

Freedom or Silence

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“We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still.” John Stuart Mill¹

Introduction

Do you ever feel strongly about a particular belief or value? Have you ever participated in challenging an issue or an idea? Has your freedom been taken away from you at one time or another? Do you know of any books that you are not allowed to read anymore? I was shocked to learn that some of Dr. Seuss's books have been censored, and likewise that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is not used as a reading text in American schools. How is it that certain books have been removed from our school curriculum? Why does this happen? If these are questions you have asked and would like to know more about Censorship, then continue reading.

Throughout history, people have been imposing their beliefs and containing contrasting ideas they deem as harmful. I have always wanted a better understanding of how this occurs in our societies. As a result, I have spent time observing different communities as the people interact with one another, and I have come to the conclusion that when anyone disapproves of something or someone, the result is a challenge or banning of the particular target. This normally happens because there is an outcry from a disgusted party, whether religious, governmental, parents, businesses, teachers, principals, or secular groups. As demonstrations, petitions, and court hearings occur the door opens for the fighting party to impose their beliefs, or values and eventually have it their way. That is, they are usually able to convince others of how noble their intentions are and thus gain support. However, every now and then they are challenged again by another party and the cycle continues on until another challenge occurs. As Ray Bradbury stated, “You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.”² This surmises the truth of the effects of book censorship. I truly believe that we need to address this controversial topic with students at the secondary level to help them make the connection between free speech principles and the freedom to read. Although students are exposed to the constitution of the United States from elementary school, at the secondary level, they still lack an understanding and an appreciation of how the Constitution applies to their lives, especially my English Language Learners (ELL). Although students are taught in Social Studies classes that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison fought and won intellectual battles about the importance of free speech in America, we still need to help them understand why it is important to defend their right to read any book.

Rationale

As I stand by my room door and observe students moving from one class to the next class, it is amazing to watch their behavior as they walk down the corridor. There are several races represented, but the majority are African American students. Some students are smiling, or look distracted, others are happily talking as they plod along. Amidst all of this, my English Language Learners enter my room with similar expressions and behavior. My students have come from Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, Turkey, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Liberia, Pakistan, Guinea, and Korea. The villages or cities they came from have sheltered or silenced them in one way or another. Similarly, they have been censored against certain ideas or freedoms by their government or religious affiliation. Therefore, it is vital that my students be exposed to censorship, its advantages and disadvantages so they will understand what to do and why it is important to do it. I need to teach my students the freedoms they are guaranteed under the Constitution because they all come from another country, and they do not understand these freedoms. I have to expose them to the fact that in America any American, including those with even the most radical ideas share the same freedoms. Only when my students fully grasp these principles will they become active Americans, and take a stand for or against an issue. Helping my students understand the philosophy of freedom promotes critical thinking, and at the same time support our forefathers' intention when they constructed the Bill of Rights.

At Christiana High School, one of our goals is to educate our students to be critical thinkers. The topic of Censorship is ideal for helping my students develop this skill. While censorship is necessary at times, students will not benefit from being kept from these materials without some sort of opportunity to understand the reason why certain decisions were made or taken. In fact, exposure to censorship is the key to promoting diversity in our society. As such this unit is necessary. It is important for my students to understand their individual rights and what they, as citizens, can do to protect these rights.

This unit is for my 10th grade ELL sophomore students at Christiana High School as a support for their CP (College Preparatory) English class. My ELL students in 10th grade have to read *Fahrenheit 451*, and what better text to use to address this topic. The main ideas that I plan to cover in this unit are based on the central ideas of censorship, freedom of speech, and the banning or challenging of books used in high school classrooms. I chose to create this unit to get my students to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills by providing them with an open forum in which they can express themselves freely. My unit should take approximately four weeks starting the first week in September and ending during Banned Books Week, which is the last week in September. The unit is scheduled to be covered on a daily basis and each session will last for 87 minutes.

Objectives

Through this unit the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards will be incorporated to address the social, instructional, and academic language that ELL students need to engage with peers, educators, and the curriculum in their tenth grade courses of Language Arts and Social Studies. English Language development standards 1, 2, and 5 will be addressed in this unit.

Standard 1 states that English language learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting.

Standard 2 states that English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts.

Standard 5 states that English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies.

In addition, I am developing this unit so that my ELL students will be able to understand what they read, and participate in their regular 10th grade CP English class. Therefore, I will incorporate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) of reading, listening, speaking, and writing to challenge my students to think for themselves, and verbalize their opinions based on text evidence. Also, I will expose them to different perspectives on the banning of books so they can learn how to respond verbally and formally, using persuasive argumentative writing.

The ELA Common Core Standards connections to the WIDA Standards are as follows:

1. RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone.)
3. W.9-10.2 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
4. SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

Overall, my students will engage in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English. I will introduce my students to the concept of censorship in our society, specifically through *Fahrenheit 451* and the First Amendment. The ***Enduring Understandings*** that I want my students to learn are that the First Amendment of the Constitution protects an American's right to freedom of speech as long as their speech does no harm, and that censoring texts is an act of power and, therefore, certain concepts or beliefs are upheld while others are denied or rejected based on the censor's beliefs.

