



SOFT CENSORSHIP

Soft censorship, or quiet censorship, occurs when an item is removed, limited, or never purchased at all despite being a title that would serve a community because of the anticipation or fear of a challenge.

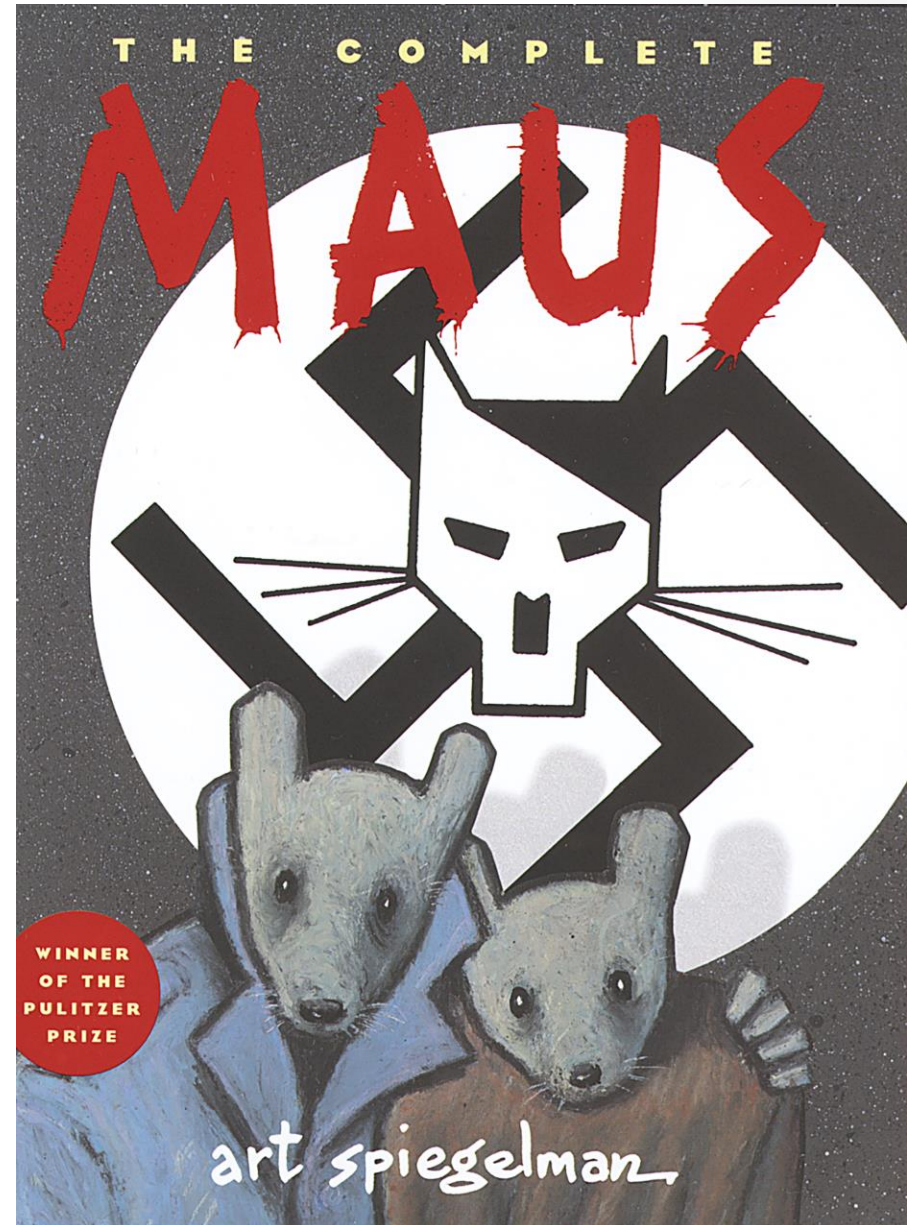
In the **Glossary of Terms Badge Module**, we learned that [United for Libraries](#) defines **ensorship** as “a decision made by a governing authority or its representative(s) to suppress, exclude, expurgate, remove, or restrict public access to a library resource based on a person or group’s disapproval of its content or its author/creator.”

Soft Censorship (also known as quiet censorship or self-censorship) occurs when materials, programs, or services are purposefully removed, limited, or never offered at all despite being something that would serve a community.

The difference between **soft censorship** and **regular censorship** is that regular censorship is often caused by a challenge while soft censorship is preemptive to avoid challenges or controversy.

Often, well-publicized material or program challenges draw attention to and increase sales or attendance of the specific title or program being challenged.

