

*Censorship in American Public Schools; Two Examples:  
The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

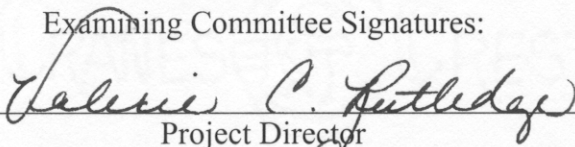
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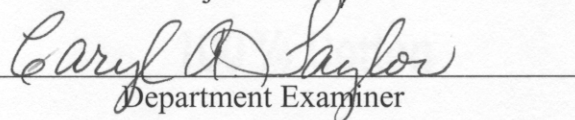
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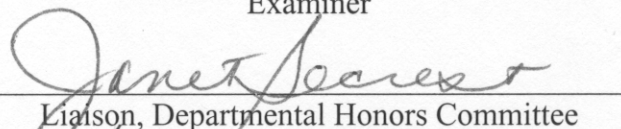
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**Purpose**

Censorship is apparent in a variety of domains such as music, television, politics, news, and books. The purpose of this study is to examine censorship through texts in secondary English classrooms. By studying the history and reasons for censorship of two American classic novels, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye, one may see these patterns of censored texts as they have evolved over the last century. The study will examine what is censored and who the censors are by concentrating on issues of language, sexuality, and racism.

**Introduction**

Censorship is an issue that has been debated for many years. Society places importance on censoring certain materials; public schools do as well. Furthermore, public schools play a large part in censoring books. Therefore studying the role that schools play in censoring provides information about censoring in general. Social climate frequently changes. Furthermore, society is often guided by trends and fads. While public schools are not separate from society, they are more or less stable because of tradition. Often public schools values are closely related to the community of which they are a part. Because of this relationship with community values, a school may censor due to concerns from its community.

Public schools contribute to the communities of which they are a part by providing a sense of unity and promoting tolerance and understanding. Author,

Donna Demac claims, "since its origin in the nineteenth century, American public school education has had as one of its primary goals the assimilation of diverse peoples and the teaching of social tolerance" (Demac 7). Censorship may contradict this goal by preventing students to being exposed to multiple opinions, lifestyles, and cultures. Therefore one of the goals of public schools is oppose of it actions such as censorship. Literature is a primary avenue through which young people are exposed to and learn about other cultures. Yet banning books can potentially impact public schools in a manner that limits students. Teachers may suffer a loss or at least a limitation of their academic freedom when censorship enters a classroom. A large concern of teachers is that "the freedom of professional classroom teachers to design and implement curriculum must be protected as censorship undermines the creation of an informed citizenry able to make critical judgments among competing ideas" (Carey-Webb 23). Curriculums that are not censored reflect the world's diversity and offer students the chance to broaden their knowledge of other people and cultures.

### *A Brief History of Censorship*

To fully understand censorship, one must establish a working definition. Henry Reichman, author of Censorship and Selection: Issues and Answers for Schools, defines censorship as, "the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of literary, artistic, or educational materials--of images, ideas, and information--on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of standards applied by the censor"(Reichman 2). For the purpose of this study, the term "censor" refers to any person or group that attempts to withhold or deny the author's original words

or intent of a literary work.

The word "censor" originally derives from the Latin word *censere*, meaning "to value or tax" (McKeon xi). The first known censor, Comitia Centuriata, established the office of censor in 443 B.C. (War xiv). This official with his chosen officers prepared censures for the Roman Empire, who "were magistrates who not only took a register of the number and property of citizens, but also exercised the office of inspectors of morals and conduct" (McKeon xii). Today, the role of censors (parents, teachers, and children) has evolved into one who exercises power over the public with specifications and tight control on written material in order to accept socially accepted conduct and morals.

#### *First occurrence of Censorship in America*

For centuries books have been challenged, burned, and censored according to the moral constraints of various segments of American society. The first book burning in America took place on October 19, 1650, in Colonial Massachusetts. William Pynchon published his pamphlet *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption* that dealt with the doctrine of atonement. After its publication, the General Court confiscated his written work and sentenced the book to be burned (War 14). Even after the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were established, the right of free speech was still being denied, as evidenced by the many examples of censorship in American public schools. Today there are still censorship patterns in American society.

#### **Censors**

Throughout literary history, various groups have sought to censor pieces of

written material for a variety of reasons. Literature dealing with alternative sexuality and profanity is often censored by school authority figures. A school district may decide to censor a novel or text due to past controversy from censors toward the piece. For instance, "school boards that engage in censorship often seek to ensure a conformity of ideas by eliminating controversial texts" (Maxwell 92). A teacher or a student may be at a standstill because he/she is only viewing one side of the spectrum. In Tulsa Public School System, a film and collection of poetry by an African-American were censored in the early 1980s. This specific racially fueled aggression caused negative attention within the school system. Writer Larry Zenke reports, "like most civil wars, there is no winner but much damage. The most insidious was the spread of suspicion and lack of trust in the curricula of the district" (36). Obviously, a region of the country may censor a topic due to race, ethnic groups, or other types of discrimination.