Second, that persuasion is a common technique used in censorship in order to sway the audience to think, act, or feel a certain way. Third, the purpose of censorship is three-fold: protection, change, and control. Fourth, I want them to understand how the social standards of appropriateness implicitly or explicitly play a role to support or reject censoring something. Sixth, that the inability to think for oneself leads to a decline in personal freedom. Seventh, that books expose people to ideas, culture, history, and people that would otherwise remain unknown. Finally, that censorship is not exclusively thought to be beneficial or harmful.

The *Guiding Questions* that I will focus on are: What is Censorship? How are values/ ideologies/ social institutions implicitly or explicitly supported or rejected through the act of censoring something? To what extent is censorship either beneficial or harmful? Why is it necessary to examine multiple perspectives before you make a judgement on censorship? Why is it important to have access to controversial texts? How can knowledge and reading eliminate fear?

Freedom to Read

“Our Nation’s understanding and appreciation of the first Amendment is not passed along genetically. It must be reaffirmed and defended, over and over. Keep fighting and keep winning.” Paul Steinle³

Book Censorship Background

Over the years, many American schools have been pressured to restrict or deny students access to books or periodicals deemed offensive, unorthodox, or disliked by parents, individuals or groups based on moral, political, religious, ethnic, racial, or philosophical grounds. Today it has become worse because writers are writing about the real world of young people--drugs, premarital sex, alcoholism, divorce, homosexuality, high school gangs, school dropouts, racism, violence, and sensuality. These types of novels are continuously judged, criticized, challenged, or removed from school libraries. The opponents of these writings condemn some of the modern literature as "filthy," "un-American," "immoral", "overly realistic," or "anti-war." Also, some people have even objected to the use of some books merely for being "argumentative." For these people, it could be interpreted that the purpose of education is not the investigation of ideas, but rather the indoctrination of certain set beliefs and standards. As a result, we can conclude two things about censorship. First, any work is potentially open to attack by someone, somewhere, sometime, for some reason. Second, that censorship is often subjective and irrational. For example, parents have accused some classics books of containing obscene, blasphemous, or rebellious messages, and thus should not be part of their children's academic curriculum.

Teaching students about censorship will prepare them to deal appropriately with this controversial issue in general. Although it is understandable that parents are only trying

to protect their children from possibly inappropriate messages or materials; however, censorship comes with serious costs. Restricting any text robs them of developing critical thought, and problem solving skills. Of course book censorship teaches our children—who, one day will become adults—that censorship, even broad and sometimes random, in general, is not acceptable. Challenged text and banned text discussions are ideal teaching tools that teachers can use to foster debate and to guide the development of logical thinking skills and cooperative learning. In addition, texts that teach students about ethnic, racial, and sexual diversity encourage understanding of human differences. By exploring challenged texts, students acquire the tools of rational thought by which they can approach, analyze, and debate controversial issues in a forum of mutual respect and understanding.

Censorship

“We must teach students about their First Amendment rights rather than restrict their use of particular books and materials. As educators, we must encourage students to express their own opinions while respecting the views of others.”— Pat Scales⁴

Censorship is all about removing or restricting materials, based upon the objections of a person or group, thereby preventing others from accessing it. It is based on perspective, whether private, government, or civilian. That is, censorship is the action that represses or bans certain speech, book, or any public thought which is considered offensive, harmful, inappropriate, and sensitive by specific groups of people, such as parents, religious denominations, the government, the media companies, or other controlling institutional bodies within a country. However, censorship varies locally, nationally, and internationally. A book, an advertisement, a television show, an art work, or words are censored for many reasons that the particular person or group believe. Some reasons include: profanity or violence, pornography, hate speech, protecting young children, sex or sex education, homosexuality, witchcraft and the occult, portrayals of rebellious actions, racist or sexist language, or because the material is promoting, or restricting political or religious views, or for protecting the national security of a country. Proponents and opponents of censorship always have many different reasons for suppressing or removing materials from society. Only by analyzing the pros and cons of the reasons for attempting to censor a book or any other thought, can one truly accept or reject it.

Pros of Book Censorship

Why do some people support the removal of a novel from school libraries? According to some parents, it is to protect the children, or making responsible decisions about what reading material is educational and age-appropriate for school children because they are not ready or mature enough to handle the topics presented in certain books. That is, when we censor books, we are preventing our children from being exposed to offensive things

like pornography, or intense racism. Based on what we have learned in psychology about the development of children, we know there are various sensitive things that need to be kept from the innocent minds, and eyes of children. Whenever books include political bias, inappropriate themes, the presence of witchcraft, violence, negativity, blasphemous dialogue, dangerous or damaging life style, and intense racism, they need to be examined and reviewed carefully to determine whether they are appropriate for particular age groups. Eliminating books that contain acts or ideas of racial hatred, terrorism, or crime would make our world a better place for all people if censored indefinitely. Books that contain sensitive topics that are not appropriate for children should be censored so that they will not see nor be exposed to these materials which could have lasting damage on children. Censorship is also right to protect the morals of the society. Through censorship violence can be prevented by stopping the circulation of the ideas that might trigger it. Another reason why censorship is needed is to prevent the public display of disrespect to a community and an individual, which is one of the most important things about censorship. Therefore, it is necessary at times to censor certain books to protect children.⁵

