
FROM THE EDITOR: THE ATTACKS ON PUBLIC EDUCATION CONTINUE

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Abstract

Kansas English Editor-in-Chief Katie Cramer laments the continued attacks on public education and democracy through anti-intellectual rhetoric, policies, executive orders, bills, and laws at the state and federal levels, and connects these attacks to book bans and censorship that harm public school teachers and students. She also previews the 2026 issue of *Kansas English*.

Keywords: book bans, censorship, anti-intellectualism, anticipatory obedience, democracy



Kansas English Editor Katie Cramer

In my [editor's letter](#) one year ago, I wrote about the policies and rhetoric spewing from our state and federal governments that “limit free speech, distort or erase history, and harm vulnerable populations locally, nationally, and globally” (Cramer, 2025, p. 1). Unfortunately, the anti-democratic and anti-intellectual rhetoric, policies, executive orders, bills, and laws have continued with head-spinning speed and aggression over the past year.

Last summer, President Trump signed the Big Beautiful Bill, “a cruel law that slashes funding for healthcare, food assistance, public schools, and colleges to pay for tax breaks for the ultra-wealthy” (Ben-Ghiat, 2025). In addition, “his administration has cut or withheld billions in federal grant funding, arrested student activists, targeted diversity initiatives, and sought to undermine academic freedom and university independence by tying funding and preferential treatment to adherence to a coercive compact” (Weingarten & Wolfson, 2026).

In Kansas, a provision in the state budget bill—signed into law by Governor Laura Kelly in April 2026, despite her significant reservations (Kansas Office of the Governor, 2026)—prohibits public universities and colleges from requiring students to complete a “DEI-CRT course,” the definition of which will be determined later by the Kansas Board of Regents (Margolies, 2026). Regarding this budget provision, PEN America’s Freedom to Learn Program Director Amy Reid stated:

When lawmakers tell students and faculty that some ideas are off-limits, it doesn’t just censor classroom discussions, it also impoverishes communities as students enter the workforce with a redacted education. Politicians and political appointees should not be in the business

of telling students what ideas are allowed and which are taboo. Slipping these provisions into a budget bill is just a sloppy strategy to camouflage censorship. (Margolies, 2026).

Speaking of censorship and the creation of a less informed electorate subject to the whims of autocrats, PEN America reports that in AY 2024-2025, there were 6,870 instances of book bans of 3,752 unique titles in 87 school districts nationwide (Baëta, et al., 2025). Shockingly, of the 2,520 bans enacted due to the presence or threat of state laws, “only 3% of the bans were triggered by a law requiring the removal of a book – the rest, 97%, came from bans caused by the fear that districts had of being out of compliance, regardless of whether the law was enjoined, hadn’t been passed yet, or didn’t call for the direct removal of books” (Baëta, et al., 2025). This is also known as [anticipatory obedience](#) (Protect Democracy, 2026).

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools on military bases engaged in anticipatory obedience when they removed 596 books from school bookshelves in July 2025 (Tolin, 2025), despite no direct reference to books in Trump’s executive orders that aim to limit and control information to which students have access (Baëta, et al., 2025). Interestingly, one of the banned books is Elizabeth Rusch’s nonfiction young adult book [You Call THIS Democracy? How to Fix Our Government and Deliver Power to the People](#) (2020).

In fact, PEN America experts (Magnusson et al., 2026) report an uptick in nonfiction book bans in AY 2024-2025 with over 1,100 unique nonfiction titles banned from public school libraries and classrooms. Removal of educational/informational books rose from 5% of titles banned in AY 2023-2024 to 13% of titles banned in AY 2024-2025 (nearly 500 unique titles), with the most banned topic being “activism and social movements.” The report’s authors note:

The increase in educational/informational titles within a larger erasure of nonfiction titles underscores the rising influence of anti-intellectualism in public spheres. The removal of educational/informational titles highlights the growing censorship of information, facts, and accounting of history and events available in public K–12 education across America. (Magnusson et al., 2026)

Here in Kansas, one school district banned one book in AY 2024-2025—thankfully a far cry from Florida’s 2,304 instances of book bans in 33 of its 67 public school districts (Baëta et al., 2025). Kansas’s Gardner-Edgerton district removed Donna Gephart’s *Lily and Duncan* (2016), which features two 8th-grade characters who alternate narrating the story. It was not required reading, and school board members who voted for the ban justified it with [complaints about positive depictions of gender-affirming care and supportive family members](#) (Kaminski, 2025). Having read and [written about the book](#) myself eight years ago (Cramer, 2018), I can say without a doubt it would be a strong addition to classroom and school libraries at the middle and high school levels.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten (2025) notes that book bans are one method authoritarians use to “attack truth, knowledge, and critical thinking because an uninformed public is easier to control.” And Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2025) argues that “the authoritarians’ goal is not just to create a hostile work environment for library and teaching staff but also to pressure administrators to submit to corrupt tactics such as banning books on spurious grounds and accepting slanderous speech used against their colleagues.”

