

English Language and Composition

Synthesis Question

(Suggested reading time – 15 minutes)

(Suggested writing time – 40 minutes)

Directions: The following prompt is based on the accompanying seven sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. *Refer to the sources to support your position; avoid mere paraphrase or summary. Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

Introduction: Potter Stewart said, censorship reflects society's lack of confidence in itself, yet some books find themselves burned, banned, pulled from shelves, opposed by parents, school boards, and in some cases, opposed by entire countries. But is banning a book ever the right answer? Is banning ever the only option? What brings about the desire to silence a voice, point of view, or belief? What is accomplished by banning?

Assignment: Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. **Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, take a position that evaluates what factors and criteria would need to be considered in the banning of book by a school board.**

You may refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Scroggins)

Source B (Quotes)

Source C (Survey)

Source D (Common Sense Media)

Source E (First Amendment)

Source F (Chervokas and Watson)

Source A

Scroggins, Wes. "Public Complaint Presented to the Republic School Board," 21 June 2010. Available at [http://www.boarddocs.com/mo/republic/Board.nsf/eb1791141834da838725731b0060c687/ea8aaefc50a6f9a387257727007d2776/\\$FILE/School%20Board%20Presentation%20\(Scroggins\).pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/mo/republic/Board.nsf/eb1791141834da838725731b0060c687/ea8aaefc50a6f9a387257727007d2776/$FILE/School%20Board%20Presentation%20(Scroggins).pdf)

The following passage is excerpted from a document presented to the Republic School Board by Dr. Wes Scroggins. The complaint regards the content of textbooks and other curricular material used in classes as immoral and in violation of the moral Law of God on which Scroggins believes the Constitution and individual liberties rest.

The High School English I (and possibly English II) curriculum contains materials that are immoral, offensive, and vulgar. "Slaughterhouse Five" is required reading in either the English I or English II course. It contains very vulgar language throughout the book and covers topics such as sex outside of marriage and homosexuality. [...]

In the English I course, students are required to read the book "Speak" and also watch the movie. "Speak" also contains much offensive material, including two rape scenes, drunken teenage parties, and teenage pre-marital sex. [...]

Books such as "Twenty Boy Summer" are also listed as recommended reading on the Republic School library website. This book glorifies drunken teenage parties and teen pre-marital sex. [...]

.....

Requiring children to be exposed to this content at school is immoral. It is an abomination to God to expose children to this material and this content will never be part of a moral education. It is difficult to understand how a school board and school administration that claims to be Christian and profess Jesus Christ can expose children to such immoral and vulgar material.

Requested Action from the Board

The Republic School Board should take the following actions:

- 1) Remove the above mentioned books from the English curriculum.
- 2) Identify and remove any other books that teach similar content.
- 3) Remove all R-rated movies from the curricula in all subjects.

Source B

"To Read, or Not to Read, That is the Question," *NCAC Newsletter: Censorship News* (issue 112). 19 May 2010.

*The following comments were selected from a heated discussion regarding the decision of administrators of Franklin Township in Indiana to pull Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* out of the hands of AP English students, who were half-way through reading the book.*

"If you think your children have not been exposed to sex, violence and profanity, you're living in a world of denial. ... this is not a book which is advocating such behavior but a realistic portrayal of life around us. Students who read this are not going to turn into sex addicts, or become violent or profane simply because of it... It is time we stop being so afraid that we feel we have to prevent students from learning how to engage in critical thinking. The lack of critical thinking in our society is becoming a pox on it."

"By the way, just because my children are exposed to sex, drugs, crime, violence, profanity, racism and general stupidity in the media, at school and in the community, doesn't make these things OK, nor should I – as a parent – accept that it is desirable for my community to promote these ideals. This type of 'parenting' or 'education' leads to an incremental acceptance of all that is vulgar, uncultured and ignorant about humanity. Hence, the argument that 'your kids are already exposed to this stuff' is a cop out."

"Any student who wishes to read that book is free to do so – they can do it on their own time. There is no good reason, however, to put that book in a classroom."

"*Song of Solomon* is a beautiful, heart-touching book with a lesson. Life isn't all rainbows and unicorns, so why shelter our kids from FICTION? Do you not trust your kids to be able to discern literature from reality? It IS difficult fiction, but it also teaches history and social context. It's a shame that Franklin doesn't have the guts to stand up to one ranting board member. Censorship is one step away from book burning."

"Kids for the most part are clueless. They are NOT adults so they have no say."

Source C

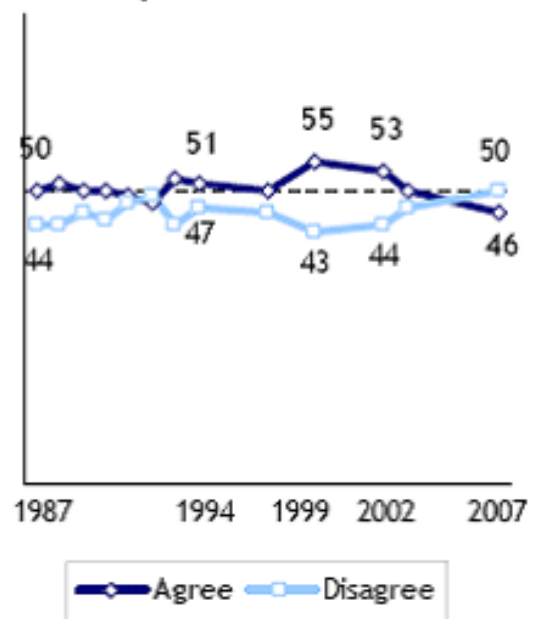
Results of a survey cited by the Pew Research for Center for the People & the Press, 27 March 2007. Survey can be accessed at <http://pewresearch.org/databank/dailynumber/?NumberID=314>.

