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Controversial Conversations in the ELA Classroom: Using Banned Books to Enhance
Learning

by

Whitney Markwica

Submitted to the

Department of Education and Human Development of
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Controversial Conversations in the ELA Classroom: Using Banned Books to Enhance
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Abstract

Banned books are a hot topic in schools and libraries all across the nation. There are many reasons why a book may be banned or challenged and all of them are related to readers being exposed to topics that others deem unsuitable. Parents are reluctant to have their children exposed to controversial topics through books in the classroom setting when this is, in fact, a great place for them to have conversations about difficult subjects. The English classroom is a unique space in which students and teachers can have open discussions about topics such as violence, drugs, alcohol, language, and sex. The fact is, many students are having experiences that are comparable to these controversial topics whether adults want them to or not. Through carefully and purposefully studying banned books students have the ability to learn through the consequences of characters in a book. *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton is a perfect example of a book that has been challenged and banned on many occasions but can be used to teach students valuable lessons on things such as gang violence, drugs, alcohol, and death.

Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement: In a world where middle school students are confronted with issues considered too controversial to be included in the curriculum, there are benefits to reading banned books in the English classroom.

For hundreds of years, there have been books that have been banned and challenged across the United States for various reasons. Some of the most common reasons involve drug abuse, inappropriate language, racial prejudice (many times in correlation with the time period setting of the novel), alcohol use, and sexually explicit scenes. The main argument in this project is that not only should books that have been previously banned be used in middle and high school classrooms, but they should be preferred for the benefits that they bring when teaching them. As Pat R. Scales mentions in his book *Teaching Banned Books*, these books “make students sensitive to society and the way others live” (Scales). Through a novel, a student can learn about the struggles and differences in other people’s lives. On the contrary, Scales also mentions how “Censors want to control the minds of the young” (Scales). By blocking certain content for students, the people who ban books are picking and choosing the information that they want to be made available to students. By not exposing them to controversial topics, students are not left to form their own opinions and learn about the world around them. The school does not only need to be a place where students learn skills such as reading and writing. It can also give students the opportunity to learn life and social skills that they will need going into the adult world. The more diverse the lessons students learn at school, the more knowledge they will have when they leave.

While many topics may cause a book to be banned, the overall reason is oftentimes the same. As author Judy Blume put it, “Censorship grows out of fear, and there is a tremendous amount of fear on the part of parents who wish to control their young children and shield them from the world” (Swiderek 592). When it comes down to it, censorship is choosing what is and what is not acceptable for students to be learning about. Things such as violence, sexuality, inappropriate language, and much more are a factor in kids’ lives regardless of the world around them, and having children turn a blind eye to them is doing them a disservice. Blume went on to say, “Children are inexperienced but not innocent and their pain and unhappiness do not come from books. They come from life” (Swiderek 592). Even when a controversial topic doesn't relate directly to a child, they cannot spend their time past childhood being completely oblivious to the world around them. They may eventually find themselves in violent, sexual, dangerous, or inappropriate situations and the classroom setting is uniquely designed to prepare kids for the future.

There has been some movement against the banning of books. Ever since the invention of the printing press, books have been banned. In order to combat this, there have been initiatives to keep these books in libraries and schools. Heather Fitzgerald writes about the formation of Banned Book Week in her newspaper article:

Banned Books Week was first created in 1982 by the American Library Association or (ALA), to inspire more people to freely read literature after the Supreme Court decision *Island Trees School District v. Pico*, which restricted public institutions' ability to ban books and other media solely based on disagreements with the content. (Fitzgerald)

Many supporters of banned books acknowledge the first amendment and the freedom of the press, the freedom to publish any content, and for that content to be circulated. Banned books week often highlights books that have been highly challenged or banned in the past and books that are being challenged and banned in the present. There is always a new reason for some to want to ban a book whether that is the inclusion of non-straight or not cis-gendered characters, the inclusion of witchcraft in fantasy novels, or the inclusion of slurs and explicit content. Banned book week draws attention to these controversial books and the benefits that they have from reading them. It aims to open the eyes of the general public to see how kids can learn from the mistakes of characters in novels who get themselves in situations that involve things such as drug and alcohol use, violence, or sexual activity. It can also expand people's understanding of individuals who are different from themselves such as the LGTBQ community or people with different religions or cultures. Each year there are specific books that are chosen to be highlighted during this week. Selected books are encouraged to be read and discussed across the nation. Schools, libraries, and other various supporters come together to promote the benefits of reading these books.

