

# Comparative Analysis of National Literature Education in the United States and Russia

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is a comparative analysis of literature education as a high school subject in the upper secondary education systems of the United States and Russia. The research aims to identify and analyze the key similarities and differences in the principles of structuring and functioning of the school literature curriculum in both countries. The document is divided into two main sections: analysis of literary policy, and a practical case study examination. In the theoretical section, based on an analysis of official educational documents from both federations, the authors analyze the influence of state policy on the school literature curriculum. This includes the study of how objectives are formulated, how thematic content is selected (*including ideological components*), and how reading lists are compiled. Special attention is given to the role of the state in the education discourse of each country, as well as the degree of autonomy in their curricula. The practical section focuses on the examination of specific case studies related to literary issues, particularly book bans and censorship, in both countries.

## **INTRODUCTION: EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

### **1. Rationale for Choosing Literature as the Subject of Study**

The choice of literature as the object of study is driven by the characteristics of the established secondary education systems in the United States and Russia. Over the past decades, these systems have shown a tendency to eliminate various forms of culture from the school curriculum, manifesting in the reduced focus on disciplines such as music, cinema, painting, or theater. In this context, literature remains one of the few cultural phenomena that continue to hold a significant place in the educational process of both countries. It represents a distinct and comprehensive way of perceiving culture, which has been preserved in the school systems of the United States and the Russian Federation. For students of all ages, literature serves as an entry point into culture, one of the few means of engaging with its values.

### **2. Rationale for Focusing on Senior Grades**

In this research, we examine literature in the context of high school education in the United States and Russia. The selection of senior grades as the focus of this study is based on the fact that in the final years of school, students become more politically active and prepare for adulthood. Consequently, the school literature curriculum is typically designed to influence the political preferences and worldviews of future citizens. Furthermore, it is during the last year of schooling that students begin to engage with complex and ambiguous works, including, for example, historical novels.

### **3. Challenges in Comparative Analysis: Differences in Educational Systems**

During the course of this study, due to the differences between the educational systems of the two countries, a challenge arose in conducting a comparative analysis of literature as a school subject and of senior high school grades.

- A. It is not feasible to analyze «*literature in general*» outside the specific frameworks established by school curricula (*i.e., as a defined academic subject*). One of the main reasons is the fragmented nature of how literature is taught in senior high school. In Russia, literary texts of an informative nature are taught within the subjects of *Social Studies* and *History* (*as separate disciplines*), whereas in the United States, *English Language Arts* (*hereafter ELA*) classes may include a wide range of texts—from ancient Greek classics to legislative documents. Thus, analyzing «*literature in general*» would require incorporating multiple school subjects into the study, which would complicate the comparative analysis. A solution was found in focusing primarily on **fiction**, as it occupies a prominent place in literature courses in both countries and fits within clearly defined curricular boundaries: ELA in the United States and «*Literature*» in Russia.
- B. The problem of comparing senior high school grades lies in the fact that they differ in duration: in the United States, senior high school covers grades 9 through 12 (*four years*), while in Russia it comprises only grades 10 and 11 (*two years*). As a result, the US curriculum may seem more extensive, which could create an imbalance. To prevent this, both the theoretical and practical parts of the study focus specifically on the **final year** of schooling in each country—12th grade in the United States and 11th grade in Russia.

### **4. Research Design: Combining Theoretical Framework and Practical Case Studies**

This study offers a theoretical and practical analysis of the issues surrounding national literature education in the United States and Russia. The theoretical section examines official documentation from both countries concerning national literature education within the high school education system. It presents conclusions about how the state influences the educational system and how this influence is reflected in legal and regulatory texts. The practical section investigates specific cases of interaction between the state and society in practice: book bans, teacher dismissals, restrictive laws, and «*laws prohibiting prohibitive laws*». Thus, the central concern of this research is the relationship between the state and society in the sphere of literature education: governmental actions and inactions, public reactions, and civic initiatives.

**Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:**

- A. What are the structural, content-related, and ideological differences in the official literature standards for upper secondary education in the United States and Russia?
- B. How does state policy shape literature education in schools in the United States and Russia, and how are differences in centralization reflected in curricula?
- C. How does the representation of national and world literature differ in upper secondary education in the United States and Russia, and what does this reveal about cultural openness and political trends in each country?
- D. What mechanisms are used to restrict access to literary works in the United States and Russia, and how do these processes correlate with each state's ideological agendas?

# ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE EDUCATION STANDARDS

## OFFICIAL OBJECTIVES OF LITERATURE EDUCATION IN RUSSIA AND THE U. S.

### 1. Introduction

Due to historically established legislative traditions and the prevailing policies of administrative-territorial governance, there are significant differences in how the process of education is regulated in Russia and the United States. Despite both nations officially holding the status of federations with republican forms of government, they exhibit crucial distinctions that must be considered when selecting relevant official acts for the analysis of literature education policies.

The Russian Federation, despite its formally federal status, is frequently characterized by scholars as a state with a centralized system of governance. Russian professor Grigory Golosov states that «*the Russian Federation effectively functions as a centralized authoritarian state*»<sup>1</sup>. The leading journal *Local Government Studies* asserts: *Since coming to power in 2000 the Putin administration has pursued a policy of centralisation, reducing regional power and discretion*<sup>2</sup>. This is an important factor to consider as it confirms that Russian regulatory acts, particularly in areas of strategic significance such as education, are formulated at the federal level in a centralized manner and then extended to the entire country.

In Russia, education standards are developed at the federal level (*Federal State Educational Standard—FGOS*<sup>3</sup>), and all textbooks, including those for literature courses, undergo state examination and are approved by the Ministry of Education.

The United States, by contrast, operates within a decentralized system in which individual states hold substantial autonomy (*unlike Russia's federal subjects*), including in the sphere of education. The federal Department of Education primarily plays a coordinating role, while specific curricula and educational standards are developed at the state level, where state departments of education, as well as local school districts, exercise considerable influence.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Golosov. *Russia's centralized authoritarianism in the guise of democratic federalism: Evidence from the September 2017 sub-national elections*. International Area Studies Review, 21 (2018): 231 - 248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2233865918789521>.

<sup>2</sup> A. Campbell. *The great chessboard: Federalism and localism in Putin's Russia*. Local Government Studies, 33 (2007): 761 - 772. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930701627480>.

<sup>3</sup> FGOS— «*a set of mandatory requirements for education at a certain level and/or for a profession, specialty, or field of training, approved by the federal executive authority depending on the level of education [...]*». Source: <https://fgos.ru/?ysclid=m7bz86ak4u919113246>.

