

RIVERSIDE-BROOKFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

LIBRARY
AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY
DEPARTMENT

POLICY MANUAL
Materials Procedures

Selection
Inventory
Evaluation/Weeding

(February 2009)

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Introduction

The Riverside Brookfield High School Library and Instructional Technology Department's mission is to help our educational community find, use and share information in formats including print, video, and digital. We are teachers who challenge students of all types – high school students, RB faculty and staff, and adults in the community – to read a book for enjoyment or for information, to try a new kind of reference search, to learn a new software tool, and to search for new ways to share their learning.

Materials Procedures: Selection

I. General Philosophy

1. Print and non-print materials (“materials”) are selected to support the educational and curricular goals of the state and district.
2. Library materials are selected to support the extra-curricular activities sponsored by the school: organizations/clubs, athletics, drama, music, dance and social events.
3. Library materials are selected to reflect the diverse interests of high school students. Resources that educate, enrich, entertain, and inform will be provided. Materials will include both basic works of permanent value and timely materials on current issues.
4. Materials may present controversial issues, but will provide many viewpoints for the study and understanding of thought provoking issues.
5. Materials considered standard works for high school collections will be selected.
6. Materials are selected to encourage the growth of knowledge; to develop literary, cultural and aesthetic appreciation, and to foster ethical development.
7. Materials will reflect the concerns and contributions of both sexes and members of various religious, ethnic, social and cultural groups, both current and historical.
8. Materials will be appropriate for the age, social and emotional development, ability level, and learning styles of the students for whom they are selected. Therefore, children’s, young adult and adult titles are included in the collection.
9. Materials will be selected to promote lifelong learning and the effective use of ideas and information.
10. Ultimate responsibility for selection rests with the Department Chair/Media Specialist, but all faculty members are encouraged to participate in the selection process. Community and student recommendations are also considered.

II. Criteria

The established criteria for all subjects and formats include:

1. Importance of subject matter to the collection.
2. Authoritativeness and accuracy of information.
3. Reputation and significance of the author/performer, producer, or publisher.
4. Timeliness or permanence of the material.
5. Appearance of the title in recommended bibliographies, indexes, or review sources.
6. Balance of special group interests with general demand.
7. Scarcity of material on the subject.
8. Appropriateness for the age, emotional development, ability level, learning styles and social development of the students.
9. Presentation of multiple perspectives on controversial issues.
10. Clarity of style and format.
11. Reasonableness of cost.
12. Appeal to our student population.

III. Criteria for Specific Types and Formats of Materials

A. Print Materials

1. Fiction

- a. Fiction works are selected with the goal of enriching the insight and understanding of oneself and those with whom one lives and works.
- b. Fiction works are selected with the goal of representing an honest portrayal of some problem, aspect of life, experience, or point of view which broadens or increases understanding of human nature and society.
- c. Motivation, characterization, setting and plot should be well-developed. Note: specific passages must be evaluated in relation to the work as a whole and cannot be given fair consideration out of context.
- d. The writing should be of an acceptable literary quality.
- e. Best sellers are considered on individual merits as are other new works.

2. Non-fiction

- a. Non-fiction of lasting value is given first priority, but materials may also be selected to meet a current or temporary need.
- b. Information should be accurate and authoritative and presented in a clear and readable style. Expressions of opinion by the author should be readily distinguishable from objective facts and should be sincere and responsible.

- c. Subjects which are technically difficult and complex should be useful to a reasonable proportion of high school readers having an interest in the subject.
- d. Faculty and Staff members with special fields of interest, experience, or study may be asked to review and make recommendations for materials in these fields.

3. Other Materials

- a. Print magazines and newspapers are selected to supplement the curriculum, cover a wide range of content, point out different views, and correspond to the variety of school activities and interests of young adults.
- b. Local History Repository is another function of the Library and Instructional Technology Department, collecting those materials which reflect growth and history of this high school and the communities it serves. Consequently, a permanent collection of the school yearbooks and newspapers is maintained, as well as pamphlets and books on the history of the local community.
- c. The Library and Instructional Technology Department obtains materials in support of curriculum initiatives and faculty development. The majority of materials are purchased, but others are provided through interlibrary loan services. If there is a recurring need for any borrowed resource, then it will be acquired for the collection.

B. Non-Print Materials

All non-print materials must meet the accepted criteria for accuracy and scope of content, organization and technical quality. In addition, they should be appropriate in treatment for the intended use, i.e., self-directed use or teacher presentation.

Collections must be continuously evaluated to identify materials requiring replacement and to withdraw obsolete items.

The selection objectives and criteria (as stated on p. 4) used for print materials generally apply to non-print materials as well, with additional criteria noted below:

Considerations in making choices include: need for subject matter; technical quality; availability of equipment; quality; ease of operation; durability.