While censors are sometimes assumed to be negative, their mission is often well meaning. Censoring is also a right guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. American citizens are guaranteed the right to decide what they wish to view or read. Furthermore, this idea extends to parents when dealing with minors. Censorship reflects a real concern of parents and educators. Public schools also need to protect minors for which they are responsible. Sometimes in an effort to protect students, educators try to shelter them from ideas, language, and sexuality by censoring the literature to which they are exposed. These efforts are sometimes misguided.

Public Schools' main mission is to educate each child to the best of the school's ability. Therefore, if a parent believes his/her child is not receiving the education he/she desires, then the parent has a right to alert the school. This exerts pressure on the schools and teachers to comply with the parent's wishes. However, when acting on these concerns it may jeopardize another student's education, censorship has a negative effect. The justifications for censoring literature in schools do not outweigh the negative aspects of censorship.

### *Teachers as Censors*

An individual teacher may decide to censor a particular novel in a classroom because of controversial ideas or words in that work. A review of the history of banning specific works in schools reveals that, "even when the censors lose or even when a particular book-banning campaign has ended, educators may still be inclined to engage in self-censorship to avoid trouble" (Demac 14). People for the American Way, a progressive organization for ending censorship, claim that self-censorship is an increasing problem facing teachers in their classrooms. (Attacks 6). Yet, the difficulty with self-censorship is that it is hard to document. Often teachers are not prone to talk about their self-censorship with their colleagues. Furthermore, they may not even be aware that they are intentionally censoring a work in the classroom (Noll 59).

Teachers in nearly every school system further realize the potential professional danger of teaching semi-banned novels. A semi-banned novel is a book verbally placed by a censor on the caution list. This is in contrast to a banned novel,

where there is legal documentation and the book has been completely removed from a reading list for the school district. Even if the censorship does not draw national attention, a teacher may still 'self-censor' and decide to avoid huge controversy and teach another, less debated book. Noll agrees for she writes, "newly hired teachers [in Arizona] are instructed or strongly cautioned against using certain literature in their classrooms" (60). Education has frequently been impacted by societal politics when educators establish an appropriate reading list. People for the American Way, claim:

It [censorship] severely damages the morale of the education establishment, tears apart opposing segments of the community, and weakens the foundation upon which strong, high quality education is built. It affects the types of materials teachers and librarians will select in the future, leading them to "self-censor" in order to avoid using something even remotely controversial (Attacks 31).

If teachers' main responsibilities involve teaching and expanding a child's mind, why do they sometimes choose to self-censor the novels taught in their classrooms? People for the American Way answer this obvious question by asserting that, "while these teachers should be applauded for standing up for academic freedom and the freedom of speech, their efforts are often met with reprimands rather than rewards" (Attacks 30). Sometimes the attention educators receive is negative when teachers study banned books. While educators often seek their coworkers' advice, they sometimes fail to communicate about certain issues such as censorship. Noll writes, "...there are few opportunities for teachers to discuss censorship concerns and potential challenges of literature. Feelings of isolation and

vulnerability, common to many teachers, become intensified when censorship threatens" (63). Noll may be suggesting that censorship issues are serious therefore teachers feel hesitant to who they speak to about their professional concerns. In a faculty setting, a primary objective is to work together for the good of the students. Yet whether teachers censor or their work is being censored, the teacher is ostracized from his or her coworkers. The teacher's mandate to educate and expand a child's mind is sometimes affected by the desire of that individual to ensure his/her own job security. The entire community is closely watching educators to determine whether their methods are suitable for the students. Daily newspapers across the nation are covering the roles that schools play in children's lives. Furthermore, many groups and organizations put pressure upon teachers. These groups may be a combination of parents, churches, or other community leaders. Noll further notes:

Even when censorship does not originate from within a school, in fact even when no controversy exists, there is pressure for teachers to align themselves with the views of the powers that be. Those who rock the boat or question the status quo are viewed as troublemakers. Being "good" teachers-like being good students-often means accepting the authority of others, not resisting or challenging it (63).

Not only does censorship rob students of the freedom to read without restrictions, but it can also inhibit teacher's right to educate by using materials that offer a wide range of information and perspectives.

#### *Parents as Censors*

Censorship is also a battle fought by parents wishing to censor novels within public schools. Often, a parent may seek to censor or limit a child's access to certain

works because of objectionable material. While a parent may have a child's best interest at heart, this challenge will affect other parents. In Zenke's article, "School Book Selection: Procedures, Challenges, and Responses" the author suggests that parents may choose what their child reads but not other children. He writes, "parents have the right to participate in selecting materials to be used by their own children so long as they do not dictate what children of other parents may read, see, or discuss" (36). However, it appears impossible to limit the exposure of one child to certain material without having an impact on other children as well. All parents have a right to monitor what their individual child reads; however, the parent may not infringe upon someone else's right to learn. The right to learn and be educated is at stake. In the past couple of decades, the power that parents possess to veto books within a school system, libraries, and individual classrooms has drastically increased (Demac 11). Parents are becoming more involved in their child's education. Yet with such a vast array of differing opinions and standards, what will be the aftermath after the parents are satisfied?