Having established an understanding of how Russia and the United States function as governmental mechanisms, we may now proceed to the direct analysis of specific regulatory documents within the two educational systems.

## **2. Education Documents Governing Literature Courses in Russia**

One of the primary federal regulatory documents governing the literary education of senior high school students in Russia is the 2024 report on literature issued by the *Federal Institute for Education Development* (hereinafter – FIED)<sup>4</sup>. The Federal Working Program of FIED outlines the objectives and expected personal outcomes of literature education at the senior high school level. Alongside Rosobrnadzor<sup>5</sup> and FIPI<sup>6</sup>, FIED issues methodological guidelines on the quality control and development of Russian education, which serve as directives for the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation.

Beyond fostering a «*sustained interest in reading as a means of understanding national and foreign cultures*» and «*developing reading competencies*»<sup>7</sup>, FIED also emphasizes the importance of «*introducing [high school students] to the national literary heritage and, through it, to traditional values and the treasures of world culture*»<sup>8</sup>. The concept of family appears in Russian official documents exclusively in its traditional form. The Russian Constitution, the country's fundamental legal document, defines the term «*family*» as «*a union between a man and a woman*»<sup>9</sup>. By contrast, American legal tradition lacks a federally imposed definition of family, thereby allowing for greater flexibility in education goal-setting at the state level.

Through FIED, the Russian government not only declares its ideological stances, which are closely tied to traditional values and a conservative way of life, but also encourages future graduates to «*establish families based on the conscious acceptance of family values, in accordance with the traditions of the peoples of Russia, including those reflected in literary works*»<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Register of Educational Standards, *Federal State Educational Standard for Secondary General Education*, <https://fgosreestr.ru/uploads/files/8511147a70463345af9abec73a28233a.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Rosobrnadzor – the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science. <https://obrnadzor.gov.ru>.

<sup>6</sup> FIPI – the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements, which «*conducts research in the field of education quality assessment*». <https://fipi.ru/o-nas>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, art. 72, p. 29, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/constitution>.

<sup>10</sup> Federal Register of Educational Standards, *Federal State Educational Standard for Secondary General Education*, p. 13, <https://fgosreestr.ru/uploads/files/8511147a70463345af9abec73a28233a.pdf>.

The universal values of citizenship and patriotism are also explicitly articulated in the FIED report. The document states the necessity of «developing student's civic consciousness as active and responsible members of Russian society»<sup>11</sup> and asserts confidence that students, through literature education, will develop «a readiness to engage in collective activity [...] in the interests of civil society»<sup>12</sup>. Beyond general formulations, the federal program also employs more specific language regarding patriotism, urging «ideological conviction, readiness to serve and defend the Motherland, and responsibility for its fate»<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Education Documents Governing Literature Courses in the United States

In the United States, the structure of regulatory documents governing literary education varies significantly and largely depends on the educational standards of each individual state. Federal legislation in the field of education is limited to setting broad guidelines and general frameworks, leaving the development of curricula to the discretion of states and local school districts. However, despite the delegation of education policy to the state level, there exists a foundational federal initiative known as the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts* (hereinafter – CCSS or Common Core)<sup>14</sup>, which was designed to standardize educational benchmarks based on mutually agreed-upon academic expectations and is currently adopted in numerous U.S. states. Forty-one states, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have implemented CCSS.<sup>15</sup>

CCSS delineates key principles of instruction, subject-specific and cross-disciplinary competencies, and establishes rigorous and clear expectations for each grade level, including high school (grades 9–12).<sup>16</sup> The Common Core emphasizes the role of literature in fostering critical thinking, the ability to analyze complex texts, and the construction of well-supported arguments. The section *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading* states that students should «read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text».<sup>17</sup> This formulation demonstrates that

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, *English Language Arts Standards*, <https://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>.

<sup>15</sup> CCSS, *Standards in Your State*, <https://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>.

<sup>16</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, *English Language Arts Standards*, p. 16, <https://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 35.

the primary focus is on analytical interpretation, engagement with the internal logic of texts, and argumentation. The document further underscores the importance of contextual analysis and authorial intent: «*Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text*»<sup>18</sup>.

The ability to form independent judgments is regarded as a core indicator of well-developed critical thinking skills, which are indispensable in contemporary education. According to CCSS, American students must be able to «*without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines*»<sup>19</sup>. They are also expected to «*construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information*»<sup>20</sup>.

#### 4. The Case of Florida

Meanwhile, the Republican-led state of Florida is among those, alongside Indiana, South Carolina, Oklahoma, and Arizona, that have fully rejected CCSS after initially adopting it,<sup>21</sup> instead pursuing an independent educational policy. In this regard, Florida represents a particularly intriguing case for study and comparative analysis, illustrating in practice the capacity of states to exercise independent control over the educational process and reaffirming the decentralized nature of governance in the United States.

A concrete example of a state-level educational document is *Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards for English Language Arts (ELA)* (hereinafter – *B.E.S.T. Standards or Florida's Standards*)<sup>22</sup> which is available for download on the official website of Florida's Department of Education<sup>23</sup>. This document regulates the objectives, tasks, and methodologies of literature instruction in the state's public schools and, like CCSS, emphasizes the development of students' critical thinking skills and their ability to analyze texts from multiple perspectives.

Notably, B.E.S.T. Standards employs rhetoric that differs from the strictly academic tone of CCSS, incorporating rich allusions and metaphors (e.g., «*uplift the soul*», «*into the glorious light of truth*», «*to*

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>21</sup> World Population Review, *Common Core States*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/common-core-states>.

<sup>22</sup> Florida Department of Education, *English Language Arts B.E.S.T. Standards*, <https://cpalmsmediaprod.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/la/elabeststandardsfinal.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Education, *Standards Review*, <https://www.fl doe.org/standardsreview/>.

*restore teachers to their true calling: educating the hearts, souls, and minds of their students»<sup>24</sup>*). Such language serves to construct an image of an elevated, almost sacred educational process, wherein teacher and student strive toward enlightenment through knowledge. Despite its at times lofty style, Florida's Standards provides a highly detailed instructional framework for the high school literature curriculum, featuring extensive tables and precise guidelines.

## 5. Analytical Conclusion

The Common Core, B.E.S.T. Standards, and the FIED report represent three distinct approaches to high school literature education. The Russian program is constructed on principles of moral and spiritual upbringing, whereas American standards prioritize individual development, creative expression, and critical thinking.

