**Intellectual Freedom and the Banning of Books**

**What is intellectual freedom?**
Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a debate, cause or movement may be explored. Intellectual freedom encompasses the freedom to hold, receive and disseminate ideas.

**What is censorship?**
Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons, individuals, groups, or government officials – find objectionable or dangerous.

Censorship can also be self-imposed. When teachers or librarians avoid selecting good books, specifically because they fear public reaction to the material, they are self-censoring. Parents may self-censor the media or reading materials that come into a home so their children are not exposed to ideas that are contrary to family values. Individuals may self-censor based upon their individual preferences. For instance, a child may not like scary stories and may chose to ignore books from that genre of literature.

**What is the difference between challenging and banning a book?**
- A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. This could be a formal protest, a media campaign, or a letter from a parent to a teacher or librarian.
- Banning is the removal of those materials from a classroom or library.

**Why are books censored?**
The top three reasons, in order, for challenging material are that the material is:

- considered to be “sexually explicit,”
- contains “offensive language,”
- or is “unsuited to age group.”

According to the American Library Association, between 2001 and 2009, American libraries were faced with 4,312 challenges.

- 1,413 challenges due to “sexually explicit” material
- 1,125 challenges due to “offensive language”
- 897 challenges due to material deemed “unsuited to age group”
- 514 challenges due to “violence”
- 344 challenges due to “homosexuality”

Further, 109 materials were challenged because they were “anti-family,” and an additional 269 were challenged because of their “religious viewpoints.”
1,502 of these challenges (approximately 34%) were in classrooms; 33% were in school libraries; 23% (or 1,032) took place in public libraries. There were 100 challenges to college classes; and only 29 to academic libraries. There are isolated cases of challenges to materials made available in or by prisons, special libraries, community groups, and student groups. The majority of challenges were initiated by parents (almost exactly 48%), while patrons and administrators followed behind (10% each).

The American Library Association reports the top 10 challenged books in 2009 were:

1. **TTYL; TTFN; L8R, G8R** (series), by Lauren Myracle  
   Reasons: Nudity, Sexually Explicit, Offensive Language, Uns suited to Age Group, Drugs
2. **“And Tango Makes Three”** by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson  
   Reasons: Homosexuality
3. **“The Perks of Being A Wallflower,”** by Stephen Chbosky  
   Reasons: Homosexuality, Sexually Explicit, Anti-Family, Offensive Language, Religious Viewpoint, Uns suited to Age Group, Drugs, Suicide
4. **“To Kill A Mockingbird,”** by Harper Lee  
   Reasons: Racism, Offensive Language, Uns suited to Age Group
5. **Twilight** (series) by Stephenie Meyer  
   Reasons: Sexually Explicit, Religious Viewpoint, Uns suited to Age Group
6. **“Catcher in the Rye,”** by J.D. Salinger  
   Reasons: Sexually Explicit, Offensive Language, Uns suited to Age Group
7. **“My Sister’s Keeper,”** by Jodi Picoult  
   Reasons: Sexism, Homosexuality, Sexually Explicit, Offensive Language, Religious Viewpoint, Uns suited to Age Group, Drugs, Suicide, Violence
8. **“The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big, Round Things,”** by Carolyn Mackler  
   Reasons: Sexually Explicit, Offensive Language, Uns suited to Age Group
9. **“The Color Purple,”** by Alice Walker  
   Reasons: Sexually Explicit, Offensive Language, Uns suited to Age Group
10. **“The Chocolate War,”** by Robert Cormier  
    Reasons: Nudity, Sexually Explicit, Offensive Language, Uns suited to Age Group

**ALA Library Bill of Rights**

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
V. A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

**NCTE Students’ Right to Read**
The National Council for Teacher Education believe it is 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.

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. 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.

**NCTE Guideline on Defining and Defending Instructional Methods**
Literature instruction that starts with students' responses to texts adds personal relevance as well as depth and breadth to their understanding of those texts.

The student/teacher community of interpreters develops knowledge by talking and writing about their reactions to a wide variety of texts. Through exploration of their own perspectives and those of others, students can better understand themselves and their worlds, even as they cultivate increasingly sophisticated reading skills.

**Handling a Challenge**
It is essential that the school or library have a written policy on selection of materials and on how challenges are handled. Every teacher should be aware of this policy.

*When you are faced with a challenge as a teacher:*
- listen and acknowledge the complainant’s concern
- sometimes they only want to be heard
- ask if they have read the materials in question in their entirety
- stay calm and offer a copy of your school policy on challenges
- make the complainant aware of the reconsideration procedure
Selection policy
It is imperative to have a selection and reconsideration policy in place prior to any reconsideration attempt. Sometimes the policy is the responsibility of the school, the department, the teachers of a grade, or an individual teacher. It is also important that the policy is open enough to allow for changes and to provide the teacher with some professional discretion in selection.

A selection policy often includes a rationale or the articulation of the reasons for using a particular literary work, film, or teaching method. Minimally, a rationale should include:

- a bibliographic citation and the intended audience
- a brief summary of the work and its educational significance
- the purposes of using the work and how it will be used
- potential problems with the work and how these can be handled
- alternative works an individual student might read or view

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