#### *Librarians as Censors*

Finally, a librarian may choose to censor material as a result of complaints from teachers, principals, parents, students, and/or other groups. With most schools facing tight budgets and being forced to make decisions about expeditors of funds, librarians may choose to purchase "safe" material as opposed to commonly challenged materials. In her article, "What Johnny Can't Read: Censorship in American Libraries," Suzanne Staples claims librarian censorship is growing at a

seriously astounding rate:

By far the most common type of censorship involves books quietly disappearing from libraries. Sometimes a parent who objects to a book but doesn't want to go through a formal challenge just slips it off the shelf. Frequently a librarian who may fear for her job removes a book that has become controversial. Because of the nature of "stealth censorship," it is difficult to document and impossible to quantify (Staples).

In 1980 the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the Association of American Publishers (AAP), and the American Library Association (ALA) conducted a national survey concerning censorship. The survey which received a return rate of 75 per cent out of 2,500 distributed, included responses from librarians, school principals, and district superintendents from all 50 United States. Librarians reported that they censored more than the teachers did. In effect, librarians removed many challenged novels from their shelves without legal or school district official action forcing such action. However librarians were not acting alone; the survey reports that "school personnel initiated more than 30 percent of the incidents [of censorship] reported" (Reichman 9). One decade after this survey was conducted, the numbers for censorship continued to increase. Between 1991 to 1994, written demands from censors to remove books from public school libraries skyrocketed by 50 percent (Staples).

### *Effects of Censorship on Students*

What lessons are children learning when they see the uncertainty and uneasiness of administrators, school boards, and teachers? Students watch how authority figures react in censorship battles. Author Carey-Webb discusses school

officials, parents, and students' perception to banning The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn in his article, "Racism and Huckleberry Finn: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change." He remarks that in November 1991 he noticed a racial battle building between Caucasians and African-Americans in a high school near the University of Michigan. Furthermore, he notes that both white and black students felt equally as frustrated in this matter. Many students saw that "parents were angry with teachers, teachers felt threatened and misunderstood, administrators went in various directions but failed to follow policies already in place, and students were alienated from the school and from one another" (Carey-Webb 23). As a result, the students saw how one challenged novel could affect other social and political areas in their lives.

Many groups debate the pros and cons of censorship. People for the American Way, a progressive organization, strongly discourages censorship. This vocal group believes that students are greatly damaged in this war on words. They note:

The primary losers in these battles are three: parents, whose children are denied access to ideas and materials because of the ideological and sectarian controversies being generated; teachers, who are increasingly subjected to intimidation and harassment and who, therefore, second-guess themselves and cleanse their classrooms of anything that might be "controversial"; and, most importantly, schoolchildren themselves, whose access to a quality education is invariably diminished by these ideological and sectarian demands...As a result students are being denied the resources they need to develop the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly complex society (Attacks 8).

The People for the American Way think that censors are robbing children of the opportunity to think and read for themselves. Wayne Booth maintains that truth can

only be obtained when ideas may be freely explored without constraints (155). The process of banning books is tantamount to stripping a growing mind of educational rights and liberties. When books are censored, students are sometimes denied the opportunity to learn to confront new ideas. Reichman suggests that students see “suppression” as the answer to “responding to controversial ideas and images” (3). Unknowingly, adults are sometimes delivering an extremely powerful message of submission and fear to children by allowing censorship to happen. It may be argued that the struggle adults go through with censorship is as negative as ideas being censored in books.

In Noll’s article “The Ripple Effect of Censorship: Silencing in the Classroom” she asks if, “By providing access only to that literature that does not discuss sex, politics, violence, or question the role of the adult, what are we doing to children's minds?” (62). Many teachers express frustration and concern at denying their students the opportunity to learn to think for themselves. For example, one Nashville, Tennessee, teacher had literature in his classroom censored by the school system. The conclusion he reached through all the strife was this: “If we want our students to become good citizens, we cannot impose a certain morality on them; we must allow them the freedom to choose it for themselves” (Ellenbogen 66). Teachers may fear that students who have not learned to think for themselves in the classroom will not function as adults who can easily process information and handle the variety of different ideas and views with which they will be confronted.

## **Censorship**

Usually a written piece is not censored immediately. In 1984, the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee identified the usual progression of censorship (Marsh 1). The first step is *Inquiry*. Innocently enough, a person may question the "rationale" behind using a certain work (Marsh 1). Secondly, the concerned party makes a value judgment and therefore identifies as an *Expression of Concern*. Third, a formal charge is written or voiced to embody the third step, *Complaint*. Next is the step that a majority of the educated population is aware of: the *Attack*. Finally, Marsh defines the fifth stage, *Censorship*, as being the "removal of material from open access by government authority" (Marsh 1). This process is actually a safety guard against rash censorship because there are so many steps and procedures to following instead of immediately taking the book from the shelves.