American standards define the **form**.

CCSS and B.E.S.T. Standards emphasize the development of critical thinking and analytical skills in students from grades 9 to 12 within the English Language Arts curriculum. U.S. legal frameworks establish the form, which is then filled by individual schools and teachers.

Russian standards define both **form** and **content**.

The FIED report, apart from outlining the structure of literary education (*reading lists, skills development, etc.*), carries a distinct ideological message, emphasizing patriotism (*defending the Motherland*), tradition (*traditional family values*), and moral education in general. Russian documentation highlights the importance of aesthetic and spiritual upbringing.

Both American standards focus on the development of analytical and cognitive skills but with different emphases, whereas the Russian program perceives literature not only as an academic discipline but also as a tool for fostering civic identity.

CCSS prioritizes academic competencies through text analysis and argumentation. Unlike the Russian standard, Common Core does not reference traditional values, patriotism, national defense, upbringing, or spirituality. It focuses on a neutral framework aimed at developing critical thinking, cross-cultural understanding, and academic skills. B.E.S.T. Standards, diverging from federal guidelines, places greater emphasis not only on analytical skills but also on the educational role of literature. This standard, showing a stronger inclination toward defining content, highlights the significance of studying classic works and instilling moral values through literature. The FIED standard places an even stronger focus on the didactic function of literature. The program explicitly underscores patriotic education and the formation of Russian national identity through the study of domestic literary works.

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<sup>24</sup> Florida Department of Education, *English Language Arts B.E.S.T. Standards*, <https://cpalmsmediaprod.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/la/elabeststandardsfinal.pdf>.

CCSS, B.E.S.T., and the FIED report illustrate three distinct approaches to literary education. CCSS is oriented toward developing analytical and logical reasoning skills. B.E.S.T. emphasizes literature's role in moral education while maintaining an academic approach. The FIED report, in turn, integrates literature education with state ideology, reinforcing patriotism, spiritual values, and national consciousness. Thus, in each of these systems, literature serves not only an educational but also a social function, reflecting the core ideological priorities of the nations in which they are implemented.

## RATIO OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LITERATURE IN THE U.S. AND RUSSIA

### 1. Introduction

The balance between national and foreign literature in the high school literature curriculum serves as a crucial indicator of state cultural policy and the priorities of the educational system. This chapter conducts a comparative analysis of the proportion of national and foreign literature in the United States and Russia, based on official educational documents, to identify the differences and similarities between the two countries that shape their internal discourses. The analysis is based on previously established materials, including CCSS, Florida's Standards, and a report by the FIED.

### 2. The Ratio of National and Foreign Literature in the United States

At the federal level, the ratio of national and world literature in the United States is as follows. The Common Core allocates approximately two-thirds of the high school curriculum to American national literature, while foreign works maintain a presence of about 29-32%. British literary works account for approximately 11%, a significantly lower share than in Florida's Standards, which will be discussed.

	National Literature (%)	World Literature (%)	British Literature (as part of total) (%)
9-10 Grades (62 works: 42/7/13)	67.70	32,30	11.30
11-CCR Grades (69 works: 49/8/12)	71.00	29.00	11.60

Source: CCSS ELA Appendix B, p. 101-183<sup>25</sup>

*Explanation of the Table: The rightmost column in this and the following table, representing British literature, is supplementary to the two main categories—national and foreign literature—which together constitute 100%. British literature is included within the category of foreign literature; however, due to its particular significance for American cultural heritage, we have chosen to present it separately. The percentage shown in the rightmost column indicates the proportion of British works relative to the total number of all literary works studied. For example, in grades 9–10 under the CCSS curriculum, students study 11.3% British literature, 67.7% national literature, and 21% foreign literature.*

The reading list for grades 9-10 is structured to provide high school students with a comprehensive view of fundamental issues that concern humanity: individual freedom, the struggle for justice, problems of identity, and cultural diversity. The curriculum focuses on works that foster critical thinking,

<sup>25</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, CCSS ELA Literacy Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks, <https://achievethecore.org/page/1840/ccss-ela-literacy-appendix-b-text-exemplars-and-sample-performance-tasks>.

moral and social responsibility, and a deep understanding of both one's own cultural heritage and global cultural and social processes.

Notably, among the works included in the curriculum for grades 9-10, American high school students have the opportunity to engage with classic works by Russian authors, such as *Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev and *The Nose* by Nikolai Gogol. Furthermore, beginning in the 11th grade, students may encounter *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Thus, 19th-century Russian literary heritage holds a notable place in the U.S. federal educational standards.

In the state of Florida, the proportion of national and foreign literature differs significantly from the federal framework. Foreign literature plays a much more substantial role, with its share exceeding two-thirds of the total reading list, while British authors make up a significant portion of it. As a result, students in grades 10 and 11 experience vastly different literary worlds in the federal and state systems: in one, national literature dominates, while in the other, world literature prevails.

Literary works/ school grades	National Literature (%)	World Literature (%)	British Literature (as part of total) (%)
9th Grade (35 works: 14/21/5)	40,00	60,00	20,00
10th Grade (40 works: 27/13/8)	67,50	32,50	20,00
11th Grade (32 works: 10/22/5)	31,25	68,75	15,62
12th Grade (22 works: 7/15/10)	31,82	68,18	45,45

Source: *ELA B.E.S.T. Standards* p.161-164<sup>26</sup>

The 10th-grade curriculum focuses on political rhetoric and civic awareness. American literature, at its highest percentage in high school (67.50%), dominates, with political speeches by Washington (*Farewell Address*), Lincoln (*House Divided Speech*), Nixon (*Checkers Speech*), Douglass (*What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?*), and Schlafly (*What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?*). The reading list includes ten political speeches. Classic U.S. fiction, such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Of Mice and Men*, is present but secondary to non-fiction. Among the 13 foreign works included, the majority—eight—are British<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Florida Department of Education, *English Language Arts B.E.S.T. Standards*, p. 161-164, <https://cpalmsmediaprod.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/la/elabeststandardsfinal.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> These are works such as: Shelley, Percy Bysshe – *Ozymandias*, Dickens, Charles – *A Tale of Two Cities*, Shelley, Mary – *Frankenstein*, Golding, William – *Lord of the Flies*, Shakespeare, William – *Macbeth*, Shakespeare, William – *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shelley, Percy Bysshe – *Prometheus Unbound*, Smith, Stevie – *Not Waving But Drowning*.

