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CENSORSHIP: WHO SHOULD DECIDE WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE READ?

Word Generation - Unit 1.07

Focus Words

access | civil | despite | integrate | promote

Weekly Passage

Each year, people try to keep certain books out of schools and libraries. They feel that students should not have access to literature about subjects they consider inappropriate for young readers. Many popular books have been challenged or banned in recent years. The list includes *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. *Harry Potter* is even on the list.

Some people think that youth should be protected from difficult issues, such as racism or violence. They also think that books can give kids bad ideas. Other people suggest that youth are facing tough issues in their lives already. If those issues are integrated into meaningful stories, young people might find books helpful for understanding their own lives. For example, when a novel incorporates a problem such as racism, it can help kids dealing with prejudice to feel less alone. It might also help them to see how their actions can affect other people.

Librarians and teachers try to promote positive attitudes toward reading. They like to

see students fully engaged with relevant literature. Some librarians and teachers want censored books to be accessible to students because they are often interesting to read. Many American citizens argue that book banning and other types of censorship violate their civil rights.

Should students have the freedom to read anything they choose despite the possible risks?

TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ Should adults have the right prevent young readers from having access to books they consider inappropriate?
- ▶ Why do some people feel that having access to books dealing with tough issues can be helpful for students, despite the risks?
- ▶ Why do librarians and teachers think they can promote positive attitudes toward reading by making banned books accessible to students?
- ▶ What are some examples of novels that integrate issues of racism or violence into their plots?
- ▶ How is book censorship a civil rights issue?

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**Censorship: Who should decide what young people read?
Focus Word Chart**

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
access	(n.) - opportunity to use; right to use	access (v.) accessing accesses		accessible accessibility accessibly accessory	concession recession procession
civil	(adj.) - involving citizens			civilize civility civilized civilian civilization	civic
despite	(prep.) - even with				spite spited despise despicable
integrate	(v.) - to make part of	integrates integrated integrating		integrative disintegrate	integral
promote	(v.) - to encourage	promotes promoted promoting		promotion	motive motion demote

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Censorship: Who should decide what young people read?



Problem of the Week

The American **Civil** Liberties Union (ACLU) **promotes** individual rights and liberties. The ACLU believes that defending civil liberties is always important, **despite** the fact that people strongly disagree about certain situations. In 1999, the ACLU sued the town of Wichita Falls, Texas for restricting **access** to two children's books. The books, *Daddy's Roommate* and *Heather has Two Mommies*, have gay and lesbian characters. Some citizens had signed a petition complaining about the books. Then, the books were moved to the adult section of the library.

At the time, the move was legal. The law in Wichita Falls said that if 300 people signed a petition, a children's book could be moved to the adult section. ACLU members said moving the book was just like hiding it. All children's books, they said, should be **integrated** into the children's section of the library.

Option 1: The population of Wichita Falls is about 100,000. Which statement is true?

- A) 300 people is less than 1% of the population
- B) 300 people is about 3% of the population
- C) 300 people is more than a third of the population
- D) 300 people is about 5% of the population

Option 2: If 300 of 100,000 residents signed the petition against the two children's books, what is the probability that a resident chosen at random signed the petition?

Answer: $3/1,000$, or $\approx .003$

Math Discussion Question: The **civil** code of Wichita Falls allowed a small percentage of the city's residents to control **access** to certain books. Some people said this was fair. They said that communities have a right to **promote** certain values, and that libraries should reflect these values. If a book offends people, it should be removed. Other people disagreed, saying that the library should **integrate** the views of all different groups, **despite** the fact that some groups might disagree with each other. Which view seems right to you?

Censorship: Who should decide what young people read?

Debating the Issue

I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Students should be free to read anything they want to because books that deal with tough issues can help young people cope with these things in their own lives. Youth can learn better ways to respond to drugs or racism or violence if they can read about characters facing those issues.

B Students should be free to read anything they want to because having access to censored books will promote reading. Censored books are often very interesting to read, and younger readers are more likely to become engaged in books that integrate issues relevant to their lives.

C Adults should carefully select appropriate books to keep students from from being upset by books that deal with mature issues like drugs, racism, or violence. Young readers are not ready to handle these topics, so reading about such issues might make them depressed or frightened.

D Adults should carefully select appropriate books for students so kids will not learn about harmful ideas or behaviors. Reading a book with violent or racist characters might lead young students to think that violence and racism are okay.

E _____

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:



Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

In my experience . . .

that's similar to what I think too...

What makes you think that?

When I re-read the text, it reminded me...

TEACHER
Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

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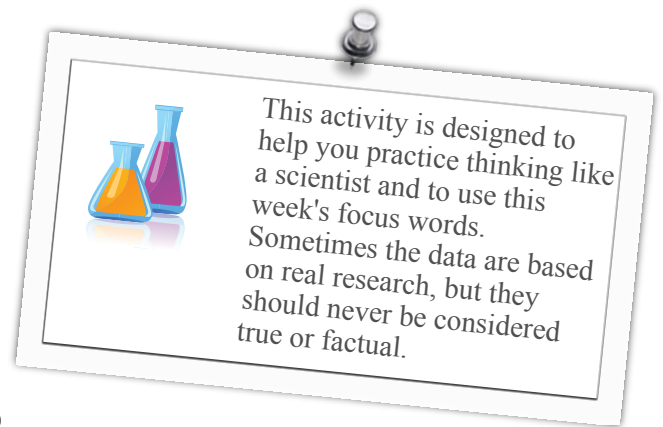
Censorship: Who should decide what young people read?

Science Activity

The principal, Miss Jackson, has banned the book, *Bless Me, Ultima* from the school library. Some students are protesting. “We should have **access** to this book,” says Trey. “Schools should **promote civil** liberties, not censorship.”

Despite the ban, Professor Kahn has begun seeing many of her students reading *Bless Me, Ultima* during study hall and at lunch. “Once I heard about the ban, I got curious,” Jackie explains. “I had to know what was in that book, so I checked it out from our county library!”

Professor Kahn becomes curious herself. Students who want to read the banned book can still access it for free at the public library, or buy it from a bookstore. Therefore, did banning the book in school really decrease the number of students who read it? Another nearby school is also going to ban the book *Bless Me, Ultima* from their library. Professor Kahn decides to **integrate** the banned book debate into her class by studying what happens at the other school.



Question:

Do fewer students read a book after it has been banned in their school library?

Hypothesis:

Students can still get the banned book from other places. So, the number of students reading the book will stay the same even after it is banned.

Materials:

Students from a school where a book is going to be banned.

Procedure:

1. For 5 weeks before the book *Bless Me, Ultima* is banned, keep track of how many students are reading it.
2. For 5 weeks after the book *Bless Me, Ultima* is banned, keep track of how many students are reading it.
3. Calculate the total number of students in each category.

Data:

Time	Number of Students Who are Reading the Book <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i>
Weeks 1 - 5: <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> is not banned	26
Weeks 5 - 10: <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> is banned	14

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Not supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Fewer students (about half of the previous number) read the book after it was banned.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Writing Prompt:

Should students have the freedom to read anything they want? Who should decide what young people read?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

access | civil | despite | integrate | promote

TEACHER	Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.
	Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- Stated my own position
- Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- Stated my own position clearly
- Included 1-2 arguments
- Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- Stated my own position clearly
- Included 1-2 arguments
- Included 1 counterargument
- Used 2-5 focus words