Besides these five steps towards censorship, the legal system insures a slow and methodical process of censorship. In the early nineties, the courts changed the way educators and censors dealt with censorship in public schools. The outcome of the *Pico vs. Island Tree School District* case prevents censorship from quickly happening. The "United States Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for books to be arbitrarily and surreptitiously removed from a school library in the dead of night without some form of due process" (Maxwell 92). This ruling sets the standard for dealing with censorship in public schools.

### *Reasons Books are Censored*

Literature is frequently censored when it oversteps socially accepted norms. “Anything that veers from traditional perspectives on sexuality, social roles, parental authority, and a wide variety of other such matters is considered taboo” and subject to censorship (Demac 10). Instead of exploring these taboos and breaking down the confusion which may exist, the books are completely banned and ignored. According to a national survey conducted in 1996 by People for the American Way, the primary reason most material was challenged was due to sexuality that was offensive or which contained the acceptable norms of that area of the country. The second reason most material was banned was profane and objectionable language (Attacks 7). The notion of censorship is more sensitive when it involves minors in a public school setting. What rights, restraints, and freedom to learn do these children possess? Does the First Amendment of the United States apply to citizens under the age of eighteen?

### *First Amendment and Free Speech*

While the First Amendment constitutionally ensures the right to free speech, it is constantly challenged. Demac claims, “People proudly point to the Bill of Rights as an impenetrable shield and boast that we Americans enjoy a kind of free speech that is almost absolute” (1). Granted there is a whole area of interpretation, balance or rights, duties, and responsibilities that play into interpreting the First Amendment. However, a common myth is that some Americans often believe that freedoms and rights are written in stone and therefore indisputable. However, review of multiple court cases ranging from dealings with religion, press, or protests demonstrates that

the outcomes are different. Therefore, many cases suggest that interpretation of the First Amendment is often up to individual perception unless already set as a precedent.

The monumental case about dealing general rights for students is *Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent Community School District*. In 1969, Iowian students were granted the right to wear black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam War. This is the first in recent history that students proudly and loudly demonstrated the First Amendment. Although this case does not deal directly with censorship, Reichman opined that, "...other federal and state courts subsequently applied these principles to cases involving direct student speech and student publications. These cases have given students important right to free expression and to a free student press" (81). As a result, the students in a public school setting are granted the right to express their views through demonstrations, literature, and other publications.

The First Amendment does indeed apply to minors. Unfortunately, the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment are not universally protected among schools across the United States. For example, in schools across the nation some districts are lax with their policies on censorship and freedom of speech. However, in other areas there are systems that are rigid. When challenges begin to rise in the system, students view the struggle over literary censorship. Therefore, students see what does happen when censorship ensues which may be both positive and negative. Viewing censorship is positive for it allows students to see both sides of an enlightened debate. However, it may also be negative because students are sometimes denied First

Amendment freedoms.

Censorship may cause serious damage, for the student is prohibited from being exposed to a variety of different viewpoints through literature. Obviously, teachers, school systems, and librarians are in danger of losing the freedom to read and learn by censors. Furthermore, parents, students, and universal humanitarian ideas are greatly at risk because the literature is censored.

### **Censoring Two Classics**

Selecting two frequently banned books to study can help to demonstrate the impact of censorship in public schools. According to Webster's Dictionary, the American literary canon is a group of novels that are sanctioned or accepted as a body of related works. Often this idea is also called the *canon* of great literature. Normally a novel is deemed a classic by its literary merits, themes, and approval from the general public. Both J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye and Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn are classic novels; therefore, they are part of the canon. Conversely, some classic novels show universal themes to an extreme and therefore they are often banned. Salinger's and Twain's novels deal with controversial themes and therefore have often been banned from public schools. Both books have attracted the alienation of censors, most of whom wish to protect children from exposure to derogatory language and descriptions of sexuality (Corbett 441).

While both novels have been censored, they are also respected. Twain's novel is a classic, for it captures a dismal time in American history while still professing racial tolerance. As for Salinger's novel, Holden Caulfield, the protagonist, is a

character most teenagers are able to identify with. In the late nineteen nineties, "The Modern Library Board ranked The Catcher in the Rye number sixty-four on its list of the Twentieth Century's 100 best novels" (Hageman). Obviously, the universal themes within the novel have holding power. Therefore, these two novels are excellent candidates to use as a reference point in reviewing patterns in censorship and the reaction in public schools.

While both novels are highly respected by literary scholars, the novels were nearly banned immediately after publication. In 1885 the public library in Concord, Massachusetts, censored Twain's novel and stated that the novel was "crude, inelegant, and coarse." (Nelson 132). However, within eight weeks of censoring The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the publishing company sold 50,000 copies (133)! Salinger's novel has an amazingly similar story. The Catcher in the Rye was printed in 1951 and received mixed reviews from the beginning. An article in *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* claims, "*The New York Herald Tribune* reviewer thought it [The Catcher in the Rye] was teenage trash and the public didn't need any more of this type of thing...from the beginning, there were very different points of view about the book" (Weaver).