The 11th-grade curriculum is more focused on philosophical thought than on fiction. Approximately 28.13% of the program consists of philosophical works by ancient Greek, Roman, and European authors. Included are works by transcendentalist thinkers (*Nature* by Emerson, *Walden* by Thoreau), classical American poets. The inclusion of *Doctrine of Right* from Kant's *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*, Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, and Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws* highlights the emphasis on Western political thought. Foreign literature consists of 22 works, five of which<sup>28</sup> are British. American literature is present but not dominant, comprising only ten works.

The 12th-grade curriculum in Florida, like the 11th and 9th grades, follows a Eurocentric model, where British and Western European authors dominate (*10 British works out of 15 foreign works*). American literature is represented but, like in the 11th grade, does not hold a central place, making up only a third of the syllabus (*seven works*). This suggests that the course prioritizes classical literary tradition over contemporary American cultural identity.

A significant portion of the 12th-grade reading list is devoted to poetry. Unlike previous years, where social issues and national identity were central, poetry here serves as a means of philosophical reflection on reality, human existence, and emotional experience. The inclusion of British Romantic poets (*Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Burns, John Donne*), metaphysical lyricists, and American modernists and Harlem Renaissance poets (*Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Langston Hughes, Phillis Wheatley, Countee Cullen*) demonstrates the course's intent to cover diverse cultural, aesthetic, and historical contexts. Poetry is not a secondary element in this curriculum.

Even excluding British Anglophone literature, the share of translated works remains exceptionally high (*ranging from 12.5% in the 10th grade to 53.13% in the 11th grade*). This high proportion indicates an extraordinary openness of the American high school literature curriculum to global cultural heritage.

Despite the higher presence of foreign literature in Florida's standards, Russian literature is represented by only one work in high school: Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. No other Russian classics are included.

American literature is most prominent in the 10th grade (67.50%), with a significant portion dedicated to political speeches and non-fiction. In the 11th and 12th grades, foreign literature dominates (*approximately 68%*), reinforcing the Eurocentric focus of the curriculum. The 12th-grade syllabus is rich in American and foreign poetry. The 10th grade emphasizes political consciousness through rhetoric and American journalism, while the 11th grade shifts focus to Western philosophical tradition, almost ex-

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<sup>28</sup> British works: William Blake – *The Chimney Sweepers*, Geoffrey Chaucer – *Canterbury Tales*, Charlotte Bronte – *Jane Eyre*, William Shakespeare – *Julius Caesar*, John Locke – *Two Treatises of Government*.

cluding fiction. The 12th-grade curriculum prioritizes literary classics, predominantly European, especially British.

### 3. The Ratio of National and Foreign Literature in Russia

In the Russian Federation, the high school literature curriculum is significantly more conservative than its American counterpart, focusing primarily on works written by Russian authors in the Russian language. The state of foreign literature in Russian schools is extremely poor, let alone literature representing ethnic minorities in one of the world's most multiethnic countries.

	National Literature	World Literature	Literature of Ethnic Minorities
10th Grade (102 hours)	67,65% (69 hours)	3,92% (4 hours)	0.98% (1 hour)
11th Grade (102 hours)	77,45% (79 hours)	3,92% (4 hours)	1.96% (2 hours)

Source: *Federal State Standard for Secondary General Education, Russia, p. 26-101*<sup>29</sup>

*Explanation of the Table: The structure of the literature curriculum in Russian upper secondary schools, as well as the organization of official Russian educational documents, differs somewhat from their American counterparts. Due to these structural differences, the combined percentage of national and foreign literature does not amount to a full 100%. This discrepancy arises from the fact that, in addition to the study of specific literary works (explicitly outlined in Russian documents in terms of title, scheduling, and number of instructional hours) literature classes also include activities such as assessments and tests, essay writing, dictations, and the recitation of memorized poetry. These classroom activities are not reflected in the table, as their inclusion was deemed unnecessary.*

World literature in these two high school years is minimally represented, with almost all instructional time dedicated to Russian poets and writers of the 19th century in the 10th grade, and to literary figures of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in the 20th century for the 11th grade.

The literature of ethnic minorities, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, is allocated only one hour in the 10th grade and two hours in the 11th grade. In practice, high school students often do not study either foreign literature or minority literature due to the lack of time, which is fully devoted to the mandatory Russian literary curriculum. The teaching process constantly follows the official documents and methodological guidelines, «*always trying to catch up with them*», as they regulate the content of every lesson in detail. As a result, missing even a single class could mean that a student never encounters literature from Russia's ethnic minorities or important world classics. As a result,

<sup>29</sup> Federal Register of Educational Standards, Federal State Educational Standard for Secondary General Education, p. 26-101, <https://fgosreestr.ru/uploads/files/8511147a70463345af9abec73a28233a.pdf>.

missing even a single class could mean that a student never encounters literature from Russia's ethnic minorities or important world classics.

This limited representation of foreign literature in Russian schools was not always the case. For example, in the 1919 curriculum, which largely retained content from the Russian Empire, we find many similarities with the modern Florida high school curriculum, including *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *The Poetic Edda*, *The Song of the Nibelungs*, ancient drama, and Shakespeare—many classical and philosophical works of global significance. Under Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s, the selection of foreign literature, surprisingly, expanded: on the one hand, through Western European writers of the 17th-19th centuries, and on the other, through contemporary authors who supported the Soviet Union. In the early 1930s, students studied the works of Hungarian poet Antal Gidaš, American writer Upton Sinclair, French novelist Romain Rolland, and Chinese writer Xiao. In a way, the 1930s represented an unprecedented interest in contemporary literature, which is usually sidelined in school curricula.<sup>30</sup>

After 1942, the number of foreign works included in the curriculum began to decline. The greatest losses in 1942 were in German literature: none of the eight works by Heinrich Heine or the seven by Friedrich Schiller remained, and Goethe's lyric poetry was removed, though *Faust* was preserved. During the early years of World War II, the shift moved away from Western European literature toward a greater share of national literature. This trend did not end with the war: in the postwar Stalinist years, the rhetoric of «internationalism» weakened in favor of glorifying Soviet and specifically Russian culture. This inertia lasted until the early 1960s and, to a large extent, continues to this day. Between 1954 and 1962, the entirety of foreign literature in the school curriculum was reduced to just two works: Goethe's *Faust* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the lack of world classics in the Russian curriculum, some American works are included. For example, in the study of 20th-century foreign prose in the 11th grade, Russian high school students are offered a selection of *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. The 10th-grade curriculum does not include American literature, instead focusing on European classics—19th-century drama, French poetry by Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and prose such as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

A comparison of these educational systems reveals key differences:

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<sup>30</sup> Sysblok, «Foreign Literature and the Literary Canon», <https://sysblok.ru/literary-canon/foreign-literature/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Federal Register of Educational Standards, *Federal State Educational Standard for Secondary General Education*, p. 50-52, <https://fgosreestr.ru/uploads/files/8511147a70463345af9abec73a28233a.pdf>.