Significance of the Problem

While the banning of books has been going on for centuries, it is increasingly important today. We live in a world where digital media is rapidly growing and children are being exposed to things beyond their parents' control at a high rate. There are ample opportunities for students to be exposed to issues such as inappropriate language, drug use, and abuse, drinking, and sex through television, radio, and in

movies and music. Teen shows such as *Riverdale*, *13 Reasons Why*, and *Pretty Little Liars* all use these themes as main plot points. Additionally, rappers who are popular with the youth such as Cardi B and Xxxtentacion have entire discographies composed of songs promoting such activities. To allow students to view and listen to these types of situations on other media outlets and to ban books that contain the same or similar topics is nonsensical. The English classroom is the perfect setting to discuss controversial topics with students. As Robert Cormier, the author of *Chocolate War*, said, "Controversial books ought to be in the classroom where they can be discussed and evaluated under the guidance of a teacher, and where students can tell how they feel about the book or even refuse to read it" (Swiderek 592). In the classroom, students have opportunities to have conversations with teachers and with each other about situations that may be difficult to talk about. While these issues may be difficult to talk about, most students are experiencing or know someone who is experiencing them. The safety of a classroom allows students to learn about controversial topics in an honest way and then to see the consequences that follow them. For example, students already know that one possible consequence of having unprotected sex is pregnancy, but through a novel, a student can learn so much more. Through Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, students can see how characters deal with both heterosexual and homosexual sexual relationships, rape, and abortion and not only get a better understanding of how they can impact someone but also get an idea of the emotional toll that can be factored in. When reading a book where a teenager has an unexpected pregnancy the reader can get a grasp on the teenager's emotions that accompany the consequence. The readers can not only see the struggle of either raising a child or

going through with an abortion but the raw emotions that come along with it such as grief, stress, lifestyle changes, and possibly regret. In other media outlets, especially in music, having sex is often portrayed as a cool thing that has only positive consequences. When reading about it, on the other hand, a student can see that there are strong emotions that can be attached to it that even in the case of no pregnancy can affect both people involved. Similar lessons can be learned from reading about drug abuse, alcohol abuse, gang violence racial prejudice, and inappropriate language. The nature of many banned books shows students the world as it is, not how we wish it to be.

One of the goals of English teachers that may not be a direct standard that is mandated by the state is to promote reading for enjoyment. The topics that are discussed in banned books are naturally engaging to students. Controversial situations tend to peak students' interests because they are unexpected and intriguing. Since banned books are oftentimes banned because they contain these controversial issues, they are great candidates for books that students will enjoy reading. If students enjoy the books that they are reading in English class they will be more engaged in class and therefore learn more content. An optimistic English teacher can then hope that if a student enjoys a book that is read in their classroom the student will be eager to find more books that have similar content. Banned books are edgy. Novels such as *The Kite Runner*, *Looking for Alaska*, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are just some examples of popular young adult books that have been frequently challenged due to the fact that they contain offensive or inappropriate language. While this may seem controversial and shocking at first in a couple of years these books will likely lose their

shock factor and be seen for their literary merit. Additionally, kids crave books that they can relate to. These edgier books can mirror certain aspects of their lives that are more controversial such as drinking and drug use. Oftentimes in these books, they can find characters that they relate to and learn from. Charlie from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* can help students realize positive and negative ways to deal with trauma. Students can have a deeper understanding of the consequences of drinking from reading through the perspective of Ponyboy in *The Outsiders*. Each character, while introducing students to controversial topics, can be someone that they relate to and gain knowledge from by reading about their experiences.

