

SAMPLE FRESHMAN ENGLISH 102 PAPERS: FREE SPEECH ASSIGNMENT 1

The sample essays below were "A" papers written by previous students in Dr. Britton's English 102 classes. They include group and individual papers on free speech topics. These are good papers--they are not perfect and you may well spot errors or areas that can still be improved. But they show how you can succeed in your work.

To discourage dishonest students from trying to plagiarize these papers (not MY students, of course), I have deleted all "Works Cited" pages. To learn how to put these together, consult your textbook. I've also altered the citations so you cannot rely on them as being the original, accurate sources. As these were e-mail submissions, I have not retained formatting matters you need to use such as italicizing book titles. My purpose here is to show how these projects should be organized and written, so some matters will be discussed in class and not shown here.

Note: as two of these models deal with video games and the teaching of creationism, you should avoid choosing these topics unless you have a different approach and use different sources from those used here.

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Essay 1: Note: Other good models can be found in the file of 101 papers also posted at this website.

Creationism in Public Schools (a group paper)

The argument over whether creationism should be taught in public schools has been a debate that has spanned decades. The United States Constitution guarantees the separation of church and state, yet the debate lives on even today. Such states as Kansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma have tried to pass regulations to put creationism on the same level as evolution as a possible explanation for life on this planet (Joseph 1). Many feel that Creationism is better left out of public school curriculums and should be taught instead by the parents of the individual students. So how can this controversy be resolved? First, an understanding of the terms involved might clarify a few points.

What is creationism? Creationism is any theory that the universe was created by a divine being. This includes all religions at every level (Joseph 5). The United States has been classified as a "melting pot" with a vast collection of people of all nationalities and religions. The Constitution of the United States provides a guarantee for all Americans to be able to exercise their right to freedom of religion. The Establishment Clause of the

First Amendment, however, does not allow the government to endorse any particular religious beliefs (Anti-Defamation 1).

Instead, the first amendment states, "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 peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievance." (Gilbert) It would seem that the government's stance on creationism being taught in schools is fairly cut and dry. So why has there been controversy over the issue? The answer is simple: politicians are human. Humans by nature are driven by emotion. Some policy makers have a hard time resisting the urge to combine their beliefs in their personal lives with the way they implement and enforce laws. For example, in Oklahoma, the State Textbook Committee determined that all biology books used in the state must contain a disclaimer stating "evolution is a controversial theory which some scientists present as a scientific explanation for the origin of living things, such as plants and humans" (Anti-Defamation 1). Why is there a need for such a disclaimer? Are there religious motivations behind it? The Anti-Defamation League feels this is simply a way to promote creationism in the public schools of Oklahoma. Similarly, in 1994, the Louisiana school board passed a resolution that educators teaching evolution should state "lessons on evolution are presented to inform students of the scientific concept and not intended to influence or dissuade the Biblical version of Creationism or any other concept" (Anti-Defamation 1). The U.S. Court of Appeals found this disclaimer to be unconstitutional because it encouraged students to consider religious alternatives to evolution (Anti-Defamation 1).

There are those people who believe that creationism shouldn't be taught with the theory of evolution because creationism is not a theory, it's a religious belief. This is not to say creationism has no place in school. Due to the outcomes of the court cases of *Epperson v. Arkansas* in 1968 and *Aguillard v. Edwards* in 1987, it was decided by the Supreme Court that creationism could be taught in the form of a religion or religious history class (Anti-Defamation 1). Science classes, however, were to teach only scientific explanations of life on earth.

We can assume the reasoning behind this is to prevent biology lessons involving creationism from turning into debates on Biblical interpretation. It has been determined that school officials may teach creationism as long as it is to teach the role of religion in the historical, cultural, economic and social development and should be to install tolerance and respect for other cultures (Anti-Defamation 2).

We have established that creationism can be taught in public schools in a particular form. The question still remains, should creationism be taught at all in public schools? A common answer might be no, there is a separation of church and state. Another answer might be yes, we should have bible study classes to promote morality etc. Both of these answers have major flaws. The problem with the "yes" response is that it obviously promotes one religion over others. The "no" response, "separation of church and state", is the judicial interpretation of the first amendment. This is widely viewed as

"religion and government can have nothing to do with one another". The government was in-fact quite religious at the writing of the constitution and somewhat still is today.

The fact is that creationism is everywhere in this country. With 84 percent of the population being Christian, two percent being Jewish and between five and seven million Muslims, the form it (creationism) takes on in a classroom could raise a few conflicts (Cohen). Why? "Some parents are not willing to have their children taught about the Bible (in this way), because their children would then be exposed to beliefs that the parents disagree with"(Robinson).

The purpose of the first amendment was to have religious tolerance and prevent all forms of religious persecution. A class that is purely objective and taught all major religions and secular views evenly would promote religious and secular tolerance. Such a class would also remove many misconceptions and stereotypes about ethnic and religious groups. The class material, however, would have to remain strictly on the basic beliefs, tenets, and history of each religion as well as the theories and reasoning of secular views. The difficult part is whether or not a non-bias teaching of the material can be achieved. The class would more than likely turn into a religion class promoting one religion more than the others, especially in areas with little religious diversity. This promotion could be blunt evangelicalism by a minister of a faith or subtle references to a particular religion or view as being discreditable. If the curriculum of the class included origins of the world, then Evolution of Man would also have to be taught as a secular view as well.