Cons of Book Censorship

For every valid reason of book censorship there is also a similar contrasting argument that we need to take note of. Indeed, individuals have different views regarding the issue of book censorship. Many people have argued that book censorship intrudes upon our rights and freedoms. Some people believe that the media has the right to disclose all information because people need to know. However, when books are censored because they want to bring to light sensitive thoughts, and are censored, it defeats this very purpose. They say we study history to learn from our mistakes. Communities have complexities and flaws that need to be revealed to individuals in our societies, but censorship prevents them from doing so. Limitations are set as to what kind of information they need to unearth which greatly intrudes upon the freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Freedom of Speech is violated every time censorship is sanctioned. Many people think that it is a basic right of humans to reveal their ideas in any way they want to. However, when books are censored, some people say it violates the rights of people to obtain information. Censorship is also viewed by some as a way for the government to control the flow of information. Regardless of the reason, censoring books will only lead to other challenges.⁶

Two Sides

Censorship of books is a controversial topic that will continue to be debated. The pros and cons of the why and why not has led to heated arguments, protest, and even legal sanctions. Who gets to choose what is appropriate and what is not appropriate are critical questions that lead to many challenges and the intervention of the Supreme Court rulings. When challenging or banning a book, there are many reasons for and against

ensorship. The party that is able to convince the judge that the removal of the book does not infringe upon the students' rights, gets the ruling in their favor.

There are advocates who think that the use of censorship creates a balance in what ought to be said and written, while opponents criticize censorship on the basis of the threat it poses to the freedom of speech. To those who control, or agree with those who control the censorship process, the advantage is that you don't have to see anything you do not want to see. On the flipside the disadvantage is no one else can see what you do not want to see yourself. For those who do not control or agree with those who control the censorship process, there is no advantage, and the disadvantage is that you cannot see what you want to see. However, when books are censored it protects personal beliefs. For example, values, but most importantly religious ideologies that one follows. The disadvantage is that it hinders growth, and puts a limit to creative thinking, and exposure to concepts otherwise totally new to a person⁷.

Book Censorship and the First Amendment

Restricting the access to books leads to the censorship of ideas which is a direct violation of the First Amendment. The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."⁸ This means that citizens should be able to express their thoughts and beliefs freely in the United States. They should be able to practice any religion or no religion. Without the First Amendment, religious minorities could be persecuted, the government could establish a national religion, protesters could be silenced, the press could not criticize government, and citizens could not mobilize for or against social change. However, there are times the First Amendment freedoms are limited. Even though the text of the First Amendment references that "Congress shall make no law," there are some limited types of speech that do not receive free-speech protection. For example, the First Amendment does not protect obscenity, child pornography, true threats, fighting words, incitement to imminent lawless action, criminal solicitation or defamation. Also, the First Amendment applies to the government, but does not apply to private companies and organizations. It protects individuals from government censorship. Although the text of the First Amendment says "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech," it means that no federal, state or local government official can infringe on your free-speech rights. A private company is not government nor state, and therefore generally is not subject to the requirements of the First Amendment. Yet, the First Amendment applies to public schools. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* that students do not "shed" their free-speech rights "at the schoolhouse gate." This means that public school students retain some level of free-expression rights, even during the school day. Students do not have the same level of First Amendment rights as adults. The Supreme Court also said

that students' rights must be considered against the "special characteristics of the school environment."⁹ Speech that substantially disrupts school activities, for example, is not protected by the First Amendment. Therefore, when any group of people try to ban books or suppress any material for any reason, they can be taken to court. In this way, anyone can exercise their right to freedom of speech.

The First Amendment gives anyone living in the U.S., including students, the freedom to express any opinion they like. Students in public high schools can access many different opinions, stories, and ideas through their high school libraries. Local boards of education are responsible for choosing books that go in the library, as well as removing books that might not be appropriate for the students. The Supreme Court has not ruled on how Boards of Education choose books to place in a library. However, once a book is in a library, the school board may remove it only under certain circumstances.

Supreme Court Cases

The Supreme Court is the highest court of law that exists in the nation for all cases and controversies that occur in the United States. It is the final mediator of the law that provides fair justice to the American people. Also, this court acts as guardian and interpreter of the Constitution. When the Supreme Court rules on a constitutional issue, that judgment is virtually final. Its decisions can be altered only by the rarely used procedure of constitutional amendment, or by a new ruling of the Court. However, when the Court interprets a statute, new legislative action can be taken. Since censorship suppresses the freedom of speech, it impacts Americans' First Amendments rights and has led to several court trials. As a result, the Supreme Court has made various rulings which have impacted our freedom of rights in school to this day. In particular, there are several cases that addresses the censoring of books. Therefore, it is important to review these cases in order to understand why they happened and where we stand today.

