# BANNED BOOKS ACTIVITY

**Scenario**

You are a first-year English teacher at TriState High School in Greenville, USA. A few years ago, a bestselling graphic novel was made into a popular movie. The movie is now available on DVD, and you’ve decided to have the students in your freshman English class read the book as homework and watch the movie in class.

The parent of one of your students does not approve of either the book or its movie adaptation and has emailed your principal to complain. The students are scheduled to start reading the book in a few weeks, so you need to make a decision and respond quickly. Please review the Document Library included in this activity and compose the email you would send to your principal (you are probably familiar with what an email looks like, and the first document in the Library gives you an example of a format you can follow). Offer a detailed rationale for your decision, and be sure to base that rationale only on the materials included in the Library.

# Document Library

1. Email from your principal, forwarding the parent’s complaint and asking for a response.
2. Publisher’s advertisement for *The Hunger Games*

<http://www.scholastic.com/thehungergames/about-the-books.htm>

1. The American Library Association’s “Freedom to Read” statement
2. Greenville Parents’ Bill of Rights
3. Movie review from focusonthefamily.com

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/protecting_your_family/book-reviews/h/hunger-games.aspx>

1. Pro/Con: Is Hollywood largely to blame for the nation’s social problems?
2. Banned Books Week: Suzanne Collins’ “The Hunger Games” Blog

<http://www.blogher.com/banned-books-week-suzanne-collins-hunger-games>

# Questions

Please consider the following questions as you prepare your response. You do not need to write a numbered list of answers, but your email to the SGA should show that you have given careful consideration to these questions.

1. In the email to the principal (Document 1), the parent claims that “children who see violent movies or play violent video games often go on to commit violent acts themselves.” Based on the evidence provided, what conclusions should be drawn about that claim? How do your conclusions affect your decision about whether to modify or replace your *Hunger Games* assignments?
2. What are the arguments for and against allowing parents and other figures to determine what is read and viewed in the public schools? Based on the evidence provided, what conclusions can you draw about the strengths and limitations of those arguments? How do your conclusions affect your decision about whether to modify or replace your *Hunger Games* assignments?
3. Is there information not included in the Document Library that would help you to draw strong conclusions and make a good decision about your *Hunger Games* assignment? What other information would you like to have access to?

**M. ENCHARGE [**[**ENCHARGE@COALTOWNSCHOOLS.ORG**](mailto:ENCHARGE@COALTOWNSCHOOLS.ORG)**]**

To: J. O. English (english@greenvilleschools.org) Sent: 16 September 2014, 9:13am

Subject: Parent Complaint

I recently received the following complaint about one of the assignments in your 2nd-period class. I want to give you the freedom to teach your classes as you see fit, but I also have to be sensitive and responsive to community concerns. We therefore need to reach a satisfactory resolution as quickly as we can.

I can see that resolution taking several forms:

1. You decide that the assignment is a critical part of your class and cannot be modified or replaced.
2. You can keep this assignment for the others, but allow this student to complete alternate activities.
3. You can replace this assignment with something else the entire class can participate in.

You are a first-year teacher, so you may not have had to deal with this before. You will almost certainly have to deal with it again, so you need to show that you can exercise good judgment when it comes to creating and defending your assignments. Please send me your response at your earliest convenience.

I. M. Encharge, M.Ed. Principal, TriState High School

-----Original Message-----

To: I. M. Encharge (encharge@coaltownschools.org) Sent: 15 September 2014, 8:47pm

From: A. Parent ([parent@freeemail.com](mailto:parent@freeemail.com)) Subject: Offensive book

Dear Principal Encharge,

My child is a student in J. O. English’s 2nd-period class. When I saw that the class was going to be working with *The Hunger Games* this term, I became very upset because it goes against the values we try to follow in our family. The book has a great deal of violence and some sexual innuendo, and I’ve been told that the movie is even worse.

As everyone knows, children who see violent movies or play violent video games often go on to commit violent acts themselves. For this reason, we did not allow our children to read the book or watch the movie when they first came out, and we do not believe they should be required assignments now. I respectfully request, therefore, that they be replaced with more suitable assignments.

Thank you very much. Sincerely,

A. Parent

<http://www.scholastic.com/thehungergames/about-the-books.htm>

# American Library Association The Freedom to Read Statement

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain.

Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

Source: “The Freedom to Read Statement.” American Library Association. Web. 14 June 2012. <http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/statementspols/ftrstatement/freedomreadstatement>

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# THE COALTOWN PARENTS’ BILL OF RIGHTS

**A Response to the American Library Association**

The news is full of stories about books that have been banned, or attempted to be banned, from our public libraries and schools. Every time an issue arises, the American Library Association (ALA) comes down squarely on the side of the librarians and teachers, insisting on something they call the public’s “right to read.”

They, however, are not the only ones with rights. Since the libraries and schools are operated with public funds, the public has a right to a voice in what takes place within their walls. With that in mind, we, the Concerned Citizens of Greenville (CCG), propose a Bill of Rights of our own. If you’d like to join our cause, please sign our online petition at [www.GreenvilleParents.org/BillofRights.htm](http://www.GreenvilleParents.org/BillofRights.htm). Thank you for your support!