Sometimes teachers may lose their jobs over teaching a censored novel. In 1960, nine years after publication, a Tulsa, Oklahoma, teacher was fired because he required his eleventh-grade class to read Salinger's novel (Karolides 366). Although the teacher ultimately regained his position, the school system no longer allowed its students to study The Catcher in the Rye. The novel recently celebrated its fiftieth

anniversary, yet turmoil continues to emerge when an instructor chooses to teach the book (Weaver). Countless times the novel has been banned across the country for blasphemy, obscene language, inappropriate actions by a minor, and sexual situations (Karolides 367). Citing specific examples in context sometimes leads to resolution of many censorship issues. For instance, many critics complain about the passage that describes Holden bringing a young prostitute to his hotel room. Yet, if one reads the situation in context, Holden pays the girl for her time because he feels sorry for her and no intimate interaction between the two actually occurs.

While these arguments have not stopped The Catcher in the Rye from being censored, they do provide support for the validity of this classic work. Still, The Catcher in the Rye "consistently has ranked in the top 10 books most frequently challenged in libraries around the country since 1982, according to data compiled by civil liberties organizations" (Stepzinski). Within the same article, Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn ranked number five on the list of the 10 most frequently challenged [censored] books of the 1990s (Stepzinski). Consequently, a majority of these books have been removed from shelves.

### **Censorship of The Catcher in the Rye**

Though both novels have similar censorship histories, it is wise to explore each novel separately. The censorship history of these two novels provides better understanding of censors and their reasoning. One decade after the first publication of The Catcher in the Rye, Oklahoma City citizens aggressively criticized the book wholesaler, the Mid-Continent News Company, for distributing the novel. While the

hearing was being held in the capital building, the censors parked outside the building a car labeled the "Smutmobile" where they displayed the books in question. This novel and others were dropped from the book company as a result of the loud outcry of disapproval (Karolides 366). Furthermore, consistently throughout the 1960s, Salinger's novel was the most censored book. During this decade, "The Catcher in the Rye maintained its standing as the chief irritant in censors' lives" (Donelson 21). What is it that makes such a mass of people oppose which is regarded by many educators and other as an American classic? One answer may be found in the reason a group of parents cited for banning The Catcher in the Rye in 1977 in Pittsgrove Township, New Jersey. The parents "charged that the book included considerable profanity and "filth and profane" language that promoted premarital sex, homosexuality and perversion, as well as claiming that it was "explicitly pornographic" and "immoral"" (Karolides 367).

### *Language*

The accusation that the novel contains profanity and crude language is the most frequently cited reason from censors for banning the book (Corbett 441). This argument cannot be ignored, for Corbett claims, "to deny that words can shape our attitudes and influence our action would be to deny the rhetorical power of language" (441). Yet, these objectionable words that mature adolescents are reading is language they hear daily from their peers. These phrases have become familiar to students. One censor in Silver Spring Township, Pennsylvania, counted seven hundred profanities and nearly one hundred blasphemous comments towards God in The

Catcher in the Rye (McCracken). While one may suggest that the language is unnecessary to understand the novel, another may claim the language is an important key in understanding the novel. Therefore, the language is a common thread between the reader and central figure; because the novel is about "a teenager's search for self-worth and values, the protagonist uses words typical of an insecure young man trying to appear grown-up" (Edwards 42). Holden is a struggling adolescent; therefore, his lexical choice is linked to his identity. If he wants to mature and become a man, he believes that he must speak like adults. The unfortunate part is that censors pull profane words out of context. Instead, the language should be taken in context and not isolated by censors who have not even read the entire novel. The language should be appreciated as a whole within the novel.

Relating the "offensive passages" to the entire work is the largest task for censors (Booth 158). The literary content of the language should be studied as a major portion of this piece of literature. For example, "Holden's [the main character] swearing is so habitual, so unintentional, so ritualistic that it [the language] takes on a quality of innocence" (Corbett 442). Also, it has been argued that some of the profane language is so dated that it has lost some of the shock value that it once held in the 1950s (Hageman). The attitude shift between the forty years suggests the morality and culture climate has shifted in America. Mature readers are able to look beyond the actual "four-letter words" and grasp the gist of the whole point of reading. Therefore, the larger picture is understandable. Still some censors want to ban the novel based on the cursing. Board member, John Dieterman from Brunswick,

Florida, proclaimed in June of 2001, "'We're going to make an effort to get books with dirty words off the shelves. We're trying to get rid of them starting with The Catcher in the Rye. There are plenty of other good books, literature much better than The Catcher in the Rye for students to read'" (Stepzinski). Clearly, language is still a primary reason Salinger's novel is taken from the shelves.

