



Written Language:

Storing knowledge

Ban it!

Some people argue that any censorship is bad. If you censor what people read you censor what they think. Who would be happy for the government to do that?

Others argue that censorship protects people from ideas which might be harmful. A book which encourages racial or religious hatred does no good. And would you like to see books that explain how to make a bomb in your local bookshop or supermarket?

In this lesson you will work in groups of four to look at the issues of censorship. You will be put in home groups to start by your teacher.

Censorship: abusing freedom or protecting us all?

1 In your home group:

Give each person one of the four cards.

Read your card to find out which issue you will be discussing.

Find the other members of the class who have the same issue card as you.

2 In your expert group:

Discuss the questions on your issue card.

You may find it useful to note down the main points - you will need to explain these to your home group when you return.

3 Return to your home group:

Report back on the ideas from your issue group.

Listen as other members of your home group describe their experiences in their expert groups.

Now carry out the task described below. Try to draw on all the good ideas that you have gained from the issue groups across the class.

4 Working in a group, prepare a piece for a newspaper that looks at the issues of censorship. The article must present arguments for and against the statement: 'Censorship of books is censorship of our freedom to think! It should never be allowed.'

The article must contain two pieces of writing. Each piece should be between 200 and 220 words and must be a campaigning piece arguing for, or against, the statement above. You can work in two subgroups to produce the pieces or work together.

Everyone must agree that the points made are fair and respectful of other opinions. But you do not have to agree with everything written!

Ban it! Censorship opinions

Banning books? You've got to be mad!

In the US a citizen can complain about a book in their local school or town library. If their complaint, or 'challenge', is upheld the book will be banned. So, are people banning books about how to build an atom bomb? Or how to steal money from little old ladies? No, the books that these concerned citizens ban include the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling and James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl! And, of course, the books are only banned from schools and libraries. People with enough money can buy them from their local bookshop any way. Banning books? It's mad! Better to allow free speech and live with the consequences.

- Because some people ban books for silly reasons does this mean all censorship is wrong?
- Which sorts of books do you think should be banned?
- Are books really so powerful that we need to be protected from them?

'Where people start burning books it is not long before bodies are next.'

In 1933, Nazi students made bonfires of books they decided were unsuitable. Some of these may have contained ideas about all people having equal rights - a terribly dangerous thought to the Nazis! But some were books like The call of the wild by Jack London. This is a book about a dog who joins a wolf pack! And where did this censorship of free speech and thought lead? Was it really to the death camps of Auschwitz and Belsen where millions of innocent people were killed?

- The Nazis started burning books. Is there really a connection between burning books and burning people?
- Are some books so dangerous that they must be banned?
- Are some books so evil that their authors should be killed or imprisoned?

How to blow up a train - a guide for terrorists

Far-fetched? Not really. Leaflets and pamphlets showing how to make bombs and where to plant them already exist. Would you like these books in your local shop or library? Of course not! Censorship of some kind is needed to protect us all. Sometimes people take banning too far but don't allow freedom of speech to become an argument for allowing these dangerous texts onto the street. Banning of books that encourage terrorism or promote racial or religious hatred is a good thing.

- Which is a greater threat to our freedom - books about making bombs or rules that allow governments to ban books that they do not like?
- Is censorship always a bad thing?
- Who should decide which books should be banned?

'Until lions have historians tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.'

This African proverb means that the writers of histories, and books, are the powerful leaders. When a book is produced that challenges their right to run the world their way the first response is often to ban it. Official histories are common in places like China and communist Russia. Even in the UK a book called The Rights of Man by Thomas Paine was banned in 1791. Even to own the book was considered treason - which carried a death sentence! The book contained ideas like 'all men are born equal'. This later turned up in the American Constitution! A free exchange of ideas through books and the printed word is no threat to a democratic government but frightens dictators everywhere. Books are powerful weapons in the fight against oppression - they should never be banned.

- Should any books be banned?
- Who should decide if a book should be banned?
- What should governments be allowed to do to authors and publishers of banned books?