Mary Beth Tinker v. Des Moines -1962

The issues of free speech in public high schools were first considered by the Supreme Court in the Tinker v. Des Moines case. In 1962, Mary Beth Tinker, a middle-schooler who was quiet and a rule follower, was suspended for wearing a black armband to protest the Vietnam War. Even though she was a shy person, Mary Beth was also moved by the many killings of the Vietnam War she was witnessing on television every night. So she, along with her brothers and sisters, decided to wear black armbands to school as a symbol of mourning for the wounded and the dead of the war and to signal support for Robert F. Kennedy's call for peace and cease fire during that Christmas. However, the school district learned of the children's plan and impulsively instituted a "no armband" policy. Nevertheless, the children still went ahead and wore their armband anyway. Then the vice principal called Mary Beth out of her algebra class, and suspended her. When this

happened, her family sued the school district, claiming that the suspension violated Mary's First Amendment rights. This case went all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a 7–2 decision, the justices ruled that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”¹⁰ Justice Abe Fortas, on behalf of the majority of justices, wrote “Students may not be regarded as closed-circuit recipients of only that which the State chooses to communicate,” nor can they be “confined to the expression of those sentiments that are officially approved.”¹¹ In other words, a student's right to free expression should not be limited while in school or on school grounds. Mary Beth's case was a landmark victory for student speech rights. She and her family celebrated that event with ice cream and soda pop. The ruling of this case can be interpreted to apply to all kinds of student expression—including their rights to read any book.

Board of Education v. Pico - 1982

In 1975, a high school student named Steven Pico led a group of students to sue the Island Trees School District board members. They accused them of denying their First Amendment rights. What had happened was that the board members had ordered that certain books be removed from the high school and junior high school libraries in this school district because they claimed that the books were “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy.” So books like *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Best Short Stories of Negro Writers*, *Go Ask Alice*, and *Down These Mean Streets* were removed and students did not have access to them anymore. This case was heard by the Supreme Court, where the judges voted in favor of the students. It was a close ruling because five judges voted in favor for the students, and four were against the petition. Justice Brennan wrote on behalf of the majority and stated, “Local school boards may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books, and seek by their removal to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of public opinion.’”¹² Here Judge Brennan clearly states that the First Amendment supports students' right to read any library books of their choice. Even though school officials have significant authority to control the content of speech in schools, their power is not absolute. Justice William Brennan wrote that “the special characteristics of the school library make that environment especially appropriate for the recognition of First Amendment rights of students.”¹³ While the court noted that school boards do have discretion in what books to acquire for the school, and it could reject any works deemed to be “pervasively vulgar,” he went on to add that local school boards may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in the books.¹⁴

Case v. Unified School District - 1995

Annie on My Mind is a novel that illustrates a lesbian relationship between two teenagers. As a result of this, the Olathe, Kansas School Board voted to remove this book from the

junior and senior high school libraries. However, the school board attested in court that they had removed the book because of “educational unsuitability.” Despite this, the federal court instituted that the school board had violated the students’ First Amendment rights. The court based its judgement on the fact that the school board actually objected to the book’s foundation and belief. The book’s removal was overturned.¹⁵

Minarcini v. Strongsville City School District - 1976

In this case, the teachers of Strongsville City School District recommended that they use *Catch-22* and *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater* as textbooks. Instead, in 1972, the school district ordered the removal of *Catch-22*, along with *Cat’s Cradle*, from the school library. When the court heard this case, it said that the school board did not have the right to remove the books from the library because the “library is a storehouse of knowledge” and students have a First Amendment right to receive information and the librarian has a right to disseminate it.¹⁶

Counts v. Cedarville School District - 2003

After receiving a complaint from a parent, the school board of Arkansas’s Cedarville voted 3-2 to remove and restrict access to all of the Harry Potter books from the public school libraries shelves. Students who wished to read or check out these books could only do so via a written parental permission slip. Several students and their parents filed a complaint, and asked for the return of the books to the open library shelves. During the hearing, the School Board members who voted to remove the books acknowledged that they had not read many of the books, and that they removed them because they exposed students to the "religion of witchcraft, and also encourage disobedience and disrespect for authority." On April 22, 2003, the district court stated that the restrictions violated students’ First Amendment rights to read and receive information and overturned the school board’s decision. The court noted that the school board could not cut students’ right to read a book because they disagreed with the ideas contained in the book. So the judge ordered the district to return the series of books to the library shelves, and the defendants (parents), did not appeal.¹⁷

Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education - 1987

In 1983, a group of students and their parents brought action against the Hawkins County Board of Education seeking relief and money damages because they were upset about the religious themes being taught in the required readings of their children classes. They claimed that their children’s First Amendment right to free exercise of religion was being impacted. They brought action against the board, challenging the textbooks being used in class. In this case the parents claimed that the mention of telekinetic and magical powers offended their religious beliefs, and they felt they had a right to choose what their

children could or could not view and learn at school. The court held that the school board was not in violation for the required reading and that it was up to the children and parents to interpret the books for themselves. The court held that it was merely required readings and not required worship and that the reading was purely the views of another.¹⁸

Fahrenheit 451 Plot

Fahrenheit 451 is a novel that is set in a world where firemen start fires, and reading or having books are banned. Montag is the protagonist, and a fireman in the story. In the rising action he meets a girl named Clarisse while walking home from work one day. They began conversing, and she asks him if he is happy. This question causes Montag to begin to question his life, and his actions as a fireman. The conflict arose when Montag went to burn a house that had books, and he witnessed a woman (Mrs. Hudson) who willingly burns herself with her books. Even though it is illegal to have books, and Montag has taken an oath to destroy books, he takes one with him. Then the rising action occurs when Montag's chief, Captain Beatty, knows that Montag has taken a book. Beatty attempts to explain why books have been censored in hopes of reasoning with Montag. Despite his job, Beatty has committed many verses of famous literature to memory, and he enforces the destruction of literature. The novel's climax occurs when Montag reads a poem to his wife and her friends, who have come over to watch television. The ladies leave disgusted, offended, and threaten to file a complaint against him. It is his wife who reports him to the authorities. The falling action occurs when Montag is ordered to burn the books himself. Instead he kills his chief and the other firemen in order to escape with the few books he has left. He is able to make his way down the river, and finds a colony of intellectuals who love books. The resolution occurs when he hopes to travel together with the colony to St. Louis where he can speak to a book printer to try and reproduce books. At the last moment, jets appear overhead, and annihilate the colony. The novel ends with the group searching for survivors to rebuild civilization.¹⁹