### *Sexuality*

Sexuality is another frequently cited reason for censoring The Catcher in the Rye. A young adult and new to the world of sexual thoughts, acts, and notions, Holden Caulfield frankly discusses his sexual drives in the novel. Yet, "in sophisticated cultures the official standards for sexual behavior are, as a rule, far more rigid and more prudish than the actual practices of the people" (War 17). So if this is true as an unwritten law of society, why are people upset with sexual exploration in The Catcher in the Rye? One answer may be that censors are upset at seeing sexual ambiguity written in a novel. Another answer may be due to Holden's young age and the possible influence on adolescents. Finally, a reason may be Holden interactions with a young prostitute or because hints of homosexuality are apparent within the text. One may ask why morals and sexuality should be present in a novel taught in a public school classroom. Ideally, such topics belong in the home. However, schools have taken over most of or at least a large part of the moral instruction of students. Author June Edwards agrees by suggesting that ethical topics should be brought up in the classroom. She states that, "unless we [educators] address the issue of morality, we will not convince critics, judges, or the public that it should remain in the

classroom" (Edwards 39). In recent times public schools have had to compensate for the lack of moral, ethical, and character education at home. Therefore, issues dealing with heterosexuality and homosexuality may be discussed at school, and literature is a wonderful tool for instruction.

In the reference book entitled 100 Banned Books: Censorship Histories of World Literature, the editors mention several reasons Salinger's novel has been banned due to sexuality. Such opposition as "sexual scenes and things concerning morals issues" was the reasoning cited by school officials in 1982 (Karolides 367). In 1988 in Indiana's Linton-Stockton High School, The Catcher in the Rye was censored by parents because the novel "undermines morality" (Karolides 367). Furthermore, in the neighboring state of Illinois, many parents from Sidell banned the book in 1992 because of the presence of "premarital sex" and "prostitution" and the school system agreed (Karolides 367). These types of objections continue. For example, "lurid passages about sex" was the reason for removal of the novel in Duval County public school libraries in Florida (Karolides 368). Less than a decade ago in 1994, Groffstown, New Hampshire, schools censored the novel because of the "main character's sexual exploits" (Karolides 368). Case after case dealing with morals and sexuality in censoring Salinger's controversial novel are noted in the history of this novel, its censorship, and its use as an instructional tool. While sometimes teachers shy away from controversial novels, they may be either willingly or unwillingly drawn into the fight. Why is it that school districts and teachers still strive to teach such a controversial novel? Edwards suggests, "English teachers are prone to defend

a controversial book on the basis of literary merit rather than moral worth" (Edwards 39).

Despite his normal adolescent musings about sex, Holden Caulfield tells the reader immediately that he is a virgin. Furthermore, "when a girl tells him to stop he stops. He never wants to hurt or offend" (Edwards 41). The scene where the prostitute visits his hotel room is often cited as a reason for censorship. Upon closer inspection, however, the reader may realize that Holden declines sex from the prostitute even though he still pays her for the time she spent talking to him. Edwards also writes, "clearly, he [Holden] is not ready to lose his virginity and certainly not with a prostitute. The poignant scene dispels any belief that Holden is anything but a mixed-up adolescent with a strong sense of values" (Edwards 41). When sexual situations become too serious, he does not trade in his learned morals for worldly gratification. There is no gratuitous or graphic sex in the novel.

### *Reasons to Teach*

One of the most powerful comments made about Holden as a character is that he is significantly and consistently identifiable to adolescents. His character is timeless because he has been able to transcend generations and time while still capturing the reader's youthful heart and imagination. Often students are intrigued by Salinger's censored book because there is something within the covers of the novel that "authority" does not want them to read. Caulfield is able to reach beyond and identify with the young adult. In Booth's article "Censorship and the Values of Fiction," the author comments on the power of Holden's character. Booth writes,

"When the student learns to see great books, classic or contemporary, as metaphors for the whole of human experience, the study of literature contributes in a unique way to this understanding of these traditions. They help him to discover who he is and where he is going" (Booth 157). The opportunity for children to gain a better understanding of sexuality is obstructed when literature such as The Catcher in the Rye is banned.

### **Censorship of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

The other timeless classic the censors still fight is Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Author Ernest Hemingway proclaims, "All modern American Literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn...There was nothing before. There has been nothing good since" (Carey-Webb 22). The novel has received such high praise that many consider it the quintessential novel of American history. Regardless of school system, district, or zone, most school children are familiar with the popularity of the book. An article entitled, "Racism and Huckleberry Finn: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change" claims, "the work is second only to Shakespeare in the frequency with which it appears in the classroom, required in seventy percent of public high schools and seventy-six percent of parochial high schools" (Carey-Webb 22). Yet during the last five decades, students frequently have not been allowed the opportunity to read the novel. Hence, a person may know why the novel is censored without even reading the classic.

While The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is mainly censored today because of the use of the term "nigger," it originally was not banned because of the language.