Three years ago in *Kansas English*, Jessica Marston (2023) published [a comprehensive literature review of the history of censorship in schools](#), noting a common goal of power and control by the censors across time and place, while also providing specific resources and strategies for teachers to combat censorship. I urge you to (re-)read it.

And then, I urge you to share your stories, ideas, and advice with us—in [Kansas English](#), at the [KATE Fall Conference](#), and in [KATE Pages](#). Here are two questions you might consider as you draft future *Kansas English* (or other) submissions:

1. What are you doing in your classrooms (PreK-12 and higher education), libraries, book study groups, and PD sessions to combat the anti-intellectualism hurling toward us at the state and federal levels?
2. How are you supporting your students in critically reading the word and the world—and talking back to it from an informed perspective?

I wrote it last year in this space, and it still applies today: *Raise your voices. Raise your pens and keyboards. Silence is not an option.*

2026 Issue Preview

Welcome to another energizing issue of *Kansas English*. This year’s authors provide us with scholarly, practitioner, reflective, and creative pieces that will enlighten and inspire us.

KATE’s President **Rebecca Pflughoeft** reveals how ELA teachers inspired her own teaching journey and celebrates collaboration, growth, and leadership opportunities within KATE.

KATE Fall Conference Co-Chair **Amanda Stinemetz** provides a preview of this year’s conference, including the keynote speakers, conference theme, and exciting collaborations with other literacy groups across the state.

In his practitioner piece, “Dialoguing *with* and *about* Texts: Using Dialectical Journals in the English Classroom,” **Adam Whitaker** advocates for the use of dialectical journals to enhance students’ reading comprehension, analysis, interpretation, and perspective-taking.

Sandra L. Bequette ponders Donalyn Miller’s concept of wild reading and how it is integral to effective literacy instruction in a reflective essay entitled “Musings about Wild Readers and the Science of Reading Classroom of Today: Where Have All the Readers Gone?”

In her reflective essay, “On the Question of Ethical Application of Large Language Models in the Writing Classroom,” **April Pameticky** reflects on the ethical and pedagogical implications of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the ELA curriculum, drawing from her year-long exploration of AI in partnership with the Midwest Cohort of the National Writing Project and the Flint Hills Writing Project.

Thomas Lichty shares how he implemented LETRS principles in a secondary special education classroom in his reflective essay entitled “Creating Confident Readers and Writers in the Special Education Classroom.”

In their scholarly article “Enhancing Writing Quality in Secondary Classrooms: A Study of the Writing with Purpose Routine,” **Suzanne Myers** and **Jocelyn Washburn** examine the influence of an instructional routine called *Writing with Purpose* on four high school English language arts classrooms, finding that the routine may be an effective instructional approach for improving adolescent writing quality.

Avery Gathright recounts a challenging and enlightening moment during her teaching internship in a creative piece entitled “We’re Bored: A Narrative Reflection.”

Similarly, in a creative reflection entitled “The In-Between,” **Alice Huelskamp** shares snapshots of individual students with whom she built relationships during her year-long teaching internship and whom she will continue to know and teach as she begins her career at the same school this August.

In two children’s book reviews and seven young adult (YA) book reviews, **Hailey Arand-Mayorga**, **Katherine Cramer**, **Alice Huelskamp**, **Sasha Joy**, **Kevin Kienholz**, **Amanda K. Stinemetz**, and **Danny Wade** elevate recently published children’s and YA books that we should add to our classroom and/or personal libraries.

And finally, the Teaching Tips column brings us pedagogical strategies that we can immediately adapt and integrate into our curricular design. Column authors for this issue include **Miriam Barton**, **Sasha Joy**, **Beth Gulley**, and **Katherine Cramer**.

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Author Biography

Katherine (Katie) Mason Cramer, Ph.D. (she/her) is starting her 17th year as Program Chair and Professor of English Education in Wichita State University's School of Education. Prior to earning her doctorate, Katie was a middle school English teacher in Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools, and she has maintained her Kansas teaching licenses (ELA 5-9 and 7-12) so that a joyful return to the middle or high school ELA classroom is always possible. She has been a member of KATE and on the Executive Board since moving back to Kansas (from Arizona and Georgia) in 2010, and she has served as Editor of *Kansas English* since 2017. Under her leadership, *Kansas English* has been honored with NCTE's Affiliate Journal of Excellence Award in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. Katie's research and publications center the use of young adult literature to recognize, affirm, and teach diverse genders and sexualities in ELA classrooms and curricula. She can be reached at Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu.