LESSON (Brief summary)

Raise awareness of First Amendment rights. Encourage understanding about Banned Books.

PRIMARY LEARNING OUTCOME(S)

Students will read critically to understand differing viewpoints.

Students will discuss reasons behind why books are banned.

Students will write a persuasive essay about banned books.

RELATED STATE/DISTRICT STANDARD(S)

Library Media Technology Grade 10-5.1.4 …evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the literature read.

BENCHMARK(S)

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES/ACTIVITIES

*Anticipatory Set*- Questionnaire on Powerpoint about 1st Amendment rights. Discuss results of survey and implications.

*Guided Instruction*- Instruct students to read “Red Flag Warning” independently then read it aloud and pause for discussion and clarification.

Show quotes from ACLU and KidSPEAK and discuss tone and implications.

Read as a class the History of Banned Materials Comic.

Direct Instruction- Librarian discusses banned books and selection policy for library.

Closure-

MATERIALS NEEDED

Banned Books Powerpoint

“Red Flag” article

Comic

List of Banned Books

Library Selection Policy

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Informal assessment of understanding during class discussion. Later, students will write on the topic of banned books using parts of the discussion from today.

American law is, on the whole, the most speech-protective in the world -- but sexual expression is treated as a second-class citizen. No causal link between exposure to sexually explicit material and anti-social or violent behavior has ever been scientifically established, in spite of many efforts to do so. Rather, the Supreme Court has allowed censorship of sexual speech on moral grounds -- a remnant of our nation's Puritan heritage.

<http://www.aclu.org/free-speech/what-censorship>

According to the American Library Association, which tracks such things, the amazing Harry Potter books have achieved yet another first: more people demanded their removal from classrooms, school libraries, and reading lists than any other books in 1999. That fact alone will probably prompt the few kids left who haven't read them to start now.

Adults who object to Harry Potter's wizardry are right to feel threatened. Harry Potter is a magician of incredible power! He turns TV-watchers and video-game players into readers right under their parents noses. Any small boy who can accomplish in one stroke what legions of well-meaning adults haven't been able to do is a small boy to be reckoned with. Maybe he SHOULD be banished!

After all, do we want a country full of little bookworms smuggling flashlights under bedcovers? And after Harry Potter, what then? The doings at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry can't continue forever and we all know where this kind of thing can lead. Just imagine hordes of small book-readers sneaking off to places like Oz, or Camelot, or Lilliput, or Narnia. It bears some thinking about.

Pat Schroeder  
President and CEO

Association of American Publishers

<http://www.kidspeakonline.org/fighthp_defense_A002.html>

[chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com/)

Red flag warning: Teenagers know little about--and put little faith in--America's tattered free speech heritage  
THE 1ST AMENDMENT

A poll of 100,000 high school students

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By Charles M. Madigan   
  
March 20, 2005  
 There's nothing vague about the foundation provided by the 1st Amendment.  
 "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."  
 It's not just a Norman Rockwell painting.  
 It's a guarantee that--short of becoming the cliched fool who shouts "fire" in a crowded theater that is not burning--what you feel you have to say, you can say.  
 The problem is there are cracks in the foundation. Amazingly, a lot of people are confused about the 1st Amendment, particularly a lot of high school students. In a recently released poll, about three in four say they don't know how they feel about the 1st Amendment, or they take it for granted.  
 The Knight Foundation's High School Initiative was aimed at collecting a base line of information on attitudes about the 1st Amendment. Its survey, conducted by the Department of Public Policy at the University of Connecticut, questioned more than 100,000 students, along with faculty and administrators at 544 high schools across the nation.  
 The results show that three in four students think that burning the flag, a time-tested gesture of protest, is illegal (it is not). Half of those students believe the government can censor what is on the Internet (it cannot).  
 And most troubling of all, particularly for advocates of expression, more than a third of those high school students think the 1st Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees.  
 If they carry those attitudes into adulthood, they will undoubtedly join the mass of grown-up Americans who also have little knowledge or little respect for the 1st Amendment. The Knight poll results stand as a waving red flag for supporters of expression in the United States.  
 What happens if you begin editing your complaints, thinking that it's not legal even to raise them?  
What if "petitioning the government" never enters your mind because you didn't know that was an option?  
How could it be that so many young people have become so confused?  
   
 It could be that, given the right attention and the revival of civics as a course and also as a way of life, the gradual erosion of support for the 1st Amendment could be turned around.  
 If it isn't, the teenagers who pay so little attention to this fundamental right might find out later in life that they have problems to address and injustices to protest, but no effective way to do either.

Madigan, Charles M. "Red Flag Warning: Teenagers Know Little About--and Put Little Faith In--America's Tattered Free Speech Heritage." *Chicago Tribune* 20 Mar. 2005. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/perspective/chi-0503200489mar20,1,5814316.story?coll=chi-newsopinionperspective-hed&ctrack=1&cset=true>

ClassKC Point of View

All novels at the ClassKC Books link are listed because they are in use or have been recently used by the Blue Valley district. This list is NOT intended to be misconstrued as books ClassKC wants removed from the curriculum. Some are great books, others are poor choices. Most have been rated by parent reviewers according to the sex, language and/or violence they contain.

The people behind classKC.org are avid book-reading, book-loving Blue Valley parents and patrons. We have nothing to personally gain by doing this. We simply feel that many of the required reading assignments are far from the common sense standards of decency that most Blue Valley parents want for their children, and expect from their school. Why WOULDN’T we ask for the highest quality literature choices for our children??

Listed below are the books banned and why:

* All the Pretty Horses (by: McCarthy)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Animal Dreams (by: Kingsolver)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* The Awakening (by: Chopin)- Wanted Removed for: Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* The Bean Trees (by: Kingsolver)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Beloved (by: Morrison)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Black Boy (by: Wright)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Fallen Angels (by: Myers)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Hot Zone (by: Preston)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings (by: Angelou)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Lords of Discipline (by: Conroy)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (by: Kesey)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Song of Solomon (by: Morrison)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* Stotan (by: Crutcher)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.
* This Boy's Life (by: Wolff)- Wanted Removed for: Profanity, Sexual Content, and Other Adult Content.

Listed Below are the Recommended Replacement Books:

* The Count of Monte Cristo
* David Copperfield
* Don Quixote
* The Good Earth
* Great Expectations
* Ivanhoe
* The Last of the Mohicans
* The Mill on the Floss
* Moby Dick
* The Narrative of Frederick Douglass
* A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
* The Return of the Native
* Robinson Crusoe
* Silas Marnar
* Treasure Island
* Uncle Tom's Cabin

What are the Real Issues? What is Censorship?

It is only the small number of required textbooks that classkc.org has questioned at the Blue Valley school district. classkc.org supports the overall goals of Blue Valley Communication Arts classes which include helping our children develop excellent reading and writing skills as well as a general love of reading. Because we support excellent literature choices, we have questioned some of the low quality, f-word-laden, and sex-filled textbooks. It is not only our right, but also our responsibility, as parents and taxpayers to see that our public school is providing the best education possible, in full compliance to their own policies, and with full disclosure to parents.

Regarding "censorship," the truth is that librarians and teachers constantly censor what our children read. This is required by their jobs as educators, by Blue Valley policies on media and Internet use, and also because they are simply acting as responsible adults. No school can afford to purchase all 15,000 books that are published each year. Librarians censor which books, magazines, movies, and other materials come into the libraries. To a much greater degree, teachers censor out the vast number of books that could be used as required textbooks. To make a statement such as "I am against all censorship" is idiotic. Without censorship, a book such as Madonna's Sex would be just as available to minor children as Stevenson's Treasure Island.

But what has been the response by many educated media, library, and educational "professionals" to our concerns? Disingenuous name calling -- book banner, book burner, and censor. Do they really not understand the truth? Or are they just trying to obscure the discussion of the real issues? We'd prefer to discuss the real issues listed below.

First of all, the debate IS NOT about:

•removing books from the Blue Valley school libraries.

•preventing children from checking books out of the Blue Valley school libraries.

•limiting any child’s “right to read.”

The REAL ISSUES (that the current BOE has mostly refused to address) are:

•what constitutes excellent and age-appropriate literature for required reading assignments.

•using decent and non-sexually provocative literature for required reading assignments

•making parents proactively aware of the 'education' their children are receiving by reading these books, a responsibility that Blue Valley has not owned up to

•holding the school district accountable to their own internal selection policies and patron promises

But isn't Shakespeare also full of objectionable content? Do you also oppose Shakespeare?

This argument is truly a sad one as it shows neither a true understanding of Shakespeare nor a true understanding of the spirit and motives of the classkc.org Web site. Yes, Shakespeare discusses serious subjects such as love, murder, drugs, and violence. But Shakespeare's works contain neither a pervasive nor gratuitous amount of sex, violence, or vulgarity. They do not teach our children about new types of sex nor do they invoke sexually stimulating feelings through explicit passages. Unlike many of our other books, a student or teacher who "talks like Shakespeare" would not be breaking other Blue Valley codes of conduct nor would they be kicked out of school for sexual harassment. Shakespeare's characters do not go through undeveloped, implausible, unresolved, vulgar, sexually-charged, and otherwise morally repugnant storylines found in some of the other books on the required reading list. As Shakespeare's characters work through their humorous, tragic, or dramatic roles, they teach us something about true character and a tremendous amount about the art of creative writing. No, we do not oppose Shakespeare. We consider his works to be an obvious cornerstone of a fundamentally sound education in English literature.

If we take a book out of the REQUIRED curriculum, that is censorship, right?

This flawed excuse displays ignorance about the word "censorship." It also supports an abdication of the fundamental responsibilities of our educator. First of all, classkc.org has never suggested that books should be removed from libraries or that any parent who wants their child to read a particular book should not be allowed to do so. Keeping parents IN the loop on the actual education of their children so they they CAN choose the best books for their children is one of the goals of classkc.org. We obviously wouldn't need to tell you about the content in the assigned books at Blue Valley if the school was proactively informing parents about these subjects themselves! Besides, each public school library, and to a much greater extent, each teacher and class, must block out the vast number of books that are available because money and time only allow a given number of titles to be purchased for the libraries and a tiny fraction of that to be studied in class. So who is "the censor?"

What we HAVE asked is that our Communication Arts (English) classes use the highest quality literature for their intended purpose available. Asking for higher quality textbooks when the existing learning resources have so many negative influences on teens (for example f-words, sex, and suicides) is not only a logical reaction to the problem, it's our responsiblity as parents and patrons. Settling for anything less in our prosperous school system would be pure laziness. In this pursuit for excellence in literature, we fail to see how a vulgar and sexually stimulating book such as Song of Solomon serves as a valid resource for any of the Blue Valley Communication Arts course objectives.

Furthermore, removing a textbook from the curriculum and replacing it with a better textbook is not censorship, it's our obligation to our children which is based on common sense. Anyone using the word "censorship" to describe the goals of classkc.org is using hysterics in order to hide from the real issues we are attempting to discuss -- an honest discussion about the content and messages many books are promoting, and how that relates to the mental and physical health of our minor children. Unfortunately, however, to date, Blue Valley continues to refuse to address this fundamental question of HOW their selected books are actually age appropriate for the minor children that are required to read these books, even though their own internal policies promise the public that the age of the child is examined every time a book is selected for the classroom. Unfortunately, that has NEVER happened. The age of the child being asked to read a book has not been addressed in ANY of the documentation used to support the selection of the current novels. To date, Blue Valley continues to REFUSE to document their decision process regarding this important criterion.

There are MANY EXCELLENT classic and contemporary books that are filtered out of our children's education because the school continues to insist on promoting books with sexually deviant and vulgar storylines. With the time to read only a tiny sliver of the available great literature, why WOULDN'T we insist on the highest quality books reasonably available? We are currently far from that common sense standard

Responses from the discussion board

To whom it may concern:

I feel compelled to contribute to this debate from the perspective of an English teacher. Apparently it is assumed that we as English teachers are complete bumbling fools who have trouble distinguishing between our right and left hands. I hope this is not your true belief. I am writing to state clearly and definitively that my colleagues and I are professionals who care deeply about what we do. We do not make decisions haphazardly or based on the level of shock and controversy we can whip up. We feel that life is greatly improved if intellectual, artistic, sometimes troubling literature is examined closely. Life isn't limited to clearly defined moral boundaries and neither should the study of literature be.

Also, please don't confuse reading levels with intended audience. I'm not sure of the validity of your reading level data, but I do know that it has nothing to do with the intellectual content in many of the novels you mention. As an example, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is written in a simple narrative style yet is intended for advanced analytical thinkers (when satirical content and thematic issues are considered). The web site seems to indicate that a 6.2 or a 7.3 level means something. In the case of most of these books, it doesn't.

Lastly, please read the books in question and try to understand the events of the novels in context. Examine the questionable passages as part of a tapestry of meaning rather than a thread of immorality.

*classkc.org:* We are glad you felt "compelled" to enter the debate on the books in Blue Valley schools. Dialogue like this is the essence of democracy and one of the keys to effective schools.

Effective schools should be the focus of this debate. The question is very simply, "What avenues of learning will challenge our best and brightest to a lifetime of learning and excellent achievement?" We believe the books in question do not represent our best hope for a positive answer to the rhetorical question.

We find the listed books are dull, unrealistic, full of questionable thinking about real life issues and would not be read at all without the sensational content. Further, many of the books expose young people to heavy themes with moral implications to be discussed in a "morally neutral" setting. We simply believe it is the role of a parent to define and discuss moral content of this nature, not our schools. In our mind, these books are bad literature, masquerading under the guise of multiculturalism, sensationalism and "art". We don't believe these books tell our students anything about real life other than some authors have vivid imaginations.

We are sorry that you are led to believe that we perceive all English teachers to be "bumbling fools, not knowing their right hand from their left." Nothing could be further from the truth. We have found all people at the center of this controversy to be intelligent and confident in their worldview. We simply have a different perspective. Our intent and our views have not always been accurately characterized in the media coverage.

*English teacher:* I thank you for your kind reply. I would, however, like to pose some questions and a few rejoinders to you. First, do you think that you, as a parent, should decide what books schools teach? Have you read the books in question? Do you consider yourself schooled sufficiently in artistic literature so that you can make an informed decision? Does such schooling even matter to you? You stated that some of the books don't represent reality. I would challenge you to think outside of your own reality. I can't imagine what the bombing of Dresden would have been like (Slaughterhouse Five) or what being an African American would be like (Beloved) or what being an adolescent lesbian would be like (Annie on My Mind). I can, however, read about those situations, think critically about them, then reject, embrace, or feel neutrality toward them. These issues are, to me, what real life is. The study of literature must embrace the open discussion of viewpoints outside of our own.

A good education creates a well-rounded human being: a kind, informed, open-minded individual. Limiting what students see doesn't do them any favors. It won't end drug use, teen pregnancy, or curb violence. If anything, open discussions in classrooms may help those problems. I worry that a curriculum limited by the moral guidance of a few like-minded individuals might create a superficial, 1950's-style understanding of life, art, and literature. My goal is not to convert anyone. My goal is to defend the rights of those who wish to keep ideas in the classroom free and flowing.

*classkc.org:* Thank you for the tone and tenor of your messages. This is the kind of dialogue that is meaningful.

In answer to your questions, parents should have the ultimate say in how their children are educated. We delegate the education of our children to the state which is accountable to us for the results. We pay for the schools.

I must remind you that public education on a scale that we currently experience is a recent experiment. Most of our founding fathers and the great men of history were not products of public education. It is not a panacea.

Yes, we have read the books in question along with more of the alternatives that are suggested on the ClassKC web site. Yes, we consider ourselves sufficiently schooled to evaluate literature critically. We have graduate and post graduate degrees from many different universities and colleges throughout the country. We have been taught how to think, critically evaluate ideas and parent children, of which we have many. Most of us went to public schools, K through 12, and have children who have graduated from both public and private undergraduate schools. Some of our children have already gone on to get college degrees.

We have been exposed to education sufficiently to evaluate the relative merits of literature. Are we to assume from your question that only the educational elite know what is best for our children? We agree that reading about culturally and historically diverse situations are helpful to the rounding of an individual. But as a professional educator, you know that not all literature is equal and some works are not credible at all. It is not just the prolific profanity or the pornography in these books that make them abusive to children. It is the promotion of ideas (particularly in the area of sexual values and attitudes) that we believe are harmful and detract our students from a more enlightened understanding of human nature that we find most objectionable. Good, well rounded exposure to literature is desirable. We do not believe these books accomplish these goals. If it is Afro-centric literature that is desirable, why not read books written by and about former slaves such as Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, Harriet Tubman, etc. rather than Toni Morrison? She was never a slave and seems only interested in the prurient side of black culture. You can't tell us that all black cultures in the 1920's were consumed with sexuality as is implied in Song of Solomon.

Have you read this book? Our perspective is broader than the last 50 years. We are not trying to return America to the 1950's, which we don't believe were all that wholesome. We simply have a vision of education that challenges our children to bring out their best, respects the worldview of all parents and does not sink to the lowest common denominator in order to hold their interest. Is it the role of schools to introduce students to challenging moral content in a "morally neutral" environment? We did not think schools were supposed to be about morality and religion as an emphasis. We question the intellectual honesty of a system that rejects books because of heavy religious and moral themes, then embraces literature on the other end of the continuum.

Your goal to defend the free-flow of ideas has merit, but you would agree that it must be age-appropriate. Even though many of these books are written on an elementary school level, the themes are too mature for fifth graders. We believe these books open up themes that are not appropriate for our high school students. You have no data to support your assertion that exposure to these books lessens a student's tendency to adopt risky behavior.

We believe we have ample data and the weight of common sense that indicates just the opposite. Thank you for your continued dialogue with us. We appreciate you taking the time to listen and to share your thinking with us.

*ClassKC.org - Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools.* 2005. Web. 15 Sept. 2011. <http://www.classkc.org/>.