### **A. Different proportions of national and foreign literature:**

- In the U.S., national literature comprises about two-thirds of the high school curriculum according to federal CCSS standards, though in some states (*e.g., Florida*), the share of foreign literature can exceed 60%.
- In Russia, national literature dominates, accounting for over 75% of high school instructional time, while foreign literature is limited to only about 4%.

### **B. Openness to world literature:**

- The American high school curriculum includes works from various countries, including philosophical and political texts. It is diverse and encourages analysis of global issues. Federal U.S. standards feature Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Gogol, while Florida's curriculum includes *Crime and Punishment*.
- The Russian curriculum is highly insular: foreign literature is marginally represented, and ethnic minority literature is almost entirely absent. Literature is taught with a nationalist perspective, with little emphasis on world cultural heritage. However, Russian high school students do have access to a limited selection of American works, such as Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*.

### **C. Curriculum focus:**

- In the U.S., literature serves as a tool for developing critical thinking, political awareness, and social responsibility. The study of world literature is encouraged and widespread.
- In Russia, the curriculum is centered on traditional values, national identity, and the didactic function of literature. The study of foreign literature is severely restricted.

### **D. Regional differences:**

- The U.S. has significant variation between federal and state standards. For instance, Florida emphasizes European philosophy and British classics, whereas other states may prioritize American authors.
- Russia's curriculum is uniform and centralized, with little regional variation. Federal subjects generally have no authority to alter literature lists, or the goals established by the Ministry of Education.

# PRACTICAL SECTION: CASE STUDIES

## PROBLEMS OF LITERATURE IN THE UNITED STATES: BOOK BANS

Despite the absence of official state censorship in the United States and the First Amendment's explicit protection of freedom of speech, recent years have seen an increase in book bans, particularly within the context of school education. Such restrictions are typically initiated at the local level—not by federal authorities but by school boards, parental groups, and community organizations seeking to limit students' access to literature perceived as conflicting with local social norms, moral values, or political beliefs. These actions have sparked intense debates over the limits of free expression, the role literature plays in shaping individual identity, and the appropriateness of governmental and community intervention in cultural life. This section examines in detail the reasons behind, mechanisms involved in, and consequences arising from book bans in the United States, illustrated through specific cases of affected works and authors.

Particular attention in this practical section is given to the theme of pressure and responses to it, which manifests itself at the level of literary works, individual citizens, local authorities, and entire U.S. states. Some of the case studies presented below examine restrictive processes and mechanisms in detail at the local and state levels, revealing their causes, consequences, and the perspectives of various stakeholders on the issue of book bans. Others place emphasis on specific instances of resistance to such restrictive measures.

### SUMMER BOISMIER'S RESISTANCE

*Jillian Chang*

In recent years, conservative-led efforts in various states in the US have sought to remove books deemed controversial, often citing concerns over critical race theory, LGBTQ+ representation. The decentralized structure of the U.S. education system allows for variation in what books are permitted or restricted in schools. Individual states and school districts determine their own policies, which results in some states actively banning books while others working to expand literary access. This absence of a top-down, federally enforced literary policy has created space for resistance. Teachers, librarians, and students push back against restrictive policies, offering alternative access to banned books and challenging state-level censorship. One such case is that of Summer Boismier, a teacher at Norman High School who resigned in protest after providing students access to books banned under Oklahoma law. Her case exemplifies how the decentralized nature of U.S. book bans allows for grassroots opposition from educators, librarians, and students. She showed how individual actors can challenge these policies, shedding light on the contested nature of literature education in the United States.

Summer Boismier became a national figure in the fight against book censorship. As a passionate educator, she sought to create a classroom environment where students could be exposed to diverse perspectives.

tives. However, her dedication to literature education came into direct conflict with Oklahoma's House Bill 1775 (HB 1775) — a law that restricted classroom discussions on race, gender, and historical accountability.

The law prohibits educators from teaching that «*one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex*», that a person «*by virtue of his or her race or sex inherently racist*» and that someone «*bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex*» among similar provisions.<sup>33</sup> While supporters of the bill claimed it was meant to prevent divisive concepts from being taught in schools, critics argued that it was a politically motivated attempt to «*restrict discussions on race and gender in Oklahoma classrooms and remain in lockstep with national anti-CRT legislation*»<sup>34</sup>. The bill prevents teachers from discussing systemic racism, which are crucial for understanding history and current societal issues. In effect, schools were increasingly pressured to remove books that addressed race, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ themes. Such was exactly the case in Norman High School – upper administration instructed teachers to either remove or restrict access to texts relating to race and gender.<sup>35</sup>

Boismier took an immediate stand. At the start of the 2022 school year, she covered her classroom bookshelves with red paper labeled «*Books the state didn't want you to read*». This act of protest was meant to draw attention to HB 1775's effect in limiting students' access to books that explored important issues. She also provided her students with a QR code linking to the Brooklyn Public Library's «*Books Unbanned*» initiative, granting them access to a collection of banned books. Her actions were a direct challenge to HB 1775, conveying that educators could still find ways to empower students despite the state's attempt to restrict content.

Boismier's protest quickly caught the attention of school administrators and state officials. A parent soon reached out to the school to issue a complaint, accusing Boismier of violating HB 1775 by offering access to explicit content. In response, Boismier chose to resign rather than comply. Her actions caught the eye of then-candidate for state superintendent Ryan Walters, who publicly accused her of promoting a liberal political agenda and providing students with access to banned and pornographic material. Upon assuming office, Walters led the charge to revoke her teaching license. In August 2024, the Board voted unanimously to strip Boismier of her license to teach in Oklahoma, ending her public teaching career in the state.

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<sup>33</sup> Oklahoma Legislature, *House Bill 1775*, <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb1775&Session=2100>.

