
    - ***What about books with people who have different experiences than you?***
    - ***How do these books make you feel? Think?***
    - ***Do books ever change how you treat others? Or talk to yourself?***
    - ***Should everyone have books about their own experiences? Why?***
    - ***Should everyone have books about experiences they haven't had? Why?***

Sharing the Books Named in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*

The following books are named in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*. Links to publisher, author, and illustrator websites are included, together with additional activities, videos, and resources.

Permissions: Hosts have permission to use entire books at free, in-person events. Please acknowledge the publisher, author, and illustrator. As specified below, permissions vary for online and archived events. Some publishers limit the number of pages that may be shared online. Some publishers require that recordings be removed after 30 days.

Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope
Crown Books, Penguin Random House
Jodie Patterson
Charnelle Pinkney Barlow

IntersectionAllies: We Make Room for All
Dottir Press
Chelsea Johnson
LaToya Council
Carolyn Chai
Ashley Seil Smith

Jacob's Room to Choose
Magination Press and the American Psychological Association
Inquiries for permissions: https://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/
Sarah and Ian Hoffman
Chris Case

Love, Violet
FSG/ MacKids: Permission to use full book live and online, indefinitely
Charlotte Sullivan Wild
Charlene Chua

My Rainbow
Kokila, Penguin Random House
Trinity and DeShanna Neal
Art Twink

Pride Puppy!
Orca Book Publishers
Permission to share at free, live events; full use of the book is allowed online for 30 days
Robin Stevenson
Julie McLaughlin

Prince & Knight
Little Bee Books, Published in Partnership with GLAAD Series
Permission to share at free, live events; please ask for permission for online sharing
Daniel Haack
Stevie Lewis

Uncle Bobby's Wedding
Little Bee Books, Published in Partnership with GLAAD Series
Permission to share at free, live events; please ask for permission for online sharing
Sarah S. Brannen
Lucia Soto

What are Your Words
Hachette; Little, Brown
Permission to share at free, live; up to 5 pages may be shared online
Katherine Locke
Anne (Andy) Passchier

Calls to Action at Events

Events are the perfect place to help people find ways to take action. Event planners can create activities to be done at the event itself, as well as resources for future action.

- **Activities to do with kids**
  - **Create thank-you cards for librarians or teachers** who make reading fun and use inclusive books.
  - **Create postcards for principals, superintendents, school board members and representatives** about what reading freedom means personally. Respond to current bills and policy questions.
- **Book lists** of favorite inclusive and intersectional books. Find recommendations here:
  - National Education Association here
  - Human Rights Campaign here.
- **Local action guides**
  - **Provide information about local school board meetings or elections.**
  - **Provide contact information for officials and current bills or concerns.**
  - **Tips for supporting inclusive books**
    - Request and check out books from the library.
    - Write online reviews.
    - Highlight inclusive books online.
    - Use and donate books to Little Free Libraries (map here).
    - If possible, buy books and enjoy them!
  - **Action tips!**
    - **Register to vote–and VOTE!** Including for school board elections.
    - **Send a letter to local principals, superintendents, or school board members** urging them to make a proclamation in support of *all* students. Host postcard parties with friends and neighbors to boost your efforts! Use this letter as a template,
    - **Report censorship**: Most censorship goes unreported. You can help track trends, identify targeted titles, and develop support materials by submitting a confidential censorship report.
    - **Petition the person or group responsible for deciding whether a challenged book will stay on the shelves.** This can be a school administrator or board, a library board, a town council, or elected leaders. Learn more here.
    - **Make a plan to attend library or school board meetings. Check out Unite Against Book Bans guide to get started.** Don't forget to bring your friends to show up in support of students!
    - **Support local libraries.** Consider volunteering, joining (or starting) a Friends group for your library, becoming a trustee, or even running for your local library board. More ideas here.
    - **Write a Letter to the Editor** in support of the freedom to read. Suggestions here.

- **Organizations that donate and distribute inclusive books**
  - First Book: https://firstbook.org/
  - Kind Cotton: https://kindcotton.com/
  - Pride and Less Prejudice: https://www.prideandlessprejudice.org/
  - We Are Stronger Than Censorship: https://wearestrongerthancensorship.org/
  - We Need Diverse Books: https://www.diversebooks.org/

- **Resources for community action**
  - African American Policy Forum: Truth Be Told Campaign
  - ACLU: Right to Learn Toolkit
  - Coalition for Inclusive Schools and Communities: Rally Social Media Toolkit
  - Fight for the First
  - PEN America: Don't Censor America
  - PFLAG: Fighting Anti-LGBTQ+ Censorship
  - Red Wine and Blue: Book Ban Busters
  - Unite Against Book Bans Toolkit
  - Unite Against Book Bans Action Items

Social Media & Advertising

Linking echo events to the April 22 Rally for Inclusive Education at the US Supreme Court and those involved will allow the broader community to boost your advertising. Resources:

- **Social Media Toolkit** for the April 22 Rally
- **Rally and Echo Event Hashtags**: #RallyForInclusiveEducation #ProtectInclusiveEducation #InclusiveEducationIsEssential #WeWillNotBeErased #LiveInYourTruth #kidlit #lgbtqkidlit #weneeddiversebooks #weneeddiverseauthors #MoCoPrideFamily #mocopride #SCOTUSRally2025
- Tagging authors, illustrators, and publishers will allow them to boost events.