Overall, with the rate the students are being introduced to controversial topics at an increasingly young age, they must have the opportunity to have these conversations in a setting that is safe and open their minds to see more perspectives than they were familiar with before they had read the book. Reading banned books exposes students to these difficult topics in just that way and therefore should be embraced in the English classroom.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to discover how banned books are not only acceptable for middle and high school students to be reading in the classroom, but how they are beneficial. There is a wide range of reasons why books are banned and challenged, however, these controversial books should be embraced. Banned books touch on situations that many middle and high schoolers are introduced to, whether they partake in them or not, it is important to read books that contain this content. Without

the incorporation of banned books in the classroom, students will be left to deal with such topics in a less controlled way and possibly on their own. The lessons that can be taught in the classroom based on banned books can enrich students' learning beyond standard requirements and therefore put students in a position where they are better prepared for the adult world. I will look into a unit on teaching *The Outsiders* in an eighth grade ELA classroom and how through this lesson students can learn more about English but also more about how to deal with difficult situations and peer pressure.

Rationale

When one looks at the term “banned book” an easy first assumption is that the book is dangerous and should be forbidden in places such as school. The fact that it has been banned in some places implies that it has provoked some sort of controversy and was deemed unfit for students to read. Topics such as violence, sex, drug use, offensive language, the portrayal of race and sexuality, and damaging lifestyle choices are some of the reasons a book may be banned. When students are reaching the time in their lives where they are entering middle school there are a lot of changes that begin to happen. For many students, this is the time where their childlike innocence begins to disappear as they are introduced to new pieces of life that they were once oblivious to. Many of the topics listed above become more relevant to students once they hit middle school whether they choose to partake in them or not. The fact is some of their peers and people around them will find themselves in complicated and diverse situations that relate to themes that banned books touch upon. Therefore, it is important to introduce

these topics to students in a way that puts them in a position to make healthy decisions for themselves.

We live in a world where these topics are often portrayed as cool in social media and music, leaving kids curious and perhaps even in belief that these are situations that they must partake in. Many students listen to rap music that has lyrics with no other purpose than to promote drug use, sex, and violence. Additionally, students have been becoming addicted to new types of drugs; the number of students vaping and using juuls has become a huge problem recently in the United States. When students read about these topics in the classroom, they are in an environment where they can have meaningful discussions about them. They are also in a setting where they can see the consequences of these actions. For example, when something such as gang violence happens in a book, the reader then sees the outcome and how that takes a toll physically and emotionally on various characters. In other media, this might be something that is mentioned to sound tough but the outcome isn't as relevant. The classroom setting also allows teachers to have meaningful conversations with students about these difficult topics as well as their consequences and give their support and insight on the subject. Isn't that how we can provide our students with the most comprehensive education?

Definition of Terms

Banned book — A book that has been challenged and removed from shelves because it contains controversial topics.

Censorship — to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable (Merriam Webster)

Challenged Book — A book that one wishes to ban because it contains controversial topics but has not yet been deemed inappropriate and removed from the shelves.

ELA— English Language Arts

Summary

In a world where middle school students are confronted with issues considered too controversial to be included in the curriculum, there are benefits to reading banned books in the English classroom. This project will look at the importance of incorporating banned and challenged books into the English classroom and provide effective ways in which these books can be taught in a middle school setting.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

One topic that is relevant today, when it comes to the English classroom, is the censorship and banning of books that can be used in various units. Books can be banned or challenged for a number of reasons, but the ones that appear the most often are for explicit language, sexual content, or violence. These are all concepts that certain

parents think should be censored from their children, especially in an educational setting. There are, however, many benefits to books with controversial topics and these benefits can be incorporated into the English classroom.

The process of a book being banned begins with the book being challenged. Usually, the people who challenge books are parents but sometimes teachers will also challenge a book. Often the reason for banning a book will be because the book is not deemed age-appropriate. There are not always details that lay out what exactly about the book is offensive. This challenge can sometimes lead to a book being permanently banned at schools or libraries (Texas Library Journal). As Strothmann mentions, “Censors often fail to view literature holistically, concentrating on specific words or scenes as objectionable instead of evaluating the merit of a work as a whole” (165). This becomes an issue when books have a lot of educational value but are also filled with controversial topics. While banning a book may censor a student’s exposure to one instance of a controversial topic, it may also take away valuable lessons that can be learned in the English classroom. Strothmann goes on to say,

Some censors have a low tolerance for diversity, ambiguity, and conflict because they see these things as dangerous to order and stability. Avid defenders of the First Amendment embrace the very traits that would-be censors reject, believing that disagreement and controversy are not only inevitable but desirable, the very life-blood of all intellectual and cultural activity (165).

