

SAGE Practice Argumentative Essay

To Ban or Not To Ban

Books usually are challenged by parents with the best intentions—to protect children from difficult ideas and information. A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others. If a parent finds a book in a school offensive, should that book be removed from the school?

Carefully read the following two sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then write an essay arguing whether or not a book challenged by a parent should be removed from a school. Your essay must synthesize information from both sources.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- plan your essay;
- write your essay; and
- revise and edit your essay.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims; and
- use evidence from both sources.

Do not over rely on one source.

Source A (Hagelin)

Source B (NCTE)

Source A

Hagelin, Rebecca. "Book Banning Protects Family Values." *Book Banning*. Ed. Ronnie D. Lankford. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2007. At Issue. Rpt. from "Are Your Kids Reading Rot?" *Townhall* (16 Aug. 2005). *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

The following article is written by Rebecca Hagelin, author of Home Invasion: Protecting Your Family in a Culture That's Gone Stark Raving Mad and a vice president of communications and marketing at the Heritage Foundation.

Reading isn't always good for our kids.

How's that for an opening sentence to stir a little controversy among the educational elites?

We've been bombarded by so many messages about how reading expands the mind, excites the imagination and enhances the vocabulary (all of which are true) that many parents have forgotten that the benefit of reading for our children very much depends on what they're reading. And, I'm afraid that many children spend hours reading what often turns out to be pure rot.

With school starting all over the country between last week and just after Labor Day, it's time for a reading warning: Parents, beware.

In many cases the very liberal American Library Association, or ALA, exerts great influence over what reading materials teachers assign their students. But that material may be highly inappropriate for your child.

Don't let the following scenario unfold in your home: Mrs. Jones hands out a book report assignment that includes several books for her class to choose from. Mom dutifully drives Suzi to the local library and browses while Suzi selects her book. Within half an hour, book in hand, everyone is feeling rather satisfied that they have been so responsible in starting on the project early. Mom and Suzi arrive home, and while mom begins making dinner, the conscientious and responsible Suzi heads to her room and begins to consume what turns out to be highly sexualized, vulgar garbage, filled with four-letter words and enough verbal porn to embarrass even an ol' salt.

Mom doesn't have a clue that her daughter's innocence has just been molested in the privacy of her own bedroom. She won't ever know because Suzi, a bit stymied by the fact that Mom took her to get a book that her teacher assigned, will be too embarrassed and confused to ever tell. Yet, she's just had sexuality, relationships and acceptable behavior defined for her by some perverted author most folks have never heard of. And the kid was simply trying to get her homework done.

Inappropriate Books for Young Readers

While researching my book, *Home Invasion: Protecting Your Family in a Culture That's Gone Stark Raving Mad*, I took an ALA-recommended reading list for 13- and 14-year-olds to my local library and headed to the "Young Adult" section (code for "pre-teen" and "teen"). I found some books from the list; others were already checked out. One book, the librarian told me, had just been returned, but hadn't been re-shelved, so I patiently waited while she went into the back room to retrieve it.

With several items in hand, I headed back to the Young Adult section, where I couldn't help but notice pre-teen and teen girls and guys in various stages of development and maturity, dutifully searching the shelves for assigned books. I sat down on a reading bench and began flipping through the pages of the book that had just been returned.

There's something very moving about holding a book in your hand that a child has just finished reading. But the warmth in my heart soon turned into a sickening feeling in my gut when I began to read passages so cheap and trashy that I could scarcely believe my eyes. I only had to get to page four before the first of many uses of the term "motherf—" showed up. Several scenes described, in graphic detail, sexual acts between teenagers.

In the interest of decency, there's no way I can give you word-for-word examples. And I refuse to give the trashy book and its loser author free publicity in a column that often gets forwarded around the World Wide Web. I'd rather parents and other adults who care about our children and their education—and whether ... educational elites indoctrinate them in immorality—actually go to their local library and research the reading lists themselves.

Lest you think the first book was put on the list in error, the next recommended teen item I thumbed through was equally as nauseating. A sexual act between fourth-graders was a "highlight," as well as graphic details of sex between teens, including a homosexual encounter. And this is the garbage that today's educators pass off as great literature for our children? The great classics, meanwhile, are all but missing. One list I reviewed for eight-graders contained about 20 authors—none recognizable save the lone great Mark Twain. And they call this education?

The lesson here is simple. Moms and dads: Don't just naively drive your kids to the library—you must be careful to help them choose books that reflect your values. Even if your kids are in private school, you're hardly safe—many of the best schools blindly use ALA lists. Of course, if you home school your kids, you're probably already aware of the moral problems of many ALA decisions, but even if you're using a good curriculum guide, it's always best to preview the books first.

The ALA is quick to call anyone who questions its decisions a "censor." But remember, part of our responsibility and privilege as parents is to be the ones who determine what is and is not appropriate for our own children.

Source B

NCTE. "The Students' Right to Read." *NCTE Comprehensive News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

The following is excerpted from the official statement about censorship from the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE].

The Right to Read

The right to read, like all rights guaranteed or implied within our constitutional tradition, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways, education is an effort to improve the quality of choices open to all students. But to deny the freedom of choice in fear that it may be unwisely used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we respect the right of individuals to be selective in their own reading. But for the same reason, we oppose efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

The right of any individual not just to read but to read whatever he or she wants to read is basic to a democratic society. This right is based on an assumption that the educated possess judgment and understanding and can be trusted with the determination of their own actions. In effect, the reader is freed from the bonds of chance. The reader is not limited by birth, geographic location, or time, since reading allows meeting people, debating philosophies, and experiencing events far beyond the narrow confines of an individual's own existence.

In selecting books for reading by young people, English teachers consider the contribution which each work may make to the education of the reader, its aesthetic value, its honesty, its readability for a particular group of students, and its appeal to adolescents. English teachers, however, may use different works for different purposes. The criteria for choosing a work to be read by an entire class are somewhat different from the criteria for choosing works to be read by small groups.

English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not lie to the young about the perilous but wondrous times we live in, books which talk of the fears, hopes, joys, and frustrations people experience, books about people not only as they are but as they can be. English teachers forced through the pressures of censorship to use only safe or antiseptic works are placed in the morally and intellectually untenable position of lying to their students about the nature and condition of mankind.

The Threat to Education

Censorship leaves students with an inadequate and distorted picture of the ideals, values, and problems of their culture. Writers may often represent their culture, or they may stand to the side and describe and evaluate that culture. Yet partly because of censorship or the fear of censorship, many writers are ignored or inadequately represented in the public schools, and many are represented in anthologies not by their best work but by their "safest" or "least offensive" work.

The censorship pressures receiving the greatest publicity are those of small groups who protest the use of a limited number of books with some "objectionable" realistic elements, such as *Brave New World*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Johnny Got His Gun*, *Catch-22*, *Soul on Ice*, or *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. The most obvious and immediate victims are often found among our best and most creative English teachers, those who have ventured outside the narrow boundaries of conventional texts. Ultimately, however, the real victims are the students, denied the freedom to explore ideas and pursue truth wherever and however they wish.

Great damage may be done by book committees appointed by national or local organizations to pore over anthologies, texts, library books, and paperbacks to find passages which advocate, or seem to advocate, causes or concepts or practices these organizations condemn. As a result, some publishers, sensitive to possible objections, carefully exclude sentences or selections that might conceivably offend some group, somehow, sometime, somewhere.