

Book Banning in Public Schools

By

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Honors English 10

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Censorship affects all mediums: art, music, and even literature. The censorship and banning of books has been present in the world for centuries, including the burning of books by German Nazis. However, for the last half century, book banning has been debated highly in public schools. Parents are the main censors of books in public schools, either because they do not agree with the views presented in certain books or they find the books “inappropriate.” Books deemed inappropriate generally contain vulgar language or sexual content that parents would not want their young children to read. When books in public schools are censored, this usually means that parents want them removed from the school libraries and curriculums. However, the bottom line is that censorship of books in public schools is unconstitutional and simply unjust; it violates students’ First Amendment rights of free speech and expression and also prevents students from reading intellectually valuable material.

Some books are challenged due to the ideas or values portrayed in them; however, court cases have declared that this is unconstitutional. The First Amendment protects citizens’ rights of freedom of speech and expression, among other things. In the Supreme Court case of the *Island Trees School District v. Pico* (1982), nine books were removed from the Island Trees high school for being “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy” (*Island Trees*). This is censorship of books based solely on the fact that some people disagree with the ideas or values presented in them. Students argued that their First Amendment rights were being violated by the removal of the books, while the school board responded by saying that minors’ rights to freedom of speech and expression must be infringed upon by law and common sense. However, in a Supreme Court decision about students’ right to protest, it was declared that students and teachers do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate” (Campbell). In the Pico case, the Supreme Court decided that school boards

Comment [KL1]: Progression of argument is logical: legal element (book banning is unconstitutional); the facts: # of books banned & connection to parents; morals and values taught in banned books; counter argument; conclusion.

could not remove books only because they disagree with the idea presented in those books, though it is not unconstitutional for books to be censored in public schools for containing vulgarity (Library Censorship). It is unconstitutional for books to be censored only because the censor is against the ideas present in the book, and it is unfair for books to be censored for being inappropriate because a standard for what is considered appropriate cannot be clearly marked.

Comment [KL2]: Combination of direct quotations and paraphrased research. Multiple sources pulled together. Pico research and constitutional research "censored in public schools for containing vulgarity."

It is common knowledge that all people have different perceptions about what is appropriate for their kids to read in school. This relates to book banning because everyone has different opinions of which books should be censored, and if all potentially offensive or inappropriate books were banned, there would be no books left. One third of the books on the

Comment [KL3]: Note the transition: standard for what is appropriate to different perceptions about reading material

Comment [KL4]: Telling... ☹

Modern Library's top 100 best novel list of the 20th century have been deemed inappropriate at some point (Library Censorship). This proves that books can hold intellectual value in the eyes of some people, but be considered inappropriate or offensive by others. If parents could ban whichever books they please due to inappropriate language or sexual content from public schools, other children would not be able to read those books for their literary value.

Comment [KL5]: Good specifics

Many books are banned, either because the ideas they contain are controversial or because they are inappropriate in some way, but this prevents students from reading them for their literary importance and learning about different cultures, values, and ideas. Literary value can be the stylistic aspects of a book (how well it is written), its moral value (whether it teaches a lesson) and its ability to describe different cultures and opinions. Many of the books that are censored are all intellectually valuable, but their importance to students is their moral value and descriptions of different ideas and cultures. For example, the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini was challenged due to numerous sorts of violence, but what many censors do not realize is that it is a powerful story that can teach readers a lesson through its themes. One theme

Comment [KL6]: Clear topic sentence

Comment [KL7]: Kite Runner and Fahrenheit 451 are used as evidence to prove this point.

is that friendship is more important than social boundaries, which students can take into account in their own lives. Censoring *The Kite Runner* would keep students from learning this important moral lesson, thus preventing them from learning about a different culture and the cruelty of the political situation in Afghanistan. Additionally, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury depicts the dystopian society that we would live in if authors were discouraged from writing about controversial topics: “The bigger your market...the less you handle controversy” (Bradbury 57). If people continue to censor great literature, less and less books will remain and writers will eventually stop writing about any subjects that would be banned for being controversial. This would keep students from learning moral lessons from books and they would not be exposed to opinions other than those that their parents teach them, making them narrow-minded. Students need to learn moral lessons and about different cultures and values from books, but censoring controversial books will prevent this from happening.

Censorship of books in public schools is unconstitutional and simply unjust; it violates students’ First Amendment rights of free speech and expression and also prevents students from reading some intellectually valuable material. Although censorship of “inappropriate” books is not unconstitutional, it is not fair to students. On the other hand, parents only censor books to protect their children from vulgar language and scenes in books that could have a negative affect on them, like promoting suicide as a way to deal with bad situations. Parents have the right to protect their children, if they are minors, from reading certain books in school because children do not have the same rights as adults. They cannot consume alcohol or smoke, for example, which is why parents believe they are not mature enough to read inappropriate or offensive books. Unfortunately for the censors, not all “inappropriate” books can be removed from schools because all parents have different opinions on what kind of language or sexual content they will

Comment [KL8]: Counter argument

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permit their children to read. Censorship is still unjust, even if parents have good reason for it, because all students deserve to be able to read books for their literary value in school. Children should be able to read books in school that contain views that their parents disagree with; they deserve that freedom, and it is protected by their First Amendment rights as American citizens.

Comment [KL9] : This is an important part of the argument and could have been better supported.

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