For example, the graphic novel *Maus* got a 753% boost in sales in January 2022 following a controversial ban in Tennessee. This would imply that challenges don't work.



HOWEVER

The reality is that challenges take a lot of staff hours and money to resolve and can erode trust between an institution and the people it serves.

Staff or administration in some institutions might therefore go the route of soft censorship, deciding that it is more practical and easier to simply not purchase materials or hold programs that might prompt controversy.

ADA PALMER, HISTORY PROFESSOR

"The more we look at censorship regimes in the past — from the Inquisition to the USSR [the former Soviet Union] — the clearer it is that the main goal isn't to silence or destroy books or works that already exist. It's to frighten people and discourage them from reading, buying and creating similar works in future."



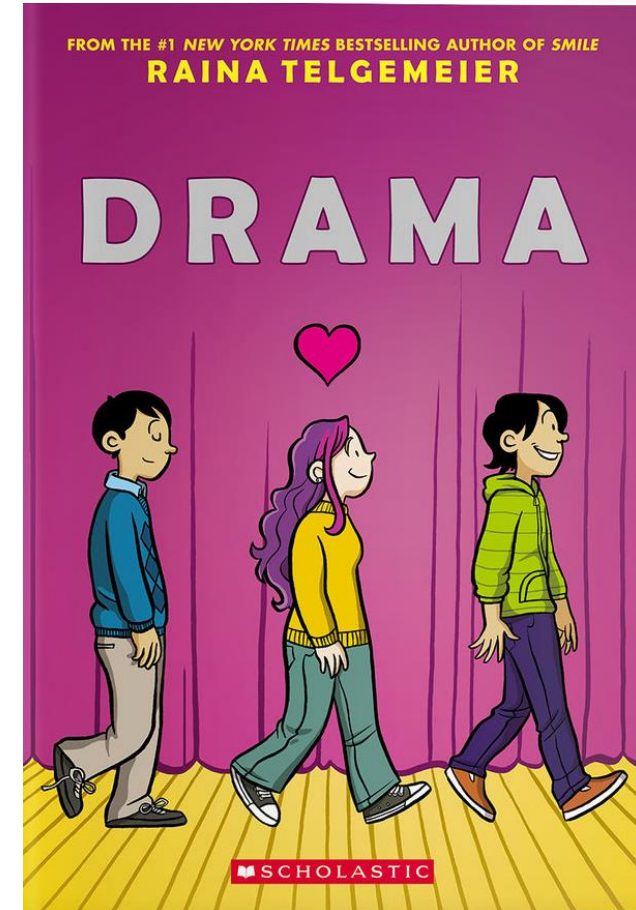
The programs and materials getting challenged or soft-censored often serve marginalized populations.

For example, on the programs side, a suburban library in Illinois canceled a program meant to teach undocumented immigrants about their rights after receiving threats in 2017.

On the materials side, the American Library Association (ALA) has documented that many challenges target books with characters who are LGBTQIA+ or people of color.

For example, Raina Telgemeier writes very popular graphic novels for children. Her graphic novel, *Drama*, includes a scene where two boys kiss in a school play. This scene led to the book making the ALA's top ten most challenged list several years in a row.

To ward off controversy, many school districts, even if they owned all of Telgemeier's other books, chose to soft-censor by either not buying *Drama* or buying it only at the middle school level, even though [Common Sense Media](#) rates the book as appropriate for children ages 10+ years.









AT ELMHURST PUBLIC LIBRARY

We buy [materials](#) and host [programs](#) according to our policies to meet our community's needs. We deal with challenges as they come and endeavor to have collections and programs for everyone without letting the avoidance of controversy overly influence our decisions.

While patrons may not need or enjoy every program or material we host or collect, we have things in our collection and on our calendar to serve everyone. Not enjoying a certain material or program we offer is fine and normal, but trying to prevent other people from accessing it is censorship. We are happy to help guide each patron to the appropriate programs and materials for them.

BROWSE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

-  [Article: Soft and Quiet: Self-Censorship in an Era of Book Challenges](#)
-  [Article: Not Quite Banned: Soft Censorship That Makes LGBTQIA+ Stories Disappear](#)
-  [Article: Authors Guild opposes “soft” censorship and urges all to shine a light on it whenever possible](#)
-  [Article: Sales Of ‘Maus’ Soar 753% In Last Week Of January Following Ban By Tennessee School District](#)
-  [Article: This wave of book bans is different from earlier ones](#)
-  [Article: Immigration rights program canceled after Arlington Heights library officials receive threats](#)