<sup>34</sup> Jennie A. Hill, «*Legitimate State Interest or Educational Censorship: The Chilling Effect of Oklahoma House Bill 1775*», *University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons*, 2023, <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/olr/vol75/iss2/6/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ileana Najarro, «*A Teacher Who 'Refused to Be Party to Censorship' Tells Her Story*», *Education Week*, vol. 42, no. 7, Sept. 2022, p. 11, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/former-oklahoma-teacher-explains-the-broad-impact-of-law-curbing-discussion-of-race-gender/2022/09>.

Meanwhile, support for Boismier poured in from educators, free speech advocates, and librarians nationwide. The Brooklyn Public Library offered her a position, where she now works to further the mission of the «*Books Unbanned*» initiative.

Boismier's case illustrates how book bans in the United States are not absolute restrictions. Unlike Russia, where literature censorship is enforced centrally with little room for opposition, the decentralized nature of U.S. education allows for resistance. While Boismier's resignation demonstrates the risks that educators face in standing up to censorship, it also highlights their ability to fight for intellectual freedom. Her case is a testament to the fact that in the U.S., book bans remain a contested issue rather than an unchallenged reality.

## THE CASE OF CALIFORNIA

*Avery Miller*

Several states in the U.S. have displayed criticism of growing numbers of books. The state of California has educational censorship challenges as well, but recent years have shown that the state is taking the initiative to protect its authors and academic curriculum.

In September of 2023, California's Governor, Gavin Newsom helped pass a new bill (*AB1078*) to protect schools from experiencing book bans. Textbooks and educational materials received increased protections as well. This bill was amended and added to the school code for California and aimed to protect the diverse stories that schools were trying to teach. The California government believes that the educational materials taught in schools should reflect the communities in the area and allow students to learn about the historical or present roles that these groups have in society. They hope to show the value in the stories that historical and educational books teach –including both fiction novels and nonfiction textbook materials.

California Legislators have viewed the «*white-washing*» that takes place in correlation with high quantities of book bans in other states and argue that these bans have caused cultural regression. In comparison to states with more severe literature opposition like Florida or Texas, California not only resisted these restrictions, but also channeled more funding into their education department.<sup>36</sup> This allowed them to better withstand the effects of the 2020 pandemic.

The 2023 bill contains several essential elements. Most significantly, it prohibits school district rejection of educational materials based on the inclusion of diverse perspectives like Latino Americans, LGBTQ people, and other cultural or religious groups. Section 4 of the bill outlines this requirement

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<sup>36</sup> *California bans book bans and textbook censorship in schools*. Governor of California. (2024, June 17). <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/09/25/california-bans-book-bans-and-textbook-censorship-in-schools/>

and states that taking action against these texts is considered discriminatory.<sup>37</sup> Section 8 elaborates on this further, requiring that the texts used in schools are accurate and not offensive to individuals based on these conditions. This is an adjustment to the previous state educational code.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, the bill adequately ensures that school districts and educational bodies are held accountable for upholding these standards. Section 5 creates a system for the department to oversee the policies enforced by schools and guarantee that they follow the guidelines of the new code. If schools are not providing sufficient materials or are suppressing certain narratives, they will receive financial penalties –as outlined in section 12.

The AB1078 bill is not new for California; it builds off of several existing regulations. State support for educational freedom is demonstrated even in 2016 through the fundamental Safe Place to Learn Act. This effort allows the State Department of Education to ensure that school districts and local structures aren't producing policies that are discriminatory. The act aims to support LGBTQ students through educational texts, school resources, and non-discriminatory student policies. California has targeted discrimination to LGBTQ stories in particular with this bill because a significant portion of book bans are related to these issues. The American Library Association revealed that of the more than 4,000 books challenged in the country, 47% of those books were related to LGBTQ topics.<sup>39</sup>

California continues to make efforts to protect the literary and educational rights of its citizens. A year after the previous bill was passed, 2024 legislation (*AB1025*) was passed making it more difficult to ban books in public libraries. Books could not be banned on the basis of race, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, social economic status, or political affiliation.<sup>40</sup> This applied to the author, audience, or subject of a book. The legislation protects books with important messages, however it's still possible for books with these traits to contain an explicit scene that causes it to be banned for other reasons. Other liberal states have been following suit in creating similar laws like Illinois and Maryland showing this is not a phenomenon unique to California.

California isn't completely free from opposition and censorship of educational material. In 2023, there were 52 attempts to restrict books and 98 titles were challenged.<sup>41</sup> Based on data of public school book

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<sup>37</sup> State of California. (n.d.). *AB-1078 Instructional materials and curriculum: diversity*. California Legislative Information. [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=202320240AB1078](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB1078)

<sup>38</sup> State of California. (n.d.-b). *California Code, EDC 60040*. California Legislative Information. [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=60040](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=60040)

<sup>39</sup> Lambert, D. (2024, October 1). *California makes it harder to ban books in public libraries*. EdSource. <https://ed-source.org/updates/california-makes-it-harder-to-ban-books-in-public-libraries>

<sup>40</sup> *idib.*

<sup>41</sup> *Censorship by the numbers*. American Library Association. (n.d.). <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/censorship-numbers>

censorship between 2014 and 2023, California was typically within the top 3rd amount of states with most book titles challenged.<sup>42</sup> This is why it's so essential that California is making efforts to protect these academic materials.

## PROBLEMS OF LITERATURE IN RUSSIA: CENSORSHIP

Literary censorship remains a pressing and contentious issue in contemporary Russian society. Despite official guarantees of freedom of expression, recent years have seen a sustained trend towards increased state intervention in literature, both within and beyond the educational system. Repressive measures manifest themselves through explicit bans and withdrawals of books from sale, as well as indirect pressure exerted on authors and publishers. This section explores the mechanisms and manifestations of censorship, illustrated by specific cases involving individual authors and their works.

### THE PHENOMENON OF THE BOOK SUMMER IN A RED SCARF

*Andrei Korovkin*

*«And if the success of our book says anything, it is only that normal people with humanistic views live in our country»*  
– Elena Malisova

**Note:** Although the case of *Summer in a Red Scarf* does not formally fall within the scope of upper secondary school literary education as defined by official curricula, our research group has nonetheless chosen to include it in the practical section of this study for the following reasons:

**1. Alternative educational system.** In the case of *Summer in a Red Scarf*, we observe a clash between two educational logics: the official, prohibition-based system and an unofficial, spontaneous one. This dynamic renders the case particularly significant for analyzing the relationship between the state and youth—officially the most reading segment of Russian society. Through this case, the study attempts to examine the official discourse by means of a non-official lens.

