

Should Schools Be Allowed To Ban Books?

In a democratic society, individuals can freely express their opinions and have unrestricted access to information. However, this freedom is often tested in schools, where administrators may restrict or ban certain books in the curriculum. The inquiry that emerges is whether educational institutions should have the authority to prohibit certain books. There exists a debate regarding the necessity of safeguarding students from potentially harmful content, with some contending that censorship infringes upon their right to access information. In this essay, I will argue that schools should not be allowed to ban books. While there are certainly valid concerns about the appropriateness of certain materials, banning books is ultimately a misguided and harmful practice that undermines the educational mission of schools. While there are concerns about inappropriate content in books, schools should not be allowed to ban books because it undermines the educational mission of schools, violates students' First Amendment rights, and is often arbitrary and subjective.

Educational institutions are responsible for imparting knowledge and equipping students with the necessary skills to confront the obstacles they may encounter in their future endeavors. This necessitates providing individuals with exposure to a diverse array of concepts and viewpoints, including those that some may deem contentious or discomfiting. The prohibition of books restricts students' exposure to significant and varied viewpoints, impeding their cognitive development (National Council of Teachers of English). The absence of exposure to diverse perspectives and ideas impedes students' ability to think critically about their surroundings. Restricting students' access to particular books indicates schools' inability to effectively carry out

their educational mandate, including equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate a multifaceted and heterogeneous society (Palmer).

Prohibiting books within educational institutions also transgresses students' First Amendment rights. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution ensures the entitlement to unrestricted speech and expression, encompassing the privilege to peruse and obtain information without censorship. The freedom to read is a crucial aspect of our democratic society. The issue of censorship poses a persistent threat to intellectual freedom (“Book Banning”). Educational institutions, being governmental establishments, are obligated by the Constitution to safeguard these entitlements. Prohibiting books within educational institutions can be interpreted as censorship, which may impede students' capacity to participate in intellectual investigation and discovery.

The imposition of censorship policies within educational institutions restricts students' ability to obtain crucial information fundamental to their academic development. Censorship refers to restraining ideas and information deemed objectionable or hazardous by certain individuals, groups, or government officials (Palmer). Prohibiting books in schools can impede the dissemination of ideas and knowledge, potentially leading to significant repercussions for students. Suppose a student desires to explore diverse viewpoints on a contentious matter. In that case, the school's prohibition of literature addressing said topic might impede their ability to do so (“Book Banning”). This phenomenon may result in a limited perspective towards acquiring knowledge and a deficiency in the capacity to analyse intricate matters with a critical lens. In addition, educational institutions are obligated to equip their pupils with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of contemporary society, and the practice of censorship fails to fulfil this objective.

Banning books is often an arbitrary and subjective practice open to abuse. The criteria for determining which books are appropriate are often vague and inconsistent. This can lead to banned books for trivial or nonsensical reasons. For example, in 2016, a school in North Carolina banned the use of Ralph Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man* because it was not aligned with the school system and its goals (Kellogg). Such arbitrary and subjective bans can limit students' access to essential and valuable literature and create a chilling effect on intellectual inquiry and free expression.

Although it is comprehensible that educational institutions are responsible for maintaining communal standards, censorship is not a viable resolution. There is a viewpoint that advocates for the prohibition of certain books as a means of safeguarding children from potentially detrimental material. According to a New York Times article, a school in Texas banned a book titled "The True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" because it contained "profanity, references to alcohol, and sexual situations." The school district defended its decision, stating it was responsible for "upholding community values" (Alter and Harris).

While this argument is understandable, it ultimately falls short for several reasons. First, it assumes that children cannot handle complex or controversial material, which is a patronizing and simplistic view of young people. Secondly, it fails to acknowledge the obligation of parents and educators to provide guidance and assistance to children as they encounter complicated subject matter rather than completely sheltering them from it. Finally, it assumes a clear and objective line between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" material, which is not always the case (National Council of Teachers of English). As previously stated, censorship limits students' access to information and intellectual freedom, which is essential for academic and personal growth.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that community values are not static and may undergo modifications as time progresses. By banning books that do not align with current values, schools deny students the opportunity to explore different perspectives and develop their values (The Learning Network). Rather than resorting to censorship, educational institutions should promote an environment fostering open discourse and cultivating critical thinking skills regarding challenging subjects.

Rather than implementing book bans, educational institutions should offer assistance and resources to students and parents to help them effectively navigate complex subject matter. Diverse approaches can address this issue, such as facilitating entry to supplementary resources, fostering avenues for discourse and exchange, and engaging guardians and instructors in decision-making (“Book Banning”). Through guidance and support, educational institutions can facilitate the cultivation of critical thinking abilities among students, enabling them to effectively engage with complex subject matter in a conscientious and well-informed manner. As per the NCTE's position statement on intellectual freedom, it is recommended that students be granted the autonomy to investigate a wide range of concepts and determine their reading preferences while adhering to the guidance provided by educators, guardians, and library personnel (National Council of Teachers of English).

In addition, providing guidance and support enables a more sophisticated strategy for dealing with conceivably contentious content. Schools can utilise an age-appropriate curriculum instead of outright banning a book and provide context for sensitive topics (“Book Banning”). Introducing books that address challenging themes, such as racism or mental health, through deliberate discussion and guided reading can potentially enhance students' critical thinking, empathy and comprehension (Alter and Harris).

Additionally, by involving parents and educators in the decision-making process, schools can ensure that concerns about appropriateness are addressed collaboratively and transparently (Kellogg). This allows for a balanced approach that respects the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders. The goal should involve parents and educators in decision-making about instructional material while ensuring their opinions do not unreasonably restrict access to diverse ideas.

In summary, it is recommended that educational institutions refrain from prohibiting access to certain literary works. The prohibition of books undermines the educational objectives of academic institutions, contravenes the First Amendment rights of learners, and is frequently capricious and open to interpretation. Rather than punitive, educational institutions should offer assistance and encouragement to enable learners to effectively navigate complex subjects, cultivate analytical skills, and attain a more profound comprehension of the global landscape. Schools can create a conducive environment that values intellectual freedom and promotes personal growth by facilitating dialogue, engaging parents and educators, and implementing an age-appropriate curriculum. As individuals involved in education and committed to promoting learning, we must acknowledge the significance of having access to a wide range of viewpoints and concepts, even if they may be challenging or contentious.

References

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