- 1. Multimedia may include: VHS Videotape, DVD, CDs, Audiobooks and new technologies as deemed appropriate.
- 2. Electronic Resources may include: subscription databases, applications programs and Internet. Specific selection criteria in addition to general criteria for non-print materials:
 - a. Date of publication and frequency of updates

- b. Copyright and licensing agreements
- c. Availability of remote access
- d. Hardware compatibility
- e. Manufacturer's customer support
- f. Ease of use
- g. Extent to which an electronic resource replaces, supplements, or extends other formats.

IV. Reviewing Tools

Reviews in professional library journals, listservs, and websites are used as a basis for selection. These tools include, but are not limited to the examples below.

- *School Library Journal*
- *Booklist*
- *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)*
- Lists of award-winning titles such as Best of the Best in YA Literature, Michael L. Printz Award, Abraham Lincoln Illinois High School Book Award, etc.
- LM_NET and ISLMA-NET listservs

In addition to the above evaluative tools, the Library Media Specialists also view book displays at professional conference and program exhibits.

V. Special Considerations

A. Religion

In the literature of religion library selection must be broad, tolerant, without partisanship, yet consistently directed toward the choice of the best materials in regard to authority, timeliness, and good literary quality. Since this is a public high school, an effort is made to maintain an impartial recognition of religions, as part of the world cultural heritage, while specializing in none.

B. Sex and Family Living

The library purchases materials about sex and family living that are appropriate for young adults. Materials are selected according to selection policies previously stated (see General Philosophy, p. 3).

C. Gifts/Donations

Materials received as gifts/donations which meet the standards generally employed for selection may be added to the collection. If they are not deemed suitable or useful, they may be given away or discarded.

D. Weeding

In order to maintain an up-to-date, attractive, and currently useful collection, a continuous program of discarding, replacing, and mending is conducted in accordance with current professional standards. Print materials which are out-dated, superseded, discredited, in poor condition, or no longer of interest are discarded. The same selection criteria will be applied in deciding whether or not to keep a specific item in the collection as are used in acquiring new materials.

E. Interlibrary Loan

In order to give our students and staff access to the most current materials available; to enable them to choose those materials that will best serve their present and particular interests; to increase the service ability of the Library and Instructional Technology Department and to satisfy requests, we are committed to membership in the Metropolitan Library System, which provides interlibrary loan service.

VI. School Library Bill of Rights

The entire selection process is based on the premise that the Board of Education supports the principles of intellectual freedom inherent in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and as expressed in the [“Library Bill of Rights”](#) of the American Library Association (Appendix page ____), [“School Library Bill of Rights”](#) of the American Association of School Librarians (Appendix page ____), and [“The Students’ Right to Read”](#) of the National Council of Teachers of English. An NCTE position paper on The Students’ Right to Read can be found on the Internet at <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/righttoreadguideline>.

Materials Procedures: Reconsideration of Materials

Occasionally objections will be voiced to the selection of some library materials, despite the quality of the selection process. The entire selection procedure is based on the premise that the Board of Education supports the principles of intellectual freedom inherent in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and as expressed in the [“Library Bill of Rights”](#) of the American Library Association, [“School Library Bill of Rights”](#) of the American Association of School Librarians, and the [“Students’ Right to Read”](#) of the National Council of Teachers of English.

If a complaint is made, the following procedure is recommended:

1. The complainant should be informed of the selection procedure and provided with a printed copy of the selection policy adopted by the Board of Education.
2. The complainant should be requested to submit a formal “Request for the Reconsideration of Instructional Materials” to the school principal.
3. Challenged materials should be kept in circulation during the reconsideration process.
4. When a request is submitted:
 - a) The principal, in consultation with certified library/media personnel, should immediately appoint an ad hoc review committee to review the challenged material. The review committee should include representatives of the certified library/media staff, classroom teachers, parents and students. The committee should report within a month.
 - b) The appropriate administrative authority should be informed of all steps that are taken to review the complaint.
5. The review committee should meet its obligation by:
 - a. reading, viewing or listening to the challenged material in its entirety.
 - b. checking established and accepted selection tools with a view to gauging the general acceptance of the challenged material.
 - c. establishing relevance of the challenged material to the curriculum and other student needs
 - d. completing the appropriate checklist including a judgment of the challenged materials as a whole for its value as an entity in the support of the overall goals and objectives of the educational program
6. A written recommendation should be presented to the School Board.
7. The decision to retain or exclude the challenged materials should be made by the School Board, and the complainant should be notified.

Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials

School _____

Please check type of material:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book | <input type="checkbox"/> Film | <input type="checkbox"/> CD |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Periodical | <input type="checkbox"/> Audiobook | <input type="checkbox"/> Kit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Videotape | <input type="checkbox"/> DVD | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Title _____

Author _____

Publisher or Producer _____

Request Initiated by _____

Telephone _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The following questions are to be answered after the complainant has read, viewed, or listened to the school library material in its entirety. If sufficient space is not provided, attach additional sheets. (Please sign your name to each additional attachment.)

1. _____
Have you read/viewed this material in its entirety? (Circle one) YES NO

2. To what in the material do you object? (Please be specific. Cite pages, film sequence, et cetera.)

3. What do you believe is the theme or purpose of this material?

4. What do you feel might be the result of a student using this material?

5. For what age group would you recommend this material?

6. Is there anything good in this material? Please comment.

7. Would you care to recommend other school library material of the same subject and format? _____

Signature of Complainant

Date

Please return *completed* form to the school principal.

Checklist for School Media Advisory Committee's Reconsideration of
Library Material — Fiction and Narrative Nonfiction

Title _____

Author/Producer _____

A. Purpose

1. What is the purpose, theme or message of the material? How well does the author/producer/ composer accomplish this purpose?

2. If the story is fantasy, is it the type that has imaginative appeal and is suitable for young adults?
_____ Yes _____ No. If no, for what age group would you recommend?
3. Will the reading and/or viewing and/or listening to material result in more compassionate understanding of human beings? _____ Yes _____ No.
4. Does it offer an opportunity to better understand and appreciate the aspirations, achievements, and problems of various minority groups? _____ Yes _____ No.
5. Are any questionable elements of the story an integral part of a worthwhile theme or message?
_____ Yes _____ No.

B. Content

1. Does a story about modern times give a realistic picture of life as it is now? _____ Yes _____ No.
2. When factual information is part of the story, is it presented accurately? _____ Yes _____ No.
3. Is prejudicial appeal readily identifiable by the potential reader? _____ Yes _____ No.
4. Are concepts presented appropriate to the ability and maturity of the potential readers?
_____ Yes _____ No.
5. Do characters speak in a language true to the period and section of the country in which they live?
_____ Yes _____ No
6. Does the material offend in some special way the sensibilities of women or a minority group by the way it presents either the chief character or any minor characters? _____ Yes _____ No
7. Is there preoccupation with sex, violence, cruelty, brutality, and aberrant behavior that would make this material inappropriate? _____ Yes _____ No
8. If there is use of offensive language, is it appropriate to the purpose of the text?
_____ Yes _____ No
9. Is the material well-written or -produced? _____ Yes _____ No
10. Does the story give a broader understanding of human behavior without stressing differences of class, race, color, sex, education, religion, or philosophy in any adverse way? _____ Yes _____ No
11. Does the material make a significant contribution to the history of literature or ideas? _____ Yes _____ No
12. Are the illustrations appropriate to the story? _____ Yes _____ No.

C. Reviews

1. Source of Review _____
Favorably reviewed _____ Unfavorably reviewed _____

2. Does this title appear in one or more reputable selection aids? _____ Yes _____ No.
If answer is yes, please list titles of selection aids:

D. Awards

1. Has this material won any awards? _____ Yes _____ No
2. If answer is yes, please list awards below.

Additional Comments

Recommendation by School Media Advisory Committee for Treatment of Challenged Materials

Date _____

Signatures of Media Advisory Review Committee

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Checklist for School Media Advisory Committee's Reconsideration of
Library Material — Nonfiction

Title _____

Author/Producer _____

A. Purpose

1. What is the overall purpose of the material? _____

2. Is the purpose accomplished? _____ Yes _____ No.

B. Authenticity

1. Is the author competent and qualified in the field? _____ Yes _____ No
2. What is the reputation and significance of the author and publisher/producer in the field?

3. Is the material up-to-date? _____ Yes _____ No
4. Are information sources well documented? _____ Yes _____ No
5. Are translations and retellings faithful to the original? _____ Yes _____ No

C. Appropriateness

1. Does the material promote the educational goals and objectives of the curriculum of the District?
_____ Yes _____ No
2. Is it appropriate to the level of intended audience? _____ Yes _____ No
3. Are the illustrations appropriate to the subject and age levels? _____ Yes _____ No

D. Content

1. Is the content of this material well presented by providing adequate scope, range, depth and continuity?
_____ Yes _____ No
2. Does this material present information not otherwise available? _____ Yes _____ No
3. Does this material give a new dimension or direction to its subject? _____ Yes _____ No

E. Reviews

1. Source of Review _____
Favorably reviewed _____ Unfavorably reviewed _____
3. Does this title appear in one or more reputable selection aids? _____ Yes _____ No
If answer is yes, please list titles of selection aids.

