



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Censorship in Libraries

No Books Left on the Shelf



Clarity and Focus

The writer introduces an interesting and precise claim ("Libraries should serve all members of its community, not just a special few as books are the key to knowledge and independence"). The essay thoroughly addresses the demands of the prompt by maintaining a strong focus on purpose and task.



Support and Evidence

Specific, relevant evidence is presented in support of the claim ("Adolph Hitler and his propaganda machine eliminated media that didn't fully support their cause") and is fully explained. Counterclaims are presented with convincing arguments ("but that doesn't mean that we should offer up graphic portrayals of the Holocaust to preschoolers or pornography to elementary school students").



Organization

The essay is skillfully organized using an effective introduction and conclusion. Body paragraphs logically develop and support the claim. Transitions are used to progress through a logical placement of ideas ("From the beginning," "therefore we must give our consent to their knowledge," and "Finally").



Language and Style

The writer engages the reader by using effective questioning techniques ("They say that history books are written by the victors. But who decides which books we read to learn about this history?"). Precise and vivid vocabulary leads to a clear understanding of concepts ("perception of what is offensive and immoral"). A formal style and attention to detail are maintained throughout.



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait 'looks like' in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see "25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays" by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

Censorship in Libraries



No Books Left on the Shelf

They say that history books are written by the victors. But who decides which books we read to learn about this history? Although writers and editors clearly publish the story they want to be told, there are other places where the flow of information may be censored: the library. Meant to be a place where people of all ages and incomes can come to access information, often there are specific groups who aim to change this. Librarians and special interest groups come to mind. The question has to be asked though. If there is censorship, who decided what is appropriate and what is not? Who do we give that power of controlling information to? Censorship is alive and well in this century as it has been ever since people have recorded thoughts and ideas on paper. This is a violation from the standpoint of personal expression, intellectual growth and education, and First Amendment rights. While all information isn't for all people, we need to take a stand against censorship. Libraries should serve all members of its community, not just a special few as books are the key to knowledge and independence.

From the beginning, censorship has been used by individuals and groups to prevent and control the creation, access, and distribution of ideas and information. It has taken many different forms and occurred for many different reasons. Libraries should be centers of unbiased and universal sources of knowledge and entertainment, and it is not right for them to censor controversial topics as if they are dictators or tyrants seeking to control the flow or content of information. To do so is to make use of the tools of dictatorship and oppression. The Third Reich was an obvious example of how a tyrant controlled information and therefore its people. Adolph Hitler and his

propaganda machine eliminated media that didn't fully support their cause: books, newspapers, films, music, and even individuals. By suppressing alternate opinions and worldviews, the tyrant in that case clearly influenced the thoughts of young and old people alike by providing only that information he deemed appropriate.

But who are these "tyrants"? Sometimes libraries themselves, but more often they are special interest groups. So many books are on a "ban list" due to material that offends someone. Everyone is offended by something, but why does that person's opinions step all over everyone else's First Amendment right to have free expression or access to information? People are fascinated by conflict, whether it is found in the pages of a book or in real life, but often they seek to suppress opposing viewpoints. Special interest groups should not be able to decide that this novel contains too much obscenity, too much treason, or too much or too little religion to be read by others. Our citizens must be free to learn by considering alternate views and critically question what they find. Certainly what is acceptable in one society or time period changes and evolves, but truly civilized people must tolerate each other's beliefs and ideas instead of censoring them. We need to remember that books cannot shout their values. They cannot shove information down our throats. Books must be read, therefore we must give our consent to accept their knowledge. Unlike an advertisement that might challenge us unawares, we must pick up a book and open it to receive its guidance.

The power of libraries to censor books must be eliminated in order to protect our intellectual freedoms, but that doesn't mean that we should offer up graphic portrayals of the Holocaust to preschoolers or pornography to elementary students. Many libraries maintain separate adult and children sections to create inherent barriers based on maturity levels of the consumer. Many also contain a teen section to address the fact that tweens and teens aren't fully in either category. These areas offer up places for people to safely explore their interests. Librarians who know their clientele can gently steer a younger child away from

Fifty Shades of Grey. Parents can also teach their children how to be critical consumers of books and information. This is not censorship, but a way to create age-appropriate places that teach individuals to think for themselves.

Finally, with each book taken from the shelf, there are ideas that are taken away and hidden, forever to be unseen. The author Katherine Paterson said that giving anyone the right to censor books results in "no books left on the shelf for any of us." The perception of what is offensive and immoral and what is not is derived from personal opinion and should never be expressed through the removal of books from a library's shelf.