**2. Specifics of censorship policy.** This case provides an important empirical illustration of how laws aimed at «protecting traditional values» and prohibiting «LGBT propaganda» are applied in practice. It is especially valuable for comparative purposes, allowing for analytical parallels with similar cases in the United States.

**3. Resistance.** The official Russian education system leaves little room for resistance, due in part to its centralized nature. Therefore, in order to draw a meaningful comparison with the American educational discourse—where resistance remains institutionally possible—the authors have decided to examine the unofficial cultural context in Russia, where space for public resistance still exists.

The book *Summer in a Red Scarf* (*Leto v pionerskom galstuke*) by Ekaterina Silvanova and Elena Malisova has become one of the most discussed literary works in Russia in recent years. Co-written by a Russian-Ukrainian author duo, the novel explores themes of first love, self-discovery, and LGBTQ+ relationships in a Soviet setting. It has faced widespread criticism and was withdrawn from sale under the pretext of violating Russia's law on «propaganda of non-traditional relationships». Additionally,

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<sup>42</sup> idib.

the book's authors and publishers were designated as foreign agents<sup>43</sup>. This case illustrates how state policy defines the boundaries of acceptable literature while disregarding the interests of a significant part of Russian society.

The popularity of *Summer in a Red Scarf* was officially recognized in a 2022 industry report by Russia's Ministry of Digital Development.<sup>44</sup> The official document stated that «*the widespread popularity of books featuring non-traditional relationships served as a catalyst for the adoption of new legislative changes in Russia*»,<sup>45</sup> including amendments that further tightened the so-called «*Law on the Ban of LGBT Propaganda*». Among fiction books by Russian authors in 2022, Silanova and Malisova's novel ranked first, followed by its sequel, *What the Swallow Keeps Silent About*<sup>46</sup> (*O chyom molchit lastochka*), in second place. Meanwhile, Russian literary classics—Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*—took third and fourth place, respectively. The bestseller about teenage love sold more than 250.000 printed copies,<sup>47</sup> earning its authors approximately 50 million rubles<sup>48</sup>—an exceptionally high figure for contemporary Russian domestic literature written by domestic authors<sup>49</sup>.

Despite *Summer in a Red Scarf* being warmly received by young readers in Russia, many pro-government conservative figures and organizations reacted sharply to its release, launching an active campaign against the book—a reaction that, ironically, contributed to its skyrocketing popularity. By late May 2022, when the novel's circulation had already exceeded 200,000 copies, Zakhar Prilepin, a writer and publicist with close ties to the Kremlin—who had fought in both Chechen wars as well as the Russian-Ukrainian war—published a post condemning the book. He was outraged by what he saw as the misuse of «*our national Soviet symbols: the red banner, the red scarf, paintings, and sculptures of real and iconic heroes of that era*»<sup>50</sup>. Calling for their legal protection, he inadvertently set in motion a campaign within nationalist circles to have the book banned. As Russia's legislation on this issue was

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<sup>43</sup> Foreign agents – a designation often used against individuals or entities viewed as critical of the government.

<sup>44</sup> Link to the industry report of the Ministry of Digital Development of the Russian Federation: <https://bookunion.ru/upload/files/Bookmarket-2023.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation, *Book Market of Russia* (Moscow, 2023), 41. Accessed January 31, 2025. <https://bookunion.ru/upload/files/Bookmarket-2023.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> This book was also withdrawn from sale due to the presence of «*LGBT relationship propaganda*».

<sup>47</sup> Meduza, «*Summer in a Pioneer Tie – A Book About a Teenager in Love with a Camp Counselor*», August 6, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/08/06/leto-v-pionerskom-galstuke-kniga-o-podrostke-vlyublennom-v-vozhatogo>.

<sup>48</sup> This amounts to approximately \$812,611 at the exchange rate of the Central Bank of Russia on October 31, 2022, the month when the sales of the book reached 250,000 printed copies.

<sup>49</sup> Considering also the fact that an ID was always checked when purchasing SIPT due to the 18+ restriction.

<sup>50</sup> Zakhar Prilepin, Telegram post, May 25, 2022, <https://t.me/zakharprilepin/10747>.

tightened, not only nationalist activists but also members of parliament and federal television networks joined the effort. For example, State Duma deputy Nina Ostanina submitted a request to Roskomnadzor<sup>51</sup>, demanding an investigation into Silanova and Malisova's work for allegedly «*promoting non-traditional values*», with the possibility of criminal prosecution. Prominent Russian television host Dmitry Kiselyov also dedicated a segment of his program on the state-run Russia-1 channel to *Summer in a Red Scarf*, calling it «*the most popular book in today's Russia*» and labeling it «*aggressive LGBT propaganda*». These were just a few examples of the criticism directed at the young authors and their work by public figures and organizations closely affiliated with the Russian government.<sup>52</sup>

However, the novel—depicting a platonic love story set<sup>53</sup> in an idealized Soviet Pioneer summer camp—was received very differently by another, officially the most reading part<sup>54</sup> of Russian society: the younger generation. At the height of its popularity, social media posts about the novel garnered hundreds of thousands of likes and tens of thousands of comments, making *Summer in a Red Scarf* a major literary phenomenon, with its print sales even surpassing some Russian literary classics.<sup>55</sup> For the first time in years, thousands of teenagers were picking up books again. The novel's influence reached far beyond literary circles—it became a part of a broader cultural and political moment in contemporary Russia. Young readers found ways to obtain digital copies, ordered physical editions from overseas sellers, and passionately debated the book's themes and significance across social media platforms.

The novel's success against the backdrop of a government-led crackdown highlights a deeper cultural divide between generations and social groups in Russia. For a portion of society clinging to traditional values, the book represented a genuine threat, something that challenged their deeply ingrained notions of what should be permissible. But for young readers, it became a symbol of self-expression and self-discovery, a declaration of the right to identity. *Summer in a Red Scarf* transformed into something larger than literature; it became a cultural landmark, a phenomenon that laid bare the struggle for creative and political freedoms. It demonstrated, in real time, how state control clashes with the genuine desires of readers. The story of this banned Russian-Ukrainian novel is not just the story of a single

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<sup>51</sup> Roskomnadzor – Russia's federal agency overseeing media, telecommunications, and the internet, with broad powers to censor content, block websites, and regulate digital communications.

<sup>52</sup> Also expressing their criticism were Nikita Mikhalkov, a filmmaker and public figure known for his support of state policies in culture and information, and Ekaterina Mizulina, head of the *Safe Internet League*, an organization advocating for bans and restrictions on digital content.