Additional Comments

Recommendation by School Media Advisory Committee for Treatment of Challenged Materials

Date _____

Signature of Media Advisory Review Committee

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Materials Procedures: Library Inventory

Purpose: To maintain an accurate record of books in the collection: to note number and kind of missing books; to allow for the re-ordering of lost books where necessary and practicable.

Procedures:

- The Library Staff will determine annually which sections of the collection to inventory, based on:
 - an inability to find books marked “Available” in the online catalog
 - heavy use of a segment of the collection

The inventory will be conducted using tools made available by whatever automated circulation system is currently in use.

Materials Procedures: Evaluation/Weeding

EVALUATING THE COLLECTION

1. Desirability. By checking the list of books on hand against a standard list, it is easy to determine what percent of the total existing collection and what percent in each classification are books recommended especially for school libraries.
2. Variety. In evaluating the variety of the book collection, count only one copy of a title -- otherwise a true picture of subject distribution will not be given.
3. Currency. The copyright dates for books in the fields of social science, science, and technology must be especially noted. Developments in these fields have been notably apparent in the past decade. Books in these groups copyrighted ten to seventy years ago or more are to a great extent out of date. Every attempt should be made to keep materials in these subjects up to date.
4. Curriculum Support. Does the library contain books to supplement the curriculum offering in all fields? What fields especially need strengthening?
5. Student Interest. Are there books on hobbies, leisure time activities, guidance, occupations, colleges, recreational reading?

WEEDING THE COLLECTION

I. Discussion

”Weeding” is defined as the procedure in which certain items have been identified as being no longer useful, current, relevant, or in good condition. Ongoing weeding of the library media collection is imperative. Teacher and library personnel should work together on this process. In order to be effective, weeding requires a thorough understanding of:

- a. the school’s curriculum
- b. knowledge of existing collection
- c. an adequate background in literature
- d. knowledge about the characteristics of a good book
- e. an understanding of the interests, needs, and abilities of the age group served
- f. a community background
- g. knowledge of other resources available

The systematic removal from the collection of materials no longer useful is essential to maintaining the purposes and quality of resources. Discarding materials requires the same degree of attention and careful study as the initial selection.

As books are weeded, they may be considered for replacement.

II. Criteria

- A. Materials are out-of-date because their content has become obsolete, inaccurate, and/or misleading.
- B. Materials are out-of-step with the interests, customs, or dress of present generation (other than those reflecting periods of time, costumes, etc.).
- C. Material is no longer in a physical condition which supports daily utilization (too worn and/or missing pages, etc.): and its repair exceeds the replacement cost.
- D. Materials socially misleading and/or scientifically incorrect information.
- E. Material has not circulated recently. It is taking up valuable space needed for more popular and relevant materials unless it contains information not found anywhere else.
- F. The item is no longer relevant to the curriculum because of a curricular change of content or emphasis.
- G. Material beyond comprehension of readers.
- H. Material is mediocre in presentation.

III. Withdrawn Items

Materials which have been weeded from the collection may be offered to staff and students; offered to charities or other libraries; discarded or recycled.

REFERENCES

American Association of School Librarians, & Association for Educational Communications and Technology. (1998). *Information power: Building partnerships for learning* (p. 6). Chicago: American Library Association.

Baumbach, D. J., & Miller, L. L. (2006). *Less is more: A practical guide to weeding school library collections*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Donham, J. (2005). *Enhancing teaching and learning: A leadership guide for school library media specialists* (2nd ed.). New York: Neal-Schuman .

Naperville Public Library Policy No. 260 (June 21, 2006)

Naperville School District 203 Library Procedures Manual. (September 2005)

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LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
5. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
6. 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.

Adopted June 18, 1948.
Amended February 2, 1961, June 27, 1967, and January 23, 1980,
Inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996,
by the ALA Council

SCHOOL LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

for School Library Media Center Programs

The American Association of School Librarians reaffirms its belief in the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association. Media personnel are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens. To this end the American Association of School Librarians asserts that the responsibility of the school library media center is:

To provide a comprehensive collection of instructional materials selected in compliance with basic written selection principles and to provide maximum accessibility to these materials

To provide materials that will support the curriculum, taking into consideration the individual's needs, varied interests, abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and maturity levels of the students served

To provide materials for teachers and students that will encourage growth in knowledge and that will develop literary, cultural and aesthetic appreciation and ethical standards

To provide materials which reflect the ideas and beliefs of religious, social, political, historical, and ethnic groups and their contribution to the American and world heritage and culture, thereby enabling students to develop an intellectual integrity in forming judgments

To provide a written statement, approved by the local Boards of Education, of the procedures for meeting the challenge of censorship of materials in school library media centers

To provide qualified professional personnel to serve teachers and students

NCTE Guideline

A guideline found to be consistent with NCTE positions on education issues

Guideline on The Students' Right to Read

The current edition of The Students' Right to Read is an adaptation and updating of the original Council statement, including "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work," prepared by the Committee on the Right to Read of the National Council of Teachers of English and revised by Ken Donelson.