Fahrenheit 451 and Censorship

In Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*, a theme that resonates throughout the novel is censorship. From the beginning we are introduced to a fictional world where the people are not allowed to own or read books. The government in *this novel* has taken full control of what its people watch and hear, and demands that books be destroyed by burning because it believes books are dangerous- they trigger thought and unhappiness. The people relied on the government to remove the sources of their unhappiness, and to enhance their lives with activities which would prevent them from thinking, and being unhappy. The people wore shells on their ears and this censored their thoughts, as well as their actions. As a result, this society was plagued by fear, and the thought of knowing, depression, suicide, and dependency. "Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord..."²⁰ The firemen are responsible for

burning any house in which books are found, and if the people refuse to give up their books, they burned with them, too. Since the government had censored so much in this society, the citizens in *Fahrenheit 451* had no idea about what was truly happening in their world. In the end their entire city was destroyed by an atomic bomb, which was a direct result of their limited knowledge. The government's propaganda made the people blind to see that their destruction was forthcoming. Through this story, Bradbury sends a very clear message of what can happen when we allow any party to take total control of what we can do, read, watch, and talk about. Although censorship is depicted as the worst evil it can be in *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury also shows that despite the fear and the brainwashing going on in *Fahrenheit 451* not all of the citizens have fallen victims to censorship. In addition, Bradbury shows us that there are citizens who are willing to sacrifice their lives to ensure that books continue to exist. In a conversation Faber says, "It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books."²¹ He continues this conversation with Montag pointing out that people need "the right to carry out actions based on what we learn [from books]. . ."²² *Fahrenheit 451* as a text fell victim to censorship because of the use of "filthy" words and the claim that it "insulted firemen."²³ Censorship in many forms continues to be a part of our lives, though not so deliberate or across-the-board as in *Fahrenheit 451*. Schools across the country are subjected regularly to efforts of censorship from what is being read and taught.

In 1953 Ballantine Books published Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*. Then in 1967 it published a special version that was sold to high schools. However, the publisher did not inform Bradbury, and it did not include any note in the edition that the publisher modified seventy-five passages in the novel in order to eliminate words like "hell," "damn" and "abortion." This altered edition was sold for thirteen years before one of Bradbury's friends notified him about what had happened. Bradbury demanded that the publisher remove the revised version, and replace it with the original. He wrote in his coda, "Do not insult me with the beheadings, finger-chopping or the lung-deflations you plan for my works. I need my head to shake or nod, my hand to wave or make into a fist, my lungs to shout or whisper with. I will not go gently onto a shelf, degutted, to become a non-book."²⁴ Also in his coda, Bradbury goes on to say, "There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches."²⁵ Ballantine publishing agreed to remove the revised version. In addition, the publicity generated by the changed version of *Fahrenheit 451* caused the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee to investigate other school books, and they used their considerable economic influence to warn publishers about editing, and demand that any altered versions be clearly identified. Parents have also tried to censor the use of this book in schools, but due to the protest from teachers, other parents, and students, school boards have continued to make this text available to students.²⁶

Strategies

Throughout my instructional delivery, I incorporate a variety of strategies and activities to engage my students in their learning. On a daily basis, I try to provide my students with the opportunities to apply their listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. I find that it is necessary to provide ELLs daily practice in all of these areas to develop these skills. By addressing these four skills daily my ELL students can learn English as well as participate actively in all their academic classes.

Journal Writing

In this kind of writing my students write a short reflection (usually for 5 or 10 minutes) daily. However, they are required to either think critically about a topic related to the day's topic, or somehow make connections between what was discussed the previous day, or what is discussed that day, and their own lives. By keeping these journals, my students work individually toward answering essential questions, as well as make real life connections. I like using journal reflections because they also serve as a starting point for whole group, small group and partner discussions. Finally, I use the journal reflections as a reference for my students to complete other writing activities incorporated in my units.

Four Corners

To teach my students to take a stand or a position, I usually divide my room into four different sections, labeled: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. Then I give them a prompt and my students are required to take a position by moving to one of the corners, and then at least one or two people (or more) from each corner will explain their positions. By doing this my students from different "corners" are able to discover if they actually have any similar viewpoints, or if they interpreted the prompt differently. Also, the students in the same corner may realize that although they are in the same corner, they might have different reasons for taking that stance. Sometimes, I use my four corners activity and extend it into a writing prompt.