In 1902, the Brooklyn Public Library pulled the novel from the children's section because of the vulgar language. Instead of “perspiring,” Huck “sweats.” Also, Huck insisted that he “scratched” rather than “itched” (Karolides 336). Most adults considered all of Huck’s terminology impolite and inappropriate for children at the time. Huck seemed like a poor influence for the youngsters who were reading his tale. The character's attitude in the novel showed a blatant disrespect for authority figures. Novels at that time were supposed to portray higher values. Literature was supposed to be strictly educational and hardly entertaining (Culture Shock). Yet after the uproar at the turn of the century, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn became an American classic and was seldom challenged until the 1950s.

It was not until 1957 that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began protesting the novel’s “racist aspects” (Karolides 336). Interestingly enough, it was not the word “nigger” that the organization opposed; instead, they objected to the way Jim [the slave] was portrayed as an equal to a small immature white boy. It seemed as though Huck were “superior to the adult Jim in decision-making capability” (Karolides 336). Around the time of this confrontation with the novel, Americans were fighting for their own civil rights, and Twain's novel seemed to infringe upon the advancement. Carey-Webb writes, “Despite the novel’s sanctified place and overtly anti-racist message, since school desegregation in the 1950s, African-Americans have raised objections to Huckleberry Finn and its effect on their children” (Carey-Webb 23). The NAACP and other groups believed children were apparently not receiving a well-rounded picture of an

African-American man in Mark Twain's novel. Moreover, Jim was accused of being an "emasculated man" and also not a "true hero to African-American children because he does not resist slavery" (Schulten 57). Jim is an African-American figure to whom others in the same ethnic group may not relate well. In 1969 in Miami Dade [Florida] Junior College, African-American students claimed to have an "emotional block" against the novel. The book was removed from the required reading list (Karolides 336-337).

Jim is indeed an interesting figure, but often he is the reason for censorship. Censors claim that Mark Twain mixes and confuses the traditional gender roles. What type of man is Jim? And why are he and Huckleberry Finn so friendly? Censors ask, when they suggest the novel has homosexual undertones between the two main characters. In Graff's forward to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, he writes that censors have insinuated that, "Jim and Huck's camaraderie on the raft involves homosexual desire" (Graff 4). Yet, another view may be Jim's fatherly devotion to Huck Finn. During the novel, Jim decides to stay with Huck in order to guide and help the orphan child. Sometimes it may be difficult for a reader to notice this from Jim's point of view. One suggestion is the reader can only see Jim as Huck, the narrator, views him. Indeed, Twain uses humor and satire to shame people into realizing the horror of racism (Culture Shock).

### *Language*

The main objection is often cited as the appearance of the word "nigger" two hundred and thirteen times within the text (Carey-Webb 24). Once again, the

language in the novel is the main reason this piece of literature has been removed from the shelves of many public school libraries. The problem is not Twain's writing style; instead, the controversy arises from the fact that the term "nigger" still holds hostile connotation today.

It was not until the mid 1970s that The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn began to be censored because it contained the word "nigger." Today the language within the novel is currently the most frequent objection to reading the timeless classic (Karolides 337). Different publishing companies began to change the word "nigger" into a more appropriate term. For example, in the novel Jim is often called "Nigger" Jim. This title, while appropriate for the author's time, was not perceived by many as suitable for twentieth century readers. The McGraw-Hill Company replaced "nigger" with "servant" while Slinger Company used the word "slave." The Foresman Company omitted these passages all together. The only documented publishing company that did not alter its passages to suit the social climate change was Ginn and Company (Karolides 337). While there have been countless complaints about teaching this novel because it contains "nigger," there has not been one complaint against Jim when he calls Huck "[poor white] trash" (Culture Shock). "Nigger" still holds America's educated society hostage.

Did all of these objections to using the novel within the school district come from African-Americans? It is true that "a significant number of such challenges have come from well-educated, middle-class, African-American parents who wish to protect their children from exposure to such insulting references" (Karolides 337). In

a Culture Shock video from PBS, a Tempe, Arizona, mother filed suit against the book being used in her daughter's school. Near the end of the video, an expert, Dr. Joshua claims that Ms. Paton [the mother] was in pain because there was no emotional distance between the word in the novel and her own experience. Dr. Joshua, claims that learning can be painful yet eye opening at the same time (Culture Shock).

Oddly enough, the novel was banned in other counties that did not have a majority of African-American students. In 1989, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was banned in Sevier County, Tennessee, because of "racial slurs and the use of ungrammatical dialect" (Karolides 337). Americans may become extremely sensitive to the slurs, grouping, and poor characterization literature has placed upon its citizens.

### *Racism*

The important question to ask is what are children learning by watching the war on words firsthand? With The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, students are watching racial lines that have been drawn between their parents and authority figures. Eventually students are placed against one another when dealing with the language in a sensitive manner. With such a wide variety of ethnic groups present in schools today, racial lines are often formed and sometimes unknowingly crossed. Language creates power; therefore, students are given power by reading. One reader of the *New York Times* wrote to testify how he felt in the 1950s when his classmates read The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn aloud. Being the only African-American in a predominately Caucasian classroom, he felt as if the word "nigger" was meant

especially for him. The other students laughed and bitterly raised their voices when the class read the word aloud. Instead of remembering the literary qualities of Twain's novel, this now elderly student remembers being at ease when he would turn the page and not see the word "nigger" (Carey-Webb 30).