The Right to Read and the Teacher of English

For many years, American schools have been pressured to restrict or deny students access to books or periodicals deemed objectionable by some individual or group on moral, political, religious, ethnic, racial, or philosophical grounds. These pressures have mounted in recent years, and English teachers have no reason to believe they will diminish. The fight against censorship is a continuing series of skirmishes, not a pitched battle leading to a final victory over censorship.

We can safely make two statements about censorship: first, any work is potentially open to attack by someone, somewhere, sometime, for some reason; second, censorship is often arbitrary and irrational. For example, classics traditionally used in English classrooms have been accused of containing obscene, heretical, or subversive elements. What English teacher could anticipate judgments such as the following--judgments characteristic of those made by many would-be censors:

- Plato's *Republic*: "This book is un-Christian."
- George Eliot's *Silas Marner*; "You can't prove what that dirty old man is doing with that child between chapters."
- Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*: "Very unfavorable to Mormons."
- Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*: "A filthy book."
- Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Too violent for children today."
- Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: "Serves as a poor model for young people."
- Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*: "Contains homosexuality."

Modern works, even more than the classics, are criticized as "filthy," "un-American," "overly realistic," and "anti-war." Some books have been attacked merely for being "controversial," suggesting that for some people the purpose of education is not the investigation of ideas but rather the indoctrination of certain set beliefs and standards. The following statements represent complaints typical of those made against modern works of literature:

- J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*: "A dreadful, dreary recital of sickness, sordidness, and sadism." (Without much question, Salinger's book has been for some time the most widely censored book in the United States.)
- Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*: "Its repetitious obscenity and immorality merely degrade and defile, teaching nothing."
- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*: "The word rape is used several times. Children should not see this in any literature book."

Some groups and individuals have also raised objections to literature written specifically for young people. As long as novels intended for young people stayed at the intellectual and emotional level of *A Date for Marcy* or *A Touchdown for Thunderbird High*, censors could forego criticism. But many contemporary novels for adolescents focus on the real world of young people--drugs, premarital sex, alcoholism, divorce, high school gangs, school dropouts, racism, violence, and sensuality. English teachers willing to defend the classics and modern literature must be prepared to give equally spirited defense to serious and worthwhile adolescent novels.

Literature about ethnic or racial minorities remains "controversial" or "objectionable" to many adults. As long as groups such as Blacks, Indians, Orientals, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans "kept their proper place"--awarded them by an Anglo society--censors rarely raised their voices. But attacks have increased in frequency as minority groups have refused to observe their assigned "place." Though nominally, the criticisms of racial or ethnic literature have usually been directed at "bad language," "suggestive situations," "questionable literary merit," or "ungrammatical English" (usually oblique complaints about the different dialect or culture of a group), the underlying motive for some attacks has unquestionably been racial. Typical of censors' criticisms of ethnic works are the following comments:

- Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: "The book is biased on the black question."
- Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*: "Obscene and blasphemous."
- Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*: "Totally objectionable and without any literary value."

Books are not alone in being subject to censorship. Magazines or newspapers used, recommended, or referred to in English classes have increasingly drawn the censor's fire. Few libraries would regard their periodical collection as worthwhile or representative without some or all of the following publications, but all of them have been the target of censors on occasion:

- *National Geographic*: "Nudity and sensationalism, especially in stories on barbaric foreign people."
- *Scholastic Magazine*: "Doctrines opposing the beliefs of the majority, socialistic programs; promotes racial unrest and contains very detailed geography of foreign countries, especially those inhabited by dark people."
- *National Observer*: "Right-wing trash with badly reported news."
- *New York Times*: "That thing should be outlawed after printing the Pentagon papers and helping our country's enemies."

The immediate results of demands to censor books or periodicals vary. At times, school boards and administrators have supported and defended their teachers, their use of materials under fire, and the student's right of access to the materials. At other times, however, special committees have been formed to cull out "objectionable works" or "modern trash" or "controversial literature." Some teachers have been summarily reprimanded for assigning certain works, even to mature students. Others have been able to retain their positions only after initiating court action.

Not as sensational, but perhaps more important, are the long range results. Schools have removed from libraries and classrooms and English teachers have avoided using or recommending works which might make members of the community angry. Many students are consequently "educated" in a school atmosphere hostile to free inquiry. And many teachers learn to emphasize their own safety rather than their students' needs.

The problem of censorship does not derive solely from the small anti-intellectual, ultra-moral, or ultra-patriotic groups which will always function in a society that guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The present concern is rather with the frequency and force of attacks by others, often people of good will and the best intentions, some from within the teaching profession. The National Council of Teachers of English, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Library Association, as well as the publishing industry and writers themselves agree: pressures for censorship are great throughout our society.