Debate

I like to use a style of debate that suits my students. They like to talk about different things, yet they need scaffolding support in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English. In this strategy I have my students identify the debate topics themselves, or I have them list their ideas. Regardless of the way they identify their topic, they have to phrase it as a question (e.g., "Should Parents be allowed to tell schools what text their children are allowed to read?"). Then I remind them that they can test to see if they have a good topic if they are able to provide arguments for both sides of the issue. Afterward, I assist my students to identify resources, including written fiction and nonfiction resources, interviews, surveys, web sites, and statistical data evidence to support their position. In addition, I show them how they can prove if their sources are reliable. The test questions I use are: Is the source an authority? Is the source up to date? Does the

source have a "hidden agenda" or bias? Does the source offer logical evidence for its information? Or I have them create their own questions. Next I have my students list the pros and cons with a simple T chart, working individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a whole class. When they work in teams, I have them choose their leader, who facilitates and delegates responsibilities, or I assign specific roles. Then I have them organize their research into major and minor arguments. I remind my students to consider how to rebut counterarguments. Next, I have my students rehearse their debate. Depending on the debate's format, I usually set a time limit. The students can participate as individuals or as teams. When they debate in teams, each member participates in the argument because the leader assign who presents the arguments and counterarguments. In this way the debate is structured, students know what their arguments are, and it flows smoothly.

Activities

Book Censorship

Students will work in groups of 3-4 on a review committee of potentially controversial books. Each group will review 1 book and fills in a chart that helps them look at the book in very different ways. First, students list anything objectionable about the book, even if it is a stretch of the imagination – anything that anyone might find wrong with the book, from the way it looks, to its function, to the values it could potentially convey. Next, students look at the flipside: what are some positive values of this book? Even if they do not personally agree, student work in groups to list every aspect they can in both categories. Then they report their finding and position. Examples of banded books:

- Maya Angelou's [*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*](#)
- Mark Twain's [*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*](#)
- Geoffrey Chaucer's [*Canterbury Tales*](#)
- Margaret Atwood's [*The Handmaid's Tale*](#)
- Ray Bradbury's [*Fahrenheit 451*](#)
- Kurt Vonnegut's [*Slaughterhouse Five*](#)
- Lois Duncan's [*Killing Mr. Griffin*](#)
- Madeleine L'Engle's [*A Wrinkle in Time*](#)
- Philp Roth's [*Portnoy's Complaint*](#)
- Toni Morrison's [*The Bluest Eye*](#)
- Robert Cormier's [*Fade*](#)
- William Faulkner's [*As I Lay Dying*](#)
- Louise Fitzhugh's [*Harriet the Spy*](#)

Question: Should ([Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*](#)) be included in the high school English curriculum? Why or why not?

Online Role-Play

This is an ongoing activity that will occur during the last two weeks of the unit. As a class, students will choose an issue related to the banning or challenging of a specific book. The class will identify the “stakeholders” in the controversy, and then I will assign students randomly to a position (whether they are in support of or against the censorship of the issue they are discussing) as well as their stakeholder identity. Then students will develop this identity by creating a “Ning”²⁷ profile of their avatar with appropriate background information as well as an initial stance on the issue. Throughout the two weeks, students will have four different opportunities in class to complete the required posts on various discussion forums. The expectation is that if students do not finish their work during class, they will complete it outside of class, as they have access to the internet on their cell phones. The online role-play allows students to step into the perspective of another person, and requires them to have an ongoing discussion about a topic from that perspective. This activity will get students to understand the value of considering multiple perspectives, and it will also allow them to practice arguments and persuasion skills.

One of the main reasons I included the online role-play as a major activity throughout the unit is that it is a great way to differentiate for students who are reluctant to participate in whole group discussions. In this role-play situation, students’ avatars are anonymous (except to me, because I will assign them) and my students will be able to distance themselves emotionally from the discussion. Students will need to challenge themselves to convincingly portray another person’s position on an issue, and may be less likely to be afraid to participate in fear of how they, or their opinions will be received by peers. The online role-play is a way to incorporate a new, fun, and exciting form of discussion students do not generally get to use in the context of school.

Reflective Journal

I will ask my students to write an interpretation for one of the following quotes:

"Every burned book enlightens the world." —Ralph Waldo Emerson²⁸

"The books that the world calls immoral are the books that show the world its own shame." —Oscar Wilde²⁹

"Fear of ideas makes us impotent and ineffective." —William O. Douglas³⁰

"You have not converted a man because you have silenced him." —John Morley³¹

"Only the suppressed word is dangerous." —Ludwig Byrne³²

"Free speech is life itself." —Salman Rushdie³³

Extended writing activities will include my students writing a reaction to the following words of Jamaica Kincaid: "No word can hurt you... No idea can hurt you. Not being able to express an idea or a word will hurt you much more. As much as a bullet."³⁴ Researching the life and works of writers of censored books, and using their research to

debate, write or illustrate a comic book that communicates the author's beliefs regarding free speech. They may write an editorial for the local newspaper about Banned Books Week, and teenagers' right to read any book.

Debate

Students will review and discuss two very important cases involved in freedom of expression in public schools in order to develop an understanding of 1) First Amendment Rights and 2) How government officials are allowed to make decisions to limit/censor expression of certain ideas – specifically in public schools. Students will have the opportunity to defend or challenge the court rulings in a debate.