Mark Twain's novel should be taught along with the reasons it has been censored. Teaching the challenges helps put this American classic novel into a contextual time line and helps readers understand why the novel is censored. The most basic and simplistic message in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is not about race; instead, the American epic is about people coming together who originally could not coexist. Loyalty and individualism are the important qualities that educators need to convey to wondering minds (Culture Shock). Besides teaching literary mechanisms, it is equally important to teach universal themes.

### *Reasons to Teach*

While there are strong reasons to censor this novel, there are equally strong reasons to keep The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn within the public school curriculum. To begin with, the novel is powerful and representative of America in the late nineteenth century. For example, "the novel remains the only one in the common "canon" to treat slavery, to represent a black dialect, and to have a significant role for an African-American character" (Carey-Webb 23). Teachers in Connecticut backed the notion that Huck Finn provided a positive role model. The Connecticut Council of Teachers of English even bound a book for rationales for teaching such censored novels. A committee member, Norma Walrath, a Ledyard,

Connecticut, teacher, supports the continuation of teaching The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. She writes:

For its [The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn] humanism--the idea that every person is worthy of respect and compassion, for its suggestion of regional differences and the need for understanding others unlike ourselves, for its satirical attack against complacency regarding the evils in our world, for its use of original literary techniques, and for its profound insight into human nature and human foibles, Huckleberry Finn is one of the most teachable books (Rationales 37).

Furthermore, she explains that it is important to teach this novel to her students for it captures a part of American history. The novel itself is a time capsule that aids in understanding the hostile environment of America during racial segregation. As far as Twain's use of "nigger," Walrath explains, "Mark Twain was well aware of the poignant use of the term and yet chose to use it to display the imperfect, contradictory nature of a developing democracy. Twain's use of the term is historically accurate rather than a sign of bias" (Rationales 38). Mark Twain did nothing but capture the social climate of his time. Walrath ends her article by stating, "To deny that some use the term 'nigger' and that slaves were treated cruelly is to deny history. We cannot romanticize the evils of the world" (Rationales 38). Basically, readers are doing the novel and themselves a grave disservice by not reading with the mind set of the period and realizing the power and social awe of the word "nigger" in American history.

### **Conclusion**

Twain's and Salinger's novels may serve as templates for tracing the patterns of censorship. These two American classics have lasted through time and the war on

words. Objections will occur as long as literature is being written; it is up to teachers to use the variety of ideas and experiences when teaching a banned book.

Furthermore, by examining the patterns of censorship in the literary world within the public K-12 educational setting, teachers may be better equipped to confront censorship. Many teacher committees have formed to fight censorship within their districts. (Note: Homstad's Anatomy of a Book Controversy published by Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation and Rationales for Commonly Challenged Taught Books by the Connecticut Council of Teacher's of English.) The battle between individuals who favor censorship and those who are opposed to censorship will continue. Educating oneself is a wise tactic when one battles censors. The only proper way to educate oneself is by examining the reasons classics are censored.

Some ideas written in literature are everlasting for they contain universal themes that fuel mankind. Holden Caulfield and Huck Finn are immortal protagonists, for readers of every generation. The characters help the reader to relate to adventure, despair, growth, and most importantly life. Yet, Salinger and Twain keep fighting back. The authors are censored within certain decades but in later decades are removed from the banned book list. These censored classics survive because they contain universal issues.

### **Recommendations**

A larger question to ask may be how this information shapes censorship in general. The patterns of censorship related to both classic novels are socially, historically, and regionally affected. At one point, the main character's behavior in

each novel was censored while later language became the large debate. Obviously many different reasons may be used to justify censorship. Because censorship will occur for many6 different reasons, educators need to recognize the lessons that may be learned by studying the history of censorship.

The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn may be used as models of how their censored histories have evolved in some public schools within the last century. When the society of censors stop robbing our children of the freedom to learn, then wonderful literature may survive untouched. This idealistic statement may never happen because of new censorship cases everyday. No one ever claimed that literature contains absolute truths. Instead, literary works should stretch and form new ideas, emotions, and concepts every time read. Education never guaranteed a painless learning experience.

This study may be viewed as a small snap shot of a larger picture of censorship. One may desire to take this study to a further level and try to map patterns of censorship based on geographic regions, specific time frames, or social trends of the cultural climates. Possibly, through this research, a large trend or generalization could be determined. Furthermore, an interesting component may be an extensive survey to monitor censorship within a certain domain. Statistics, models, and test would establish a working theory. Perhaps if this research is done a theory may develop about censorship and occurrence in school systems. Other questions that may be posed would be how other novels, besides The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye, are taken into account through the

same examination. Comparing and contrasting gives one a better understanding of literary censorship as a whole. This study only touches on a small portion of censorship; therefore, there is a vast array of other possibilities with censorship to explore.

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