The material that follows is divided into two sections. The first on "The Right to Read" is addressed to parents and the community at large. The other section, "A Program of Action," lists Council recommendations for establishing professional committees in every school to set up procedures for book selection, to work for community support, and to review complaints against any book or periodical.

The Right to Read

An open letter to the citizens of our country from the National Council of Teachers of English:

Where suspicion fills the air and holds scholars in line for fear of their jobs, there can be no exercise of the free intellect. . . . A problem can no longer be pursued with impunity to its edges. Fear stalks the classroom. The teacher is no longer a stimulant to adventurous thinking; she becomes instead a pipe line for safe and sound information. A deadening dogma takes the place of free inquiry. Instruction tends to become sterile; pursuit of knowledge is discouraged; discussion often leaves off where it should begin.

Justice William O. Douglas, United States Supreme Court: *Adler v. Board of Education*, 1951.

The right to read, like all rights guaranteed or implied within our constitutional tradition, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways, education is an effort to improve the quality of choices open to all students. But to deny the freedom of choice in fear that it may be unwisely used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we respect the right of individuals to be selective in their own reading. But for the same reason, we oppose efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

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. In effect, the reader is freed from the bonds of chance. 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.

In selecting books for reading by young people, English teachers consider the contribution which each work may make to the education of the reader, its aesthetic value, its honesty, its readability for a particular group of students, and its appeal to adolescents. English teachers, however, may use different works for different purposes. The criteria for choosing a work to be read by an entire class are somewhat different from the criteria for choosing works to be read by small groups.

For example, a teacher might select John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* for reading by an entire class, partly because the book has received wide critical recognition, partly because it is relatively short and will keep the attention of many slow readers, and partly because it has proved popular with many students of widely differing abilities. The same teacher, faced with the responsibility of choosing or recommending books for several small groups of students, might select or recommend books as different as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Jack Schaefer's *Shane*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*, Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge over the River Kwai*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, or Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, depending upon the abilities and interests of the students in each group.

And the criteria for suggesting books to individuals or for recommending something worth reading for a student who casually stops by after class are different from selecting material for a class or group. But the teacher selects, not censors, books. Selection implies that a teacher is free to choose this or that work, depending upon the purpose to be achieved and the student or class in question, but a book selected this year may be ignored next year, and the reverse. Censorship implies that certain works are not open to selection, this year or any year.

Wallace Stevens once wrote, "Literature is the better part of life. To this it seems inevitably necessary to add, provided life is the better part of literature." Students and parents have the right to demand that education today keep students in touch with the reality of the world outside the classroom. Much of classic literature asks questions as valid and significant today as when the literature first appeared, questions like "What is the nature of humanity?" "Why do people praise individuality and practice conformity?" "What do people need for a good life?" and "What is the nature of the good person?" But youth is the age of revolt. To pretend otherwise is to ignore a reality made clear to young people and adults alike on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines. English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not lie to the young about the perilous but wondrous times we live in, books which talk of the fears, hopes, joys, and frustrations people experience, books about people not only as they are but as they can be. English teachers forced through the pressures of censorship to use only safe or antiseptic works are placed in the morally and intellectually untenable position of lying to their students about the nature and condition of mankind.

The teacher must exercise care to select or recommend works for class reading and group discussion. One of the most important responsibilities of the English teacher is developing rapport and respect among students. Respect for the uniqueness and potential of the individual, an important facet of the study of literature, should be emphasized in the English class. Literature classes should reflect the cultural contributions of many minority groups in the United States, just as they should acquaint students with contributions from the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The Threat to Education

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.

The censorship pressures receiving the greatest publicity are those of small groups who protest the use of a limited number of books with some "objectionable" realistic elements, such as *Brave New World*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Johnny Got His Gun*, *Catch-22*, *Soul on Ice*, or *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. The most obvious and immediate victims are often found among our best and most creative English teachers, those who have ventured outside the narrow boundaries of conventional texts. Ultimately, however, the real victims are the students, denied the freedom to explore ideas and pursue truth wherever and however they wish.

Great damage may be done by book committees appointed by national or local organizations to pore over anthologies, texts, library books, and paperbacks to find passages which advocate, or seem to advocate, causes or concepts or practices these organizations condemn. As a result, some publishers, sensitive to possible objections, carefully exclude sentences or selections that might conceivably offend some group, somehow, sometime, somewhere.