As parents, we have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and education of our children. As taxpayers, we are entitled to ensure that our public institutions are operated in accordance with our values. With that in mind, we endorse the following “Greenville Parents’ Bill of Rights”:

1. We have the right to voice our opinions concerning the materials in our municipal and school libraries. We should be able to comment on potentially objectionable material before it is purchased, and to request that objectionable material already in the collections be removed or placed on restricted use.
2. We have the right to voice our opinions concerning the materials used in our public-school classrooms. We should have the opportunity to “sign off” on all books our children will be required to read and all films they will be required to watch. If we object to the content of any material, we have the right to request alternative assignments.

"The Hunger Games." Focus on the Family, n.d. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/protecting_your_family/book-reviews/h/hunger-games.aspx>

**Sex, Violence and the Media**

***Is it time to crack down on TV and movies?***

By Charles S. Clark

**Pro/Con**

# Is Hollywood largely to blame for the nation's social problems?

November 17, 1995 • Volume 5, Issue 43

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| **Sen. Bob Dole**  R-Kan.. Republican presidential candidate. From a speech in Los Angeles, Calif., May 31, 1995. | **Lionel Chetwynd**  Filmmaker and producer.. From remarks at a conference on sex and Hollywood sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Sept. 29, 1995. |
| One of the greatest threats to American family values is the way our popular culture ridicules them. Our music, movies, television and advertising regularly push the limits of decency, bombarding our children with destructive messages of casual violence and even more casual sex. . . . [W]e must hold Hollywood and the entire entertainment industry accountable for putting profit ahead of common decency. . . .  There is often heard in Hollywood a kind of “aw shucks” response to attempts to link societal effects with causes in the culture. It's the “we just make movies people want” response. . . . But when they go to work tomorrow, when they sift through competing proposals for their time and their money, when they consider how badly they need the next job, I want the leaders of the entertainment industry to think about the influence they have on America's children. . . .  My voice and the rising voices of millions of other Americans who share this view represent more than the codgy old attempt of one generation to steal the fun of another. A line has been crossed - not just of taste, but of human dignity and decency. It is crossed every time sexual violence is given a catchy tune. When teen suicide is set to an appealing beat. When Hollywood's dream factories turn out nightmares of depravity. . . .  I am not saying that our growing social problems are entirely Hollywood's fault. They are not. People are responsible for their actions. Movies and music do not make children into murderers. But a numbing exposure to graphic violence and immorality does steal away |
| Hollywood is so much easier to [go after] than gun control enforcement, destruction of certain types of families by cycles of poverty and welfare dependency or, perhaps most importantly, parental responsibility and adult maturity. . . .  This is not to suggest that Hollywood's product is not inextricably bound up with the social problems eating away at our nation but simply to point out that evidence indicates it is not a causal factor. Politicians, always in need of a target of opportunity, have found a useful one in popular entertainment. . . .  Canadians are subjected to virtually the identical popular entertainment as Americans. . . . And yet, Canada appears virtually free of the enervating social pathologies that erode American society. . . . How do the critics of Hollywood explain this? . . . If our popular culture is the cancer-causing virus, why is the annual homicide rate for all of Canada roughly the same as a tough long weekend in Los Angeles?  On the other hand, it would be disingenuous to claim that popular entertainment is not a force and that there is no difference between “Andy Hardy” and “Natural Born Killers.” . . . A reasonable person would find it  very difficult, if not impossible, to agree that Hollywood is at least part of the problem; so, the specific questions are: (a) is it the whole problem? and (b) can it be the solution?. . . |

innocence, smothering our instinct for outrage. And I think we have reached the point where our popular culture threatens to undermine our character as a nation. . . .

The corporate executives who dismiss my criticism should not misunderstand. Mine is not the objection of

Like most people who make their living in Hollywood, I am deeply troubled by much of our product. I cringe at some of the films and television - and, especially, “music” such as Gangsta rap . . . . I urgently hope that the current outcry will shake up the complacency that infects so much of the Hollywood community, that we will, along with the rest of America, embark on an

some tiny group of zealots or an ideological fringe. From earnest attempt to restore a sense of pride,

inner city mothers to suburban mothers to families in rural America - parents are afraid, and growing angry. There once was a time when parents felt the community

commonality, responsibility, and even shame, to our lives and work.

of adults was on their side. Now they feel surrounded by But it can only happen “along with the rest of America.” forces assaulting their children and their code of values. There is no single monster that a single stake through

. . .

My challenge to the entertainment industry is to accept a calling above and beyond the bottom line - to fulfill a duty to the society which provides its profits. Help our nation maintain the innocence of its children. Prove to us that courage and conscience are alive and well in Hollywood.

the heart can cure. The restoration of the glory of the American dream is a national project, not the responsibility of a single (and largely frivolous) industry.

. . .

Like many in Hollywood, I am willing to accept some of the blame for the wreckage I see around me - but I long for the politicians and the journalists and the victimhood specialists to acknowledge their share of responsibility.

Clark, C. S. (1995, November 17). Sex, violence and the media. *CQ Researcher*, *5*, 1017-1040. Retrieved from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/>

**DOCUMENT 7**

Ballum, Karen. "Banned Books Week: Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games"" *Www.blogher.com*. Blogher.com, 29 Sept. 2011. Web. 3 Aug. 2014.

<http://www.blogher.com/banned-books-week-suzanne-collins-hunger-games>