Accessibility

Make sure your space is accessible to those using mobility aids. When advertising, ask attendees to alert you to any accessibility needs. At your event, point out exits, bathrooms, and quiet spaces, if you have them, for children who need a break. Avoid scents and perfumes. If floor seating is used, provide chairs for those who can't sit on the floor.

Security and Volunteers

Planning

Developing a thorough security plan is essential for events where objectors might seek to disrupt the program. This is especially true for drag story hours. While the nuances of how to increase safety at such events are more complex than can be covered here, the Rainbow Defense Coalition of the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia (RDC-DMV) and Drag Story Hour (DSH) have excellent resources and expertise. [They are preparing a separate, thorough guide now.]

The event host, venue staff and their security, and any volunteers should establish thorough security plans in advance and determine the best method of communication during the event. As the program nears, they must assess the risk level, paying attention to online comments and threats, letters to the editor, and so on. Create plans for what to do in different scenarios, such as bomb threats or loud, aggressive objectors. Establish key people to field information about shifting conditions. Focus on providing the most protection for the most vulnerable participants, especially drag performers and children.

Security Principles

- **Non-engagement and de-escalation**
  All volunteers should agree to not engage with objectors. Only trained de-escalators should respond to objectors and do so in a way that lowers tensions, distracts, and draws protestors away from the event and its participants.
- **Shielding event participants**
  - **Storytellers, especially drag performers**, should be protected. This might involve someone meeting them off site and driving them to a separate entrance, and providing a secure green room and private bathroom.
  - **Families and children** should be shielded so that, ideally, children aren't even aware of any hate speech outside. Depending on the setting, this might be done with greeters who escort guests into the venue. Others might create "love barriers" between disruptors and the event. Disruptors should be discouraged from entering the event space whenever possible.
  - **Love barriers**: Volunteers can use rainbow or colorful umbrellas and Pride flags as joyful barriers so that families do not see hateful signs or angry faces. Bubbles, cheers, festive clothing, and loud Disney music create a magical atmosphere for children, and can cover up unpleasant noise. Disney music is especially helpful if objectors try to post video of events. Disney will quickly remove such posts to protect their intellectual property.

Planning for a secure and well-organized program helps events run smoothly and safely and also adds a layer of magic for children! Check out the joy at Rainbow Defense Coalition-DMV events!

Learn More

Articles about Mahmoud v. Taylor

- *Mahmoud v. Taylor* case file and amici briefs
- AP News, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, CBS, NBC, *Education Week*, *USA Today*, *The Globe and Mail* (Canada),
- Background articles: *Bethesda Magazine* 2022, 2023; *Maryland Matters* 2024; *Washington Post* April 2023, Dec. 2023
- United States Supreme Court File
- Mombian blog: "Supreme Court to Hear Case on Whether Reading LGBTQ Books in School Requires Parental Opt-Out Option"
- PEN America Announcement and Response
- Americans United Response
- Nine Books Named in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*

Authors and Illustrators Respond

- Statement from the Authors and Illustrators, PEN America
- Sarah Brannen, *The Boston Globe*: [Forthcoming]
- ABC interview with Sarah Brannen and Daniel Haack [Forthcoming]
- Sarah and Ian Hoffman, *Time Magazine*: "Our Books Help Teach LGBTQ Themes in Schools. Should SCOTUS Allow Parents to Opt Out?"
- Charlotte Sullivan Wild, blog: Response to *Mahmoud v. Taylor* and Stonewall Book Award Speeches video (with discussion of the lawsuit) [and op-ed forthcoming]

Related Articles and Research

- *The74*: "Even in States Where You're Supposed to 'Say Gay,' Fear Often Outweighs the Law"
- First Book, study: "The Impact of a Diverse Classroom Library"
- Flair, Randy. *Other Words*: "Teachers Have the Power to Open Students' Eyes – If We Let Them"
- GLSEN, research brief: "The Power of Inclusive Learning for LGBTQ+ Youth"
- Journal of Adolescent Health: "Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior Among Transgender Youth"
- Society of Research in Child Development: "Gender-Affirming Policies Support Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth's Health"
- Tompkins, Chris. *Psychology Today*: "Why "LGBTQ Isn't for Kids" Is a Dangerous Narrative: The real impact of anti-LGBTQ policies on youth mental health."
- The Trevor Project:
    - 2024 Survey
    - Research brief: "Anti-LGBTQ+ School Policies and LGBTQ+ Young People: *Attending a school with even one anti-LGBTQ+ policy is associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and past-year suicide attempts for young LGBTQ+ students*."