

Embracing Literary Expression

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When I was in middle school, I remember one of English teachers assigned the entire class to read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling; unfortunately, I was not allowed to read or bring that book home from school if I ever needed to because my family did not approve of its witchcraft and magic content. However, the fact that I was not allowed to read the book made me want to read the books even more. In the article "Opinion: Stop Banning Books" from *The Pepperdine University Graphic*, Emily Chase (2023) argues against banning books because books are a form of art and expression. She explains how books allow creativity to flow and nurture "soul-growing experiences." She is also confident that banning books is harmful to society because people will no longer have the information they need to learn about the real world and real events. Chase (2023) discusses several books that have been banned in school districts, and she explains how some of those books were based on real events and enjoyed by their audience. Lastly, she argues that the real reason for book banning is because people want to avoid having awkward conversations or having to explain mature topics to children and teenagers. I agree with Chase (2023) because books promote critical thinking, and banning books can lead to poor quality of education. They allow readers to relate to and feel represented without judgment, and restricting books will not be enough to protect children's innocence because they are surrounded by temptation due to open access to the internet.

At the beginning of the article, Chase (2023) claims that books are a type of artistic work that depicts creativity and expression. I concur with Chase (2023) because literature depicts the storytelling of human history and personal stories in the same way artists express their view of society and their own lives through other mediums. On top of that, I found that books are meant to encourage critical thinking skills. According to the article "Book Banning: The End of Critical Thinking" from *The Ridge Review*, journalist and senior in high school (at the time), Caitlin

Bailey (2022), argues that children have the right to possess information, no matter how excruciating it can be to discuss. She says, “When we stop giving students the opportunity to explore perspectives different from their parents, we pave the road toward the end of critical thinking.” When I was younger, I was not allowed to read books that went against my family’s beliefs, such as books related to magic and witchcraft or books containing mythological gods. However, I had access to these books at the school library, and I read them during my free time or whenever I was alone in my room. Hearing from a high school student’s perspective and opinion about banning books is essential because students will be the ones mostly affected by the lack of learning exposure and open-mindedness.

Books like this did not only improve my reading skills, but they exposed me to different ideas and perspectives that allowed me to understand the world and diverse cultures a lot better. Bailey (2022) emphasizes that it’s extremely important to expose children to diverse opinions and perspectives, even though these same opinions might be different from their parents’ ideas and beliefs. This exposure will allow them to think critically and ask questions about the world and people around them. Critical reading is essential regardless of the content of books, and kids need to acquire critical thinking skills to become functional adults in society who understand and respect other people’s opinions and perspectives.

After highlighting her beliefs that banning books suppresses art and expression, Chase (2023) talks about the book *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, which is considered a classic American novel written in 1987. After the book was banned in 2022, Chase (2023) argues, “Teachers, administrators and parents at these schools — not mentioned — are sheltering their children from real events, real history.” She explains that the novel was influenced by a true story about a person who escaped slavery in Kentucky during the 1850s. I agree with Chase (2023) that

banning books keeps people from learning real history, and this may also cause students to get poor quality education if they're not learning real facts. In the article "Book Banning, Curriculum Restrictions, and the Politicization of U.S. Schools" from the *CAP*, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Educational Policy, and External Relations, Akilah Alleyne (2022), argues, "Book bans and curriculum gag orders make it impossible for every child to receive a high-quality and age-appropriate education by dictating whose history, identities, and voices matter." She states that according to the GBAO and the Anchor Collaborative, 54 percent of the members who participated in the poll agreed that young people want to keep moving forward in society, and those who want to suppress them only want them to move backwards. They want to make sure teenagers get the best quality education to build a brighter future. Through survey analysis and data, Alleyne (2022) points out that students want and deserve a better quality of education, but the politicization of schools wants to prevent children from learning the truth about their country because they don't want students to feel ashamed of being Americans. However, they should be taught the reality of America, even at its worst moments. Just because some events happened a long time ago, it does not mean we should forget about them or erase them from history books. Learning about real history is crucial because students need to understand the past and understand the events and things that went wrong to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Furthermore, Chase (2023) proceeds to talk about another book written by George M. Johnson called *All Boys Aren't Blue*, which has been restricted from several public schools because it is said to have "sexually explicit" content. Chase (2023) says, "[The book] covers topics students and young adults encounter on a daily basis." She explains that the book talks about the life of a young black male who grew up being part of the LGBTQ+ community. I agree

with Chase (2023) because most novels discuss themes many people can relate to. Besides, books make people feel included and represented without judgment. In the article “Struggling Kids Told Me My Book Helped Them Talk to Parents” from the *NPRnews*, Maia Kobabe (2023) claims that their book *Gender Queer: A Memoir* was expected to bring hate and disapproval due to its non-binary content. However, Kobabe (2023) says, “[...] I received only positive, often heartwarming and deeply moving, feedback. People told me they related to *Gender Queer* more than any other book [...]” After releasing the first copies of their book back in 2019, Kobabe (2023) received a lot of support from readers who identify with their book, and they say some readers were able to have open conversations with their parents about it. This demonstrates that readers will identify with a book at some point in their lives. Books like *Gender Queer: A Memoir* or *All Boys Aren’t Blue* shouldn’t be banned because there are people out there who need to be represented and included without judgment from society.

On the other hand, Chase (2023) explains that some people only want to ban books because “they are afraid of tough conversations and they don’t like pushback and confrontation about things they believe are correct.” I concur with Chase (2023) that some people feel uncomfortable talking about topics that relate to sexual orientation or race. However, the book ban won’t prevent children from reading these books because they still have access to the internet. Based on the article “Does Banning Books Protect Our Children?” from *Christian Parenting*, Steve Yount (2023) goes on about the different perspectives regarding book banning. He explains that Christians believe that these books go against their beliefs, while others think they only want to protect the innocence of children. As his final argument, Yount (2023), states, “Ever since Adam and Eve ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, temptation has been part of our daily lives. Sadly, we can’t completely protect our children from it.” Yount

(2023) explains that preventing kids from reading banned books is “virtually impossible” due to the advancement of technology and the internet, and even the Bible accepts and talks about sin in the world that cannot be prevented due to temptation. I understand that parents should always be worried about what their children are watching and reading. However, we cannot protect kids from everyday issues and controversy. The right thing to do is to have conversations with children about these topics, no matter how uncomfortable they can be, so they can have an open mind and be ready for the real world.

The bottom line is that all types of books promote creativity, expression, and critical thinking. Literature provides real history and real-life events, and a lack of accurate information can lead to a low quality of education for children and young adults. Books allow safe access for readers to feel represented and included without feeling ashamed of themselves. Finally, restricting books to kids won't be sufficient to save children's innocence because they have access to amplified technology. Referring to what I've stated, I learned that banning books restricts the different types of perspectives and opinions readers can choose from. Students should be taught accurate historical events to avoid repeating past mistakes. I have also learned that children should not be kept inside a bubble for the rest of their lives, away from open-minded conversations about issues that we face in society. Books are voices; they should never be silenced, and children should not be kept from developing their own opinions. Even though I was not allowed to read books such as Harry Potter, that didn't stop me from reading and enjoying them all. It is true that parents are responsible for what their children read and watch, but we should not make this a political issue. Everyone should have the opportunity to read books to expand their knowledge and critical thinking skills.

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