Assessments

Various daily formative assessments will play important roles in this unit on censorship. Because censorship is such a relevant current issue that students can easily connect to, and reflect on how their own lives are affected by it, journaling will be a major component to this unit. Student journals will be collected once a week, where the assessment focus will be on the depth of the reflections. The major purpose for the journals is to get students to keep returning to the essential questions/enduring understandings for the unit. Many of the journal prompts will require students to consider the essential questions from different perspectives or to consider their own perspectives, connections to the essential questions, and enduring understanding. Through a combination of the strategies, and activities, it is my belief that my students will come to a deeper, more relevant, multi-perspective understanding of censorship.

Bibliography

Bradbury, Ray, and Joseph A. Mugnaini. 1953. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Ballantine Books. (accessed November 3, 2015).

Heins, Marjorie. 2001. *Not in Front of the Children: "Indecency," Censorship and the Innocence of Youth*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Rogers, Donald J. *Banned! Book Censorship in Schools*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1988.

Spark Notes Editors. "Spark Note on *Fahrenheit 451*." Spark Notes LLC. 2007. <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/451/> (accessed December 3, 2015). This website provides the context, summary, plot, themes, analysis, quiz, and question for *Fahrenheit 451*.

<http://emertainmentmonthly.com/2014/09/27/banned-books-week-defense-fahrenheit-451/> accessed December 1, 2015. This short article provides a synopsis of Fahrenheit 451, and defends it.

<http://kristinnador.com/2012/03/26/writers-controversy-self-censor/> accessed December 12, 2015. This is an article that addresses self-censoring, and expands on the quotation written by Jamaica Kincaid.

<https://purlibrary.wordpress.com/2013/09/27/too-hot-to-handle-fahrenheit-451-challenged-in-2007/> accessed January 8, 2016. This article addresses several aspects about the banning of Fahrenheit 451.

<http://www.quotegarden.com/censorship.html> accessed on October 15, 2015. Quotations about censorship.

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorshipfirstamendmentissues/courtcases> accessed December 1, 2015. This website provides many notable book banning court cases.

<http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks> accessed on October 15, 2015. A website that provide books that have been challenged and the reason for these challenges.

<http://www.ala.org/bbooks/top100bannedbooks.html> accessed on October 15, 2015. Contains a complete list of "The 100 Most Frequently Challenge Books of 1990-2000.

<http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/ifissues/issuesrelatedlinks/quotations> accessed December 10, 2015. This website offers many quotes about censorship, the First Amendment, and the freedom to read.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/bannedbooks> accessed on October 15, 2015. Provides information about how books, ideas, and writers are being threaten around the world. The Amnesty International's banned books portion of this website also provides posters for your classroom.

<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/f/fahrenheit-451/critical-essays/the-issue-of-censorship-and-fahrenheit-451> accessed December 3, 2015. This is a website with an essay that shows how personal freedom of expression is tied to the First Amendment.

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/banned-books> accessed on October 15, 2015. This website contains a brief explanation of the history of book censorship and presents the

most important court decision regarding libraries, and the First Amendment- the Board of Education, Island Tree School district vs. Pico.

<http://www.firstamendmentschools.org/freedoms/case.aspx?id=41> accessed December 1, 2015. This website provides the Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico, court case and reason for the ruling.

http://www.learningpeace.com/pages/rtp_actionkids.html accessed on October 15, 2015. This is a website that contains a list of additional websites that you can visit to see examples for ideas on how students can form action groups in their schools to turn their visions into actions.

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/fahrenheit451/readers-guide/historical-context/> accessed December 1, 2015. This website provides the life and time of Bradbury and the censoring of his text Fahrenheit 451. It also provides historical context of the destruction of books, including Bradbury's reaction.

<http://www.ning.com/what-is-ning/> accessed January 9, 2016. This is a website you can use to setup an online roleplay forum.

<https://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/resources/guides3/censorship.html> accessed on December 1, 2015. This website that offers teachers a guide to teaching censorship in high school.

<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/451/451.html> accessed December 1, 2015. This website provides Bradbury's coda to Censorship of his writing, and includes his reaction.

<http://www.spaceagecity.com/bradbury/quotes.htm> accessed on November 15, 2015. A website that contains quotes and Ray Bradbury's perspectives on many topic including censorship.

<http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/about-educational-outreach/activity-resources/what-does> accessed on December 1, 2015. This is a website that points out the rights that are included, and the rights not included in the First Amendment Right. It also includes the court cases that established those rights.

<http://system.uslegal.com/u-s-constitution/amendment-i/censorship-in-the-united-states/book-censorship/> accessed December 1, 2015. This website presents the Comstock Act which impacted the censoring of books, and includes several examples of other book censoring cases.

<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2011/02/the-school-library-versus-the-school-board-an-exploration-of-the-book-banning-trend-of-the-1980s/> accessed December 1, 2015. This website explores book banning cases and trends of the 1980s.

Notes

¹ <http://www.quoteagarden.com/censorship.html>

² <http://www.spaceagecity.com/bradbury/quotes.htm>

³ <http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/resources/guides3/censorship.html>

⁴ <http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/ifissues/issuesrelatedlinks/quotations>

⁵ Heins, Marjorie. 2001. Not in Front of the Children: "indecenty," Censorship and the Innocence of Youth. New York: Hill and Wang.

⁶ Ibid.5

⁷ Ibid.5

⁸ Stewart, Douglas E. "Going Back in Time: How the Kansas Board of Education's Removal of Evolution from the State Curriculum Violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause." The Review of Litigation 20.2 (2007): 549+.