The judicial interpretation of the first amendment is that no religion or secular view can be promoted above any other religion or secular view in government. Nor can any religion or secular view be dejected or placed as less than any other religion or secular view in government (Robinson). One can hardly respect a system of education that would leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared (Flowers).

Clearly, the question of creationism in public schools will be debated for years to come. Achieving a non-bias curriculum about the subject would be difficult. Finding educators qualified and experienced enough to teach creationism objectively would also be very difficult. Due to these major obstacles, creationism must remain out of the classroom and dealt with at home by the parents.

(The "Works Cited" has been deleted; source names have been changed.)

Essay 2

Freedom and Literature

"The books that the world calls immoral are the books that show the world its own shame"(Oscar Wilde).

For decades, groups and individuals have attempted to censor material they deemed inappropriate. Literature is often criticized for violence, strong language, or controversial plots. Many classic novels that are said to teach children moral lessons have come under this type of criticism. The novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, is just one of the many novels referred to as inappropriate. This book appears on required reading lists in many schools, and has been challenged by parents and organizations who do not want children reading strong language and discussing racial issues. However, many feel that Harper Lee's novel teaches readers about a sad time in American history, and can be morally beneficial. The fact is that, under the First Amendment, individuals have the right to choose what they read. Likewise, individuals and organizations have the freedom to voice their opinions on an issue. When combining these two civil liberties, it is evident that not only would it be a huge loss to ban a book opposed by a few, it would also be unconstitutional.

To Kill A Mockingbird is a story of a brother and sister growing up in the Deep South during a time of heightening racial segregation. This novel brings to light circumstances that are offensive today, but are undeniably a piece of our history. A key example of one of these instances is the trial of Tom, a local black man accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a white woman with a bad reputation. Jem and Scout Finch, the children in the novel, struggle to come to terms with the cruelty of their society after Tom is found guilty following a trial that clearly proved him innocent. For two children under the age of thirteen, this was a very powerful and disturbing issue. Those opposed to the novel feel it is too powerful for the children of today to handle(Miner). This, and the use of words such as "nigger," and "whore" have led to the challenging of this novel. In fact, it has caused such an uproar among book banners that it appeared as number forty-one on the American Library Associations list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990 to 2000(100 Most). *To Kill A Mockingbird* has also been temporarily banned in places like Eden Valley, Minnesota, only to be put back on the shelves by anti-banning protesters(Caution).

What is the difference between a ban and a challenge? The American Library Association refers to a challenge as "an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group"(Banned). A ban is the actual removal of materials. According to Deanna Duby, director of education policy for People for the American Way, there are three types of challenges made against books: a parent who does not want their child reading a certain book, an individual who does not want anyone in a school to read the book in question, and an organized campaign by a prepared group(Miner). Challenges made by a parent are the most common followed by organized religious groups(Miner). The top five reasons for banning a book include sexually explicit material, use of offensive language, promotion of an occult theme or Satanism, violence, and promotion of homosexuality(Banned).

To Kill A Mockingbird has been challenged for its use of offensive language. However, Harper Lee's novel has not been successfully banned in a school or public library system(Holliday). This shows that challenging books is a healthy exercising of an American right, and that banning will never succeed because the majority of Americans

can find a moral lesson within controversy. In the case of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, parents and school administrators have collectively decided that it's material is a good way to teach children about racial segregation. Beverly Becker of the American Library Association feels that, "Books contain a wealth of diverse and important ideas. It is a safe place to think about things and to explore different ideas"(Holliday). When accompanied by a full history lesson on slavery and segregation, children can better relate to the issues in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The trial and fate of Tom are prime examples of the injustice blacks faced during racial segregation. This does not promote racism as some believe. Regarding this issue, Jessica Zisko, city editor of the *Daily Aztec* says, "This society is too quick to jump on the censorship bandwagon. They see the word 'wizard' and cry wolf about Satan sneaking into the world. A book has one black character and all of a sudden it's 'too racist' for our children to read. If we don't fight we won't be teaching our children about the occult or homosexuality. We will be teaching them about ignorance"(Zisko).

Although school administrators and some parents approve of reading *To Kill A Mockingbird*, there are still some parents who are offended by it. According to an organization called Parents Against Reading Bad Books in Schools, "Children should not be able to access offensive books at school. Some books just aren't appropriate for all ages"(Holliday). For this reason, many schools have decided to make reading it optional, rather than required(Holliday). There are other solutions to disputing a book, such as parents having to sign a permission slip in order for their child to read it, offering an alternative reading choice, or teaching the subject to an older level of students. Having a parent sign a permission slip lets a teacher know that a parent is comfortable with their child discussing the issue at hand. Many school administrators and teachers would simply offer another book to anyone who has an objection to reading a controversial piece of literature. This allows students the freedom to read the novel in question and learn more about a controversial topic without making other students uncomfortable. Another solution many school systems may choose is to include books like *To Kill A Mockingbird* in the curriculum of older high school students, rather than younger junior high students. According to Barbara Miner, author of "Reading, Writing, and Censorship: When Reading Good Books Can Get Schools in Trouble," it is a wise idea to discuss challenged books with older students because, "Issues of age appropriateness are most common in elementary and middle schools. Teachers, parents, and the courts have generally recognized that the older the student, the more that student has the right to know"(Miner). In a recent Nova Scotia case challenging *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the Tri-County District school board voted to keep the book in schools, reminding teachers to "be aware of racial sensitivities in teaching the books, and that any student who doesn't want to read them doesn't have to"(Nova Scotia).