The Community's Responsibility

American citizens who care about the improvement of education are urged to join students, teachers, librarians, administrators, boards of education, and professional and scholarly organizations in support of the students' right to read. Only widespread and informed support in every community can assure that

- enough citizens are interested in the development and maintenance of a superior school system to guarantee its achievement;
- malicious gossip, ignorant rumors, and deceptive letters to the editor will not be circulated without challenge and correction;
- newspapers will be convinced that the public sincerely desires objective school news reporting, free from slanting or editorial comment which destroys confidence in and support for schools;
- the community will not permit its resources and energies to be dissipated in conflicts created by special interest groups striving to advance their ideologies or biases; and
- faith in democratic traditions and processes will be maintained.

A Program of Action

Censorship in schools is a widespread problem. Teachers of English, librarians, and school administrators can best serve students, literature, and the profession today if they prepare now to face pressures sensibly, demonstrating on the one hand a willingness to consider the merits of any complaint and on the other the courage to defend their literature program with intelligence and vigor. The Council therefore recommends that every school undertake the following two-step program to protect the students' right to read:

the establishment of a representative committee to consider book selection procedures and to screen complaints; and

a vigorous campaign to establish a community atmosphere in which local citizens may be enlisted to support the freedom to read.

Procedures for Book Selection

Although one may defend the freedom to read without reservation as one of the hallmarks of a free society, there is no substitute for informed, professional, and qualified book selection. English teachers are better qualified to choose and recommend books for their classes than persons not prepared in the field. Nevertheless, administrators have certain legal and professional responsibilities. For these reasons and as a matter of professional courtesy, they should be kept informed about the criteria and the procedures used by English teachers in selecting books and the titles of the books used.

In each school the English department should develop its own statement explaining why literature is taught and how books are chosen for each class. This statement should be on file with the administration before any complaints are received. The statement should also support the teacher's right to choose supplementary materials and to discuss controversial issues insofar as they are relevant.

Operating within such a policy, the English department should take the following steps:

Establish a committee to help other English teachers find exciting and challenging books of potential value to students in a specific school. Schools without departments or small schools with a few English teachers should organize a permanent committee charged with the responsibility of alerting other teachers to new books just published or old books now forgotten which might prove valuable in the literature program.

Devote time at each department meeting to reviews and comments by the above committee or plan special meetings for this purpose. Free and open meetings to discuss books of potential value to students would seem both reasonable and normal for any English department. Teachers should be encouraged to challenge any books recommended or to suggest titles hitherto ignored. Require that each English teacher give a rationale for any book to be read by an entire class. Written rationales for all books read by an entire class would serve the department well if censorship should strike. A file of rationales should serve as impressive evidence to the administration and the community that English teachers have not chosen their books lightly or haphazardly.

Report to the administration the books that will be used for class reading by each English teacher.

Such a procedure gives each teacher the right to expect support from fellow teachers and administrators whenever someone objects to a book.

The Legal Problem

Apart from the professional and moral issues involved in censorship, there are legal matters about which NCTE cannot give advice. The Council is not a legal authority. Across the nation, moreover, conditions vary so much that no one general principle applies. In some states, for example, textbooks are purchased from public funds and supplied free to students; in others, students must rent or buy their own texts.

The legal status of textbook adoption lists also varies. Some lists include only those books which must be taught and allow teachers freedom to select additional titles; other lists are restrictive, containing the only books which may be required for all students.

As a part of sensible preparations for handling attacks on books, each school should ascertain what laws apply to it.

Preparing the Community

To respond to complaints about books, every school should have a committee of teachers (and possibly students, parents, and other representatives from the community) organized to

inform the community about book selection procedures;

enlist the support of citizens, possibly by explaining the place of literature in the educational process or by discussing at meetings of parents and other community groups the books used at that school; and

consider any complaints against any work. No community is so small that it lacks concerned people who care about their children and the educational program of the schools.

No community is so small that it lacks readers who will support the English teachers in defending books when complaints are received. Unhappily, English teachers too often fail to seek out these people and to cultivate their good will and support before censorship strikes.

Defending the Books

Despite the care taken to select worthwhile books for student reading and the qualifications of teachers selecting and recommending books, occasional objections to a work will undoubtedly be made. All books are potentially open to criticism in one or more general areas: the treatment of ideologies, of minorities, of love and sex; the use of language not acceptable to some people; the type of illustrations; the private life or political affiliations of the author or, in a few cases, the illustrator.

If some attacks are made by groups or individuals frankly hostile to free inquiry and open discussion, others are made by misinformed or misguided people who, acting on emotion or rumor, simply do not understand how the books are to be used. Others are made by well-intentioned and conscientious people who fear that harm will come to some segment of the community if a particular book is read or recommended.

What should be done upon receipt of a complaint?

If the complainant telephones, listen courteously and refer him or her to the teacher involved. That teacher should be the first person to discuss the book with the person objecting to its use.

If the complainant is not satisfied, invite him or her to file the complaint in writing, but make no commitments, admissions of guilt, or threats.

If the complainant writes, contact the teacher involved and let that teacher call the complainant.