⁹ <http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/about-educational-outreach/activity-resources/what-does>

¹⁰ <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2011/02/the-school-library-versus-the-school-board-an-exploration-of-the-book-banning-trend-of-the-1980s/>

¹¹ <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2011/02/the-school-library-versus-the-school-board-an-exploration-of-the-book-banning-trend-of-the-1980s/>

¹² <http://www.firstamendmentschools.org/freedoms/case.aspx?id=41>

¹³ <http://system.uslegal.com/u-s-constitution/amendment-i/censorship-in-the-united-states/book-censorship/>

¹⁴ <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/banned-books>

¹⁵ <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorshipfirstamendmentissues/courtcases>

¹⁶ [Ibid.16](#)

¹⁷ [Ibid.16](#)

¹⁸ [Ibid.16](#)

¹⁹ Spark Notes Editors. "Spark Note on Fahrenheit 451." Spark Notes LLC. 2007. <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/451/>

²⁰ Bradbury, Ray, and Joseph A. Mugnaini. 1953. Fahrenheit 451. New York: Ballantine Books.

²¹ [Ibid.19](#)

²² [Ibid.19](#)

²³ <http://emertainmentmonthly.com/2014/09/27/banned-books-week-defense-fahrenheit-451/> and <https://purlibrary.wordpress.com/2013/09/27/too-hot-to-handle-fahrenheit-451-challenged-in-2007/>

²⁴ <http://www.neabigread.org/books/fahrenheit451/readers-guide/historical-context/>

²⁵ <http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/451/451.html>

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- 26 <http://www.neabigread.org/books/fahrenheit451/readers-guide/historical-context/>
- 27 <http://www.ning.com/what-is-ning/>
- 28 <http://www.quotegarden.com/censorship.html>
- 29 [Ibid.28](#)
- 30 [Ibid.28](#)
- 31 [Ibid.28](#)
- 32 [Ibid.28](#)
- 33 [Ibid.28](#)
- 34 <http://kristinnador.com/2012/03/26/writers-controversy-self-censor/>

Curriculum Unit

Title

Freedom or Silence

Author

Julette Grusell, Ed. D.

KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

1. The First Amendment of the Constitution protects an American's right to freedom of speech as long as their speech does no harm.
2. Censoring texts is an act of power and, therefore, certain concepts or beliefs are upheld while others are denied or rejected based on the censor's beliefs.
3. Persuasion is a common technique used in censorship in order to sway the audience to think, act, or feel a certain way.
4. Censorship is three-fold: protection, change, and control.
5. The inability to think for oneself leads to a decline in personal freedom.
6. Books expose people to ideas, culture, history, and people that would otherwise remain unknown.
7. Censorship can be beneficial or harmful.
8. One must consider the larger interest of students, schools, communities, and the nation served when censoring.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

How are values/ ideologies/ social institutions implicitly or explicitly supported or rejected through the act of censoring books?
How does censorship affect students, societies, and the nation?
Should books be censored? Why or why not?

CONCEPT A

Censorship- Pros and Cons

CONCEPT B

First Amendment and Book Censorship

CONCEPT C

Fahrenheit 451 – Theme (Censorship)

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

What is Censorship? How does censorship affect you? To what extent is censorship either beneficial or harmful? What would the world be like if there was no censorship at all?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

Do you think censorship violates freedom of speech? Why is it necessary to examine multiple perspectives before you make a judgement on censorship?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

Why is it important to have access to controversial texts? How can knowledge and reading eliminate fear? How did censorship affect the characters in Fahrenheit 451?

VOCABULARY A

| | | |
|------------|---------|-----------|
| Censorship | Extent | censor |
| Beneficial | ban | taboo |
| Harmful | query | offensive |
| Violates | scandal | choice |
| challenge | Freedom | fear |

VOCABULARY A

| | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| First Amendment | examine |
| Multiple | Perspective |
| Evidence | necessary |
| Deny | Rights |
| Justify | Judgement |

VOCABULARY A

| |
|---------------|
| Access |
| Controversial |
| Eliminates |

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

Resources: These are three resources not included in the unit, but they provide additional information about the first amendment, Censorship and lesson ideas.
Website <https://www.englishclub.com/esl-forums/viewtopic.php?t=62296> (A reading text about Freedom of Speech)
<http://www.nnerpartnerships.org/wp-content/files/Article-4-2010-NNNER-Dangerous-Words.pdf> (This is an essay that discusses the problems raised by book challenges in the public schools, and it offers practical and philosophical responses to censorship. It also summarizes the legal history of book censorship in schools and libraries and provides a list of often challenged books that should be used in the classroom.)
<http://www.neabigread.org/books/fahrenheit451/teachers-guide/schedule-lesson-plans/> (the PDF contains teaching lessons schedule for a 10 day class study of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.) <http://www.neabigread.org/books/fahrenheit451/media/> (This provides a film and the audio guide referenced in the PDF)
<http://www.fcusd.org/cms/lib03/CA01001934/Centricity/Domain/3317/Fahrenheit%20451%20Vocabulary%20Lists%20with%20Definitions.pdf> (This is Fahrenheit 451 vocabulary list with simple definitions.)