In any public situation or decision, there will always be one person who is unhappy with it. Protests and challenges will never cease because it is the American way. Civil liberties not only give us the freedom to read and write about anything that strikes us, they also give us the right to challenge. To go any further with a protest and ban a book is a violation of American pride. Literature is a free market; anyone can read it, anyone can write it. There are many ways to prevent banning books and still make most

people happy. The lessons readers learn from books such as *To Kill A Mockingbird* shape our morals. In this way, America's values and beliefs truly are a product of freedom and literature.

Essay 3

Violence in Video Games

Last year, one of the most prominent inventions of the 20th century celebrated its 30th birthday (Bowling). Not only is the video game industry one of the most successful industries of all time, it is also one of the most controversial.

Video games are a very popular pass time among children and youth. 79% of children in the United States play them on a regular basis (Bowling). A large percentage of these games are appropriate and educational. The remaining percentage, however, contain violence, gore, and behavior that is not acceptable in society (Bowling). These types of games are a serious concern among parents, teachers, and doctors. The concerns of these men and women are supported by the belief that these types of games are harmful and negatively influential on the children who play them (Bowling).

The concerns of these people are justified through research that shows consistent results that children who play violent video games tend to behave in a more aggressive way than do children who do not play these games (Bowling). So what is stopping these types of games from being taken off of the shelves of stores and permanently banned?

Every video game that is produced is issued a rating by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). These ratings are as followed: C-Early Childhood (Ages 3 and up), E-Everyone (Ages 6 and up), T-Teen (Ages 13 and up), M-Mature (Ages 18 and up), and RP-Rating Pending (ESRB). Along with these ratings comes a description that tells us why the game was given that rating (ESRB). For example, the Playstation 2 game *Grand Theft Auto Vice City* was rated M for mature because of blood, gore, violence, strong language, and strong sexual content (ESRB).

It is the duty of the video game producers and distributors to follow this rating board and only sell to people who meet the age restrictions of these games. Although evidence shows that many of these people do not abide by these rules, violent video games should not be taken off of the shelves because of the faults of these men and women.

The ratings that the Entertainment Software Rating Board gives to video games is much like the ratings that are given to movies. These movies are as followed: G-General Audiences (All Ages), PG- Parental Guidance Suggested (Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children), PG-13-Parental Guidance Strongly Cautioned (Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13), R-Restricted (Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent Or Adult Guardian), and NC-17-No One Under 17 Admitted (The Braverman Group). These ratings for movies and the ratings for video games given by

the ESRB are very similar. So, if we are to ban violent video games with a rating of M, then what stops us from banning violent movies with a rating of R? Children under 18 years of age can sneak into an R rated movie just as easily as they can purchase an M rated video game from the number of distributors who are willing to sell them to these children. We cannot take away from the movie industry, the video game industry, or the people of age who enjoy playing or watching violence because of the ability of some people to manipulate the system. These ratings exist for a reason: to prevent individuals who are not capable of handling the content in a video game from playing them. As producers and distributors are required to regulate who purchases certain video games, parents are also required to supervise their children and their behavior at all times. This is not based on opinion, it is the law. This law has been confirmed by the Supreme Court (Bowling). Other laws prohibit children under a certain age from taking place in certain activities such as alcohol, tobacco, guns, pornography, and gambling (Bowling). These laws would include supervising what video games your children purchase and play. Parents should be aware of the whereabouts of their children and the events that they are taking place in at all times. Violent video games were not made for children to play. Therefore, rather than banning them because some children can get their hands on them, parents should be looking for ways of better supervising what their children are doing. For example, Wayne Kawamoto, whose children enjoy playing video games, believes in supervising the games that his children play whether they are at home or away, stating:

“When my son's friends come over, I always call their parents to make sure that they're okay with video games. I also stay in touch with relatives and friends about gifts; I let them know what is and is not acceptable for our family. A little knowledge is not a dangerous thing. A few facts can help us make intelligent decisions. We have to draw our own lines for our kids when it comes to violence in any medium. Children are more likely to stay within those lines—whether they like them or not—if we've spent a little time understanding the topic, and them.” (Kawamoto)

Video games, violent or nonviolent, will continue to flourish. Their popularity will continue to grow and, most likely, so will the controversy that surrounds them. Rather than focusing on banning violent video games all together because of the negative affects that they have on children, we should be focusing on finding ways to prevent people who do not meet the age requirements from purchasing and playing such games.

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