Sometimes the problem seems less serious and more easily resolved through personal contact over the phone. If the complainant is not satisfied, invite him or her to file the complaint in writing on a form prepared for this purpose. (See sample below.)

Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work

Author _____

Paperback _____ Hardcover _____

Title _____

Publisher (if known) _____

Request initiated by _____

Telephone _____

Address _____

City / State / Zip _____

Complainant represents

- _____ Himself/Herself
- _____ (Name organization) _____
- _____ (Identify other group) _____

1. Have you been able to discuss this work with the teacher or librarian who ordered it or who used it?
_____ Yes _____ No
2. What do you understand to be the general purpose for using this work?
 - Provide support for a unit in the curriculum?
_____ Yes _____ No
 - Provide a learning experience for the reader in one kind of literature?
_____ Yes _____ No
 - Other _____
3. Did the general purpose for the use of the work, as described by the teacher or librarian, seem a suitable one to you?
_____ Yes _____ No

If not, please explain.

4. What do you think is the general purpose of the author in this book?

5. In what ways do you think a work of this nature is not suitable for the use the teacher or librarian wishes to carry out?

6. Have you been able to learn what is the students' response to this work?
 Yes No

7. What response did the students make?

8. Have you been able to learn from your school library what book reviewers or other students of literature have written about this work?

Yes No

9. Would you like the teacher or librarian to give you a written summary of what book reviewers and other students have written about this book or film?

Yes No

10. Do you have negative reviews of the book?

Yes No

11. Where were they published?

12. Would you be willing to provide summaries of their views you have collected?
 Yes No

13. What would you like your library/school to do about this work?

Do not assign/lend it to my child.

Return it to the staff selection committee/departmentf or reevaluation.

Other--Please explain

14. In its place, what work would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of the subject treated?

Signature _____

Date _____

At first, except for politely acknowledging the complaint and explaining the established procedures, the English teacher should do nothing. The success of much censorship depends upon frightening an unprepared school or English department into some precipitous action. A standardized procedure will take the sting from the first outburst of criticism. When the reasonable objector learns that he or she will be given a fair hearing through following the proper channels, he or she is more likely to be satisfied. The idle censor, on the other hand, may well be discouraged from taking further action. A number of advantages will be provided by the form, which will

- formalize the complaint,
- indicate specifically the work in question,
- identify the complainant,
- suggest how many others support the complaint,

- require the complainant to think through objections in order to make an intelligent statement on work (1, 2, and 3),
- cause the complainant to evaluate the work for other groups than merely the one he or she first had in mind (4),
- establish his or her familiarity with the work (5),
- give the complainant an opportunity to consider the criticism about the work and the teacher's purpose in using the work (6, 7, and 8), and
- give the complainant an opportunity to suggest alternative actions to be taken on the work (9 and 10).

The committee reviewing complaints should be available on short notice to consider the completed "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work" and to call in the complainant and the teacher involved for a conference. Members of the committee should have reevaluated the work in advance of the meeting, and the group should be prepared to explain its findings. Membership of the committee should ordinarily include an administrator, the English department chair, and at least two classroom teachers of English. But the department might consider the advisability of including members from the community and the local or state NCTE affiliate. As a matter of course, recommendations from the committee would be forwarded to the superintendent, who would in turn submit them to the board of education, the legally constituted authority in the school.

Teachers and administrators should recognize that the responsibility for selecting works for class study lies with classroom teachers and that the responsibility for reevaluating any work begins with the review committee. Both teachers and administrators should refrain from discussing the objection with the complainant, the press, or community groups. Once the complaint has been filed, the authority for handling the situation must ultimately rest with the administration and school board.

Freedom of inquiry is essential to education in a democracy. To establish conditions essential for freedom, teachers and administrators need to follow procedures similar to those recommended here. Where schools resist unreasonable pressures, the cases are seldom publicized and students continue to read works as they wish. The community that entrusts students to the care of an English teacher should also trust that teacher to exercise professional judgment in selecting or recommending books. The English teacher can be free to teach literature, and students can be free to read whatever they wish only if informed and vigilant groups, within the profession and without, unite in resisting unfair pressures.

The Committee on the Right to Read of the National Council of Teachers of English:

- Edward R. Gordon, Yale University, Chair
- Martin Steinmann, University of Minnesota, Associate Chair
- Harold B. Allen, University of Minnesota
- Frank A. Doggett, D. U. Fletcher High School, Jacksonville Beach, Florida
- Jack Fields, Great Neck South High School, New York
- Graham S. Frear, St. Olaf College, Minnesota
- Robert Gard, Camelback High School, Phoenix, Arizona
- Frank Ross, Detroit Public Schools, Michigan
- Warren Taylor, Oberlin College, Ohio

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