The idea is that through the First Amendment, not only do people have the right to share their ideas and beliefs through writing, but they also have the right to consume this information at their own discretion. Limiting a person’s ability to access a book goes

directly against this part of the constitution. Where banning books becomes more complicated is in schools and classrooms. This is because some parents do not think that certain topics are age-appropriate for their children to be reading about. It is, in fact, the process that the school uses in response to a parent or community complaint that most often determines the results of a challenged book, not the actual contents of the book itself (Texas Library Journal).

The controversial topics that cause books to be banned are exposed to students all of the time in various forms of entertainment such as movies, television programs, music, and video games. Kids are exposed to sex, violence, suicide, drug abuse, and homosexual relationships in shows such as *Riverdale*, *Degrassi*, *13 Reasons Why*, and *Pretty Little Liars*. Musical artists such as Cardi B and Xxxtentation have many references to sex and drugs and yet many middle and high school students are familiar with their music. Video games such as Call of Duty and Fortnite have plots entirely based around shooting other characters. Why then, are some parents so eager to ban a book from a school but not a movie from a theatre or a song from a radio station?

One of the main reasons why someone might want to ban a book is because of the language that is used in the book. This can have a wide range but is typically aimed at books that incorporate swear words into the dialogue of their characters. Some parents do not want their kids to read books with this type of language in fear that they will adopt it as their own. As Niccolini writes, “The implicit fear seems to be less about what language might do to teens and more what teens might do with language”(25). Two books that are often banned for this reason are Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These two books are often

banned for the use of the derogatory “n” word when referencing African Americans. There is a point to be made that if children are reading books with inappropriate language they may be more likely to start using those words themselves. There are, however, a couple of reasons why reading books with offensive language may be beneficial. As Niccolini points out, “Language deemed inappropriate often brings up difficult topics: racism, sexism, homophobia, anger, violence, and hate. Rather than shy away from these important issues, we can use “inappropriate language” to broach complex conversations” (25). Going back to the example of both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the offensive language that is used is included to show the racism of the time. The fact of the matter is, during the time periods that these books were written, those were the types of things that a lot of people said. When reading a book that includes racist language students should be a little startled at first because today fewer people use those terms. It is often the case that the author wants the reader to feel at least a little uncomfortable with the racially offensive language in order to spark a conversation about race itself. When teaching these books, English teachers have the opportunity to discuss racial issues of the past and how they have changed (or haven't changed) since the time period in which the novel takes place in. In this way, the language that is often viewed as inappropriate and offensive can be beneficial to the English classroom and discussions within it.

Another reason why people choose to challenge books is that there is some sort of sexual content or a discussion of sexuality in general included. In fact, sex and sexuality can play one of the largest roles in banning books. Students at the high school level are at a unique time of their life, where they are going through puberty and are

overwhelmed with hormones. It is no surprise that many books that are written for people their age, especially ones with characters around their age, have some sort of sexual content. Some people, however, do not think that children should be exposed to this subject matter. As Niccolini mentions, “We have a tendency to want to protect the innocence—or the fictional image of innocence we hold—of the youth we’re teaching” (27). The important part of this quote comes when Niccolini mentions the fictional image of innocence that is held with high school students. In some people’s version of a perfect world, teenagers would not yet be experiencing sex but the fact is, some of them are and most of them are at least thinking about it. It is not something that can be prevented, because that is what puberty does to humans, no matter what books they are reading. In her book *Innocence, Knowledge, and the Construction of Childhood: The Contradictory Nature of Sexuality and Censorship in Children’s Contemporary Lives*, Kerry Robinson states, “The discourse of childhood innocence plays a critical social function in defining and regulating differences between the adult and the child, of which sexual innocence is central” (42). A part of a child’s identity in many cultures is that they are naive when it comes to sexuality. There is a lot of controversy surrounding the topic of when and how children are to become sexually knowledgeable. Additionally, there are various cultural norms that suggest how “it” should be done, who should be doing “it” with whom, when, where, and for what purposes. (Johnson 61) Many of these societal norms focus on the idea that children should be maintaining and protecting their innocence for as long as they can, sexual innocence certainly falling under that category. Parents, wanting to shelter their children from mature and complex realities of the world, can sometimes overlook the fact that in