Since 1999, support for the idea of banning "books with dangerous ideas" from public school libraries has declined from 55% to 46% and has now fallen to the lowest level of support of the past 20 years, in contrast with the modest increase observed in concerns about pornographic material in magazines and movies. But even in the early 1990s, as few as 48% had supported banning such books. While there are relatively modest partisan differences in opinions about banning dangerous books, there are divisions within parties, especially among Democrats. Two-thirds of liberal Democrats (67%) disagree that dangerous books should be banned -- and 52% completely disagree. By comparison, most conservative and moderate Democrats (56%) agree with the banning of dangerous books (and a relatively large proportion -- 37% -- completely agrees). Republicans are somewhat less divided, although 52% of conservative Republicans favor a ban on such books compared with 40% of moderate and liberal Republicans.

The darker line on the graph shows the percentage of those polled that agree that "books that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries."

The lighter line on the graph shows the percentage of those polled that disagree that "books that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries."

Books that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries



Source D

Common Sense Media's rating for Walter Dean Myer's *Fallen Angels*. Accessed at <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/fallen-angels>. 26 July 2010.

Below is Common Sense Media's rating for Water Dean Myers' historical fiction novel Fallen Angels.

Why We Rated This **iffy** for Ages 14–18

updated 02.09.10

What to watch out for



Messages: This a realistic depiction of the Vietnam War without the glamour Hollywood often provides. **Not an issue.**



Role models: Asian people referred to as "gooks," as was common among American soldiers. Some racial tension among American soldiers. Soldiers gamble and engage in coarse talk. A captain inflates the body count and sends his troops into battle



Violence: Extreme, graphic war violence to both soldiers and civilians. Depicts shootings and explosions, including a woman who booby-traps a small child to explode in an American soldier's arms.



Sex: References to some sexual fantasies of the soldiers.



Language: Constant and extreme -- a realistic depiction of soldier talk.



Consumerism: Not an issue.



Drinking, drugs, & smoking: Soldiers drink, smoke marijuana.

Summary of the novel (not from *Common Sense Media*): 1989 award winning novel about 17 year Richard Perry. Follows Richard and his best friend during their fighting in the Vietnam War.

Source E

First Amendment to the United States Bill of Rights

The following is the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution, which was ratified on December 15, 1791.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Source F

Chervokas, Jason and Tom Watson. "50 Most Frequently Banned Books," from *Banned in the U.S.A.* by Herbert N. Foerstel as cited by *Digital Nation* 1997.

50 Most Frequently Banned Books

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Impressions</i> Edited by Jack Booth et al.2. <i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck3. <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> by J.D. Salinger4. <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)5. <i>The Chocolate War</i> by Robert Cormier6. <i>Bridge to Terabithia</i> by Katherine Paterson7. <i>Scary Stories in the Dark</i> by Alvin Schwartz8. <i>More Scary Stories in the Dark</i> by Alvin Schwartz9. <i>The Witches</i> by Roald Dahl10. <i>Daddy's Roommate</i> by Michael Willhoite11. <i>Curses, Hexes, and Spells</i> by Daniel Cohen12. <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> by Madeleine L'Engle13. <i>How to Eat Fried Worms</i> by Thomas Rockwell14. <i>Blubber</i> by Judy Blume15. <i>Revolting Rhymes</i> by Roald Dahl16. <i>Halloween ABC</i> by Eve Merriam17. <i>A Day No Pigs Would Die</i> by Robert Peck18. <i>Heather Has Two Mommies</i> by Leslea Newman19. <i>Christine</i> by Stephen King20. <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> by Maya Angelou21. <i>Fallen Angels</i> by Walter Myers22. <i>The New Teenage Body Book</i> by Kathy McCoy and Charles Wibbelsman23. <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i> by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm24. <i>The Headless Cupid</i> by Zilpha Snyder25. <i>Night Chills</i> by Dean Koontz | <ol style="list-style-type: none">26. <i>Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding27. <i>A Separate Peace</i> by John Knowles28. <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> by Kurt Vonnegut29. <i>The Color Purple</i> by Alice Walker30. <i>James and the Giant Peach</i> by Roald Dahl31. <i>The Learning Tree</i> by Gordon Parks32. <i>The Witches of Worm</i> by Zilpha Snyder33. <i>My Brother Sam Is Dead</i> by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier34. <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> by John Steinbeck35. <i>Cujo</i> by Stephen King36. <i>The Great Gilly Hopkins</i> by Katherine Paterson37. <i>The Figure in the Shadows</i> by John Bellairs38. <i>On My Honor</i> by Marion Dane Bauer39. <i>In the Night Kitchen</i> by Maurice Sendak40. <i>Grendel</i> by John Champlin Gardner41. <i>I Have to Go</i> by Robert Munsch42. <i>Annie on My Mind</i> by Nancy Garden43. <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i> by Mark Twain44. <i>The Pigman</i> by Paul Zindel45. <i>My House</i> by Nikki Giovanni46. <i>Then Again, Maybe I Won't</i> by Judy Blume47. <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Margaret Atwood48. <i>Witches, Pumpkins, and Grinning Ghosts: The Story of the Halloween Symbols</i> by Edna Barth49. <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> by Gabriel Garcia Marquez50. <i>Scary Stories 3: More Tales to Chill Your Bones</i> by Alvin Schwartz |
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