<sup>53</sup> The book has 544 pages, and only one of them is about physical intimacy.

<sup>54</sup> «87% of 18- to 24-year-olds have read books in the past three months». Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), «*The Most Reading Country (Monitoring)*», accessed February 2, 2025, <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/samaja-chitajushchaja-strana-monitoring>

<sup>55</sup> According to the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation, *Summer in a Red Scarf* ranked first among the top five best-selling printed books by Russian authors in 2022, surpassing *The Master and Margarita* and *Crime and Punishment*. See Table 19 in *Book Market of Russia – 2023*. <https://bookunion.ru/upload/files/Bookmarket-2023.pdf>

book—it is proof that culture will always find a way to reach its audience, even in the midst of the Russian-Ukrainian war, even under the weight of repression. In the end, *Summer in a Red Scarf* is not just a bestseller; it is a defining chapter in the recent history of Russian literary culture.

## THE BAN ON WORKS ABOUT CERTAIN HISTORICAL PERIODS

*Natalia Semenova*

A new directive<sup>56</sup> from the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation has removed books from the high school curriculum (*grades 10–11*) that explore the theme of Stalinist repressions and criticize Soviet policies. Among the excluded works is *The House on the Embankment* by Yuri Trifonov, which was previously not only recommended for reading but also suggested as a literary argument in the final Russian language essay.

*The House on the Embankment* tells the stories of the residents of a building on Bersenevskaya Embankment of the Moscow River. This building, officially known as the House of Government, was constructed in 1931, designed by architect Boris Mikhailovich Iofan.<sup>57</sup> From 1931 onward, it became home to members of the Soviet elite: party and government officials, heroes of the Civil War, Heroes of Socialist Labor, and Heroes of the Soviet Union. During Joseph Stalin's rule, particularly in the years of the Great Terror (1937–1938), the house suffered greatly. Secret police officers lived in covert apartments and operated under the guise of building managers, concierges, and elevator operators. From 1933, sporadic arrests of residents began, escalating into mass repressions during the Great Terror, when the campaign against alleged «enemies of the people» reached the highest levels of government, the military, and the Communist Party. More than 700 residents of the building were repressed.<sup>58</sup> *The House on the Embankment* became a symbol of the Great Terror, which affected nearly every family living there.

Yuri Trifonov's novella is autobiographical. He was the son of a military and government figure with a revolutionary past and spent most of his childhood in *The House on the Embankment*. While the novel does not provide a detailed account of the Great Terror, it vividly captures the atmosphere of the era and the moral climate of the time: the ever-present fear, the necessity of conformism, and the inevitability of betrayal.

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<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, Order No. 171 of March 19, 2024, accessed May 14, 2025, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202404120003?pageSize=1&index=447>.

<sup>57</sup> Culture.ru, «10 Facts About the House on the Embankment», <https://www.culture.ru/materials/193130/10-faktov-o-dome-na-naberezhnoi>.

<sup>58</sup> Aleksei Tarasov, *Domovaya kniga epokhi. 80 let legendarnomu «Domu na naberezhnoi»: litsa, rakursy, teni, traktovki* (Moscow: Novaya Elita, 2011), 472.

When discussing Stalinist repressions and the Great Terror in the context of school education, it is important to recognize that this is one of the most controversial topics in Russian historical discourse. In history textbooks, teachers are advised to avoid discussing Stalinist repressions, and instead, Joseph Stalin is presented as a figure who established a one-party dictatorship and centralized authority. The actual number of victims of political repression is obscured, while history textbooks attempt to justify the events of the Great Terror by portraying Stalin's actions as rational responses to the historical circumstances of the time—decisions made by a leader who understood that a major war would soon threaten the country.

For this reason, Yuri Trifonov's *The House on the Embankment* became inconvenient for the current political narrative and was removed from the reading list to prevent students from delving deeper into the history of *the House on the Embankment*, the fate of its residents, and, by extension, the Great Terror and political repressions.

## CONCLUSION

### 1. Conclusion of the Theoretical Section of the Study

The analysis of secondary school literature education systems in the United States and Russia has revealed fundamental differences in the approaches to curriculum development, content selection, and ideological orientation. The Russian model represents a centralized system in which the state not only determines educational standards but also embeds a clear ideological agenda aimed at fostering national identity, traditional values, and patriotism. In contrast, the American educational system is decentralized, allowing for significant variation in curricula across states; nonetheless, the primary focus remains on the development of critical thinking, analytical skills, and individual interpretation of literary texts.

The study demonstrates that in the United States, literature is primarily viewed as a tool for intellectual development and the cultivation of civic competencies. In Russia, by contrast, literary education is geared toward shaping the citizen through a prescribed canon of national texts. While the American system emphasizes pluralism, the analysis of diverse perspectives, and engagement with a broad global cultural context, the Russian system is grounded in the idea of continuity of tradition and the enforcement of fixed interpretations.

### 2. Conclusion of the Practical Section of the Study

In addition, the examination of censorship and book banning practices in both countries has demonstrated stark contrasts in the mechanisms of state control over literature. In the United States, censorship initiatives typically originate at the local community level and are subject to public debate. In Rus-

sia, by contrast, restrictions on literature—especially on works addressing politically sensitive topics—are centralized and supported at the state level.

Thus, literary education in the United States and Russia not only reflects the particularities of their respective educational systems but also serves as an indicator of broader sociocultural processes, illustrating how state policy shapes perceptions of culture, history, and civic identity. Consequently, it can be concluded that literature in schools performs not only an educational but also a sociopolitical function, and the degree of freedom in its instruction is a crucial marker of a nation's overall educational and cultural policy.

### **3. Afterword: *On the level of culture***

In this final word, the authors of the present study wish to express a sincere hope: that despite the many constraints faced by the United States and Russia, and despite the profound differences in their histories, systems, and worldviews, it remains possible to forge lasting bilateral ties—ties grounded in the quiet, enduring force of culture. Culture, unlike fleeting policy or strategic interest, possesses the power to bridge what divides: it speaks across languages, reaches beneath ideologies, and connects people through shared experiences. Having devoted several months to a comparative study of cultural and educational contexts, we are convinced that this plane is not merely secondary, but foundational. The future of dialogue between our nations depends, above all, on the human dimension—on students and teachers, researchers and readers, artists and citizens. On culture as the deepest and most enduring form of understanding. *On the level of culture.*