doing so they are putting their child at risk for being unprepared to fully understand the risks and consequences that are associated with sex. Adult utopianism and denial can also lead to misinterpretation of the children in general. The reality is that there are teenagers that are having sex and there is nothing that will be done to put an end to that. It is not effective to teach children as if we were living in a perfect world because there is no such thing. It is often fear that comes from real-life situations such as sexual assault, STDs, and teenage pregnancy that cause moral panic leading to stronger regulation and surveillance to protect children. However, if these are real risks for children it would be doing them a disservice to not address them and help them have a complete understanding of the consequences that could come of their actions.

(Robinson)

This leads us to deal with how exactly sex should be addressed in the classroom. It is important to acknowledge that not all parents have the same ideas about how schools should approach the topic of sexuality. Conservative adults may argue that it is the responsibility of the families to talk to their children about sex and to tell them what information they deem fit for them to know. More liberal guardians may consider it the responsibility of both the parents and the school system to educate kids on these topics. The fact that there is a strong divide on what people think is the appropriate way to expose children to sex is what leads to a debate on how schools should address the topic when it inevitably comes up. Developmentally Appropriate Practice has been around as far back as the 1960s and focuses on regulating when students receive knowledge based on their maturity and what age is deemed appropriate. Teachers and parents alike often consider the “correct” way to approach and tackle complex topics

such as sexuality. It assumes the idea that children are innocent and that this should not be corrupted prematurely. Trying to ban any form of conversation about sex or sexuality with teenagers can actually be detrimental to them, leaving them confused or leading them to believe that sex is an evil thing that should be avoided at all costs. Now, it should not be the job of an English teacher to be the main guide for students when it comes to discovering their sexuality, but it does not hurt to read content that can so closely relate to students' lives. Niccolini mentions, "Kerry H. Robinson speaks against the censorship of sex and sexuality in educational materials, arguing that young people are 'given little critical guidance in negotiating the various and contradictory discourses they encounter, particularly in relation to sexuality'. The English classroom can be a space to develop these critical muscles" (25). Personal growth is often part of the English curriculum regardless of the fact that it is not necessarily directly linked to advancements in reading and writing. Through literature, students can understand characters' thoughts on the subject, thoughts that they might relate to that they thought that they were alone in thinking. They can also see the consequences and benefits of expressing their sexuality through the fictional lives of characters. Since these characters are not real people, the students can learn from their actions without feeling any guilt for being either judgmental or supportive. For some students, these situations are exactly where they are finding themselves in real-life whether adults like it or not. Since "formal sexuality education in schools is generally out of sync with the lives and experiences of children and young people" (Robinson 68) including conversations about it in the curriculum can help students get a firmer grasp on the world around them.

The third characteristic in literature that will often get a book banned is the incorporation of violence. Many novels that are challenged include plots that involve war, gang violence, gunfights, or physical aggression. Again, the reason why these books are banned comes back to people thinking that teenagers should be sheltered from these very real-life concepts. Some think that when students read about violence, they will be more likely to act out violently themselves. In a study that was conducted based on reading banned books, it was found that “banned books were either positive or neutral on most outcomes related to civic behaviors, GPA, and criminal behavior” (Ferguson). This study shows that just because a student is reading a book that contains violence, they are not more likely to engage in violent behaviors. Again, it is interesting that there is such an issue with banning books that contain violence when one takes a look at all of the other forms of modern-day entertainment. Many of the most popular video games such as Call of Duty Black Ops, Super Smash Bros, and Fortnite, include violent themes such as war, gun violence, and physical aggression. Additionally, many popular movie franchises, such as the Marvel movies, include themes of war and violence. There are studies, such as ones done by psychologist Craig A. Anderson, that come to the conclusion that exposure to violence through video games can cause aggressive behavior and decreased empathy. This theory, however, has been contended many times. Many studies such as ones researched by John L. Sherry and Christopher J. Ferguson have shown that playing video games does not cause a student to become more violent (Vitelli). Sherry concluded that there was “a smaller effect of violent video games on aggression than has been found with television violence on aggression” (Sherry). Ferguson found that without the effect of publication

bias, the idea that an article that shows that there is a positive correlation between video games and aggressive behavior will be more likely to be published than one that shows that there is little correlation between the two, it cannot be concluded that video games and aggression are highly correlated. Factors that have been shown to have a higher effect on high levels of aggression are instead households that function with a low level of parental monitoring, violence happening within the house allowing children to see or experience it firsthand, and other direct forms of violence such as bullying (Vitelli). If forms of media that expose children to violence through visuals, as well as dialogue and audio, do not cause children to be more aggressive it seems the natural conclusion to assume that books will not have this effect either, If high schoolers are allowed to play and watch this type of content, which is sometimes associated with aggressive behavior despite the proof that the two have little correlation, the same should be true for books. Also, the same point that was made about the benefits of reading books with sexual content can be made for books with violence. When students read a book that has a violent scene or character, the student can learn about the consequences of violence through the experiences of the fictional character. This kind of activity can actually help students realize that the consequences of violence can be extreme and help them to find other ways to resolve their anger and frustration.

To argue against all of the reasons why some think that certain books should be banned, there are some reasons why controversial books should be appreciated in the school setting. The first is that books with controversial topics are often the ones that students gravitate towards. As pointed out by Niccolini, “Nothing sparks more interest in a book than mentioning it’s been banned” (23). Isn’t it a goal for English teachers to get

their students to read more, especially on their own? There is no better way to do this than to have students reading books that they find intriguing and interesting. On top of that, banned books can be helpful in guiding important conversations in the English classroom; “By incorporating critical literacy into instruction, especially when using books identified as controversial, teachers are meeting the standards for the English language arts put forth by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English and the Common Core State Standards, both of which involve students reading deeply and thinking critically about a variety of texts to help build knowledge and expand perspectives” (Graff 79). By using these books, teachers are not sacrificing the role that they have of giving students a proper education. Many of the books can be used to cater to the standards that teachers need to adhere to. An English classroom is a safe place where students can learn and discuss controversial topics so that they are properly educated on concepts that could potentially affect them in the present or in the future. In addition, “In an era of heightened sensitivity about what and how we say things, we need ongoing conversations about how literature can be part of our lives without undue stress and controversy. This is especially true among youths who are denied access to books they want to read, as well as educators who are under intense scrutiny and are often told, rather than asked, what books would be of benefit to students” (Graff 78). It is important that educators and students speak out against banning books. The academic gain that could be sacrificed by censoring certain literature has the potential to be too high. Through research and discussion, the list of banned books will hopefully decrease.

Chapter 3: Application

Teaching *The Outsiders* in the middle school classroom

Adolescence is a unique time in students' lives where they are beginning to discover who they truly are. It is also the time where most students start to take off their rose-colored glasses and understand the world around them. They realize that there are serious issues that they will be facing and positive or negative consequences that will follow their decisions. This can be related back to all reasons why books are banned; sexuality, language, violence, or other dark themes. The fact that students will eventually be dealing with these types of "offensive" issues at some point, most likely sooner rather than later, means that in order to make knowledgeable decisions they must be exposed to the effects and reality of these situations ahead of time. The English classroom is a safe and comfortable setting where students can hold discussions about such topics. *The Outsiders*, a novel by S.E. Hinton, is often found on the banned books list. This novel is commonly banned for having content that is deemed too mature for the middle school audience that often reads it. *The Outsiders* includes issues such as gang violence, underage drinking and smoking, aggression, and children coming from broken homes. The idea that a book can be banned because it includes children from broken homes is offensive considering many students deal with that every day and it is not something that they have control over. Reading a book about a broken home is not going to make their life at home any worse and can at best give the student someone who they feel like they can relate to. The other issues that *The Outsiders* has been

banned for can also have a surprisingly positive effect when reading about them in the English classroom.

As mentioned, one of the main reasons that a book is likely to get banned is because of violence which is something that *The Outsiders* is based upon. More specific to this novel is gang violence. The plot is based around constant “rumbles” that occur between the two gangs, the Socs and the Greasers. Many of these fights are hands only; however, there are some that involve weapons such as switchblades, cracked glass bottles, metal pipes, and guns. This action raises concerns amongst some parents and school board members. People who challenge this novel are deciding that they want to hide certain aspects of life from the youth. The problem with that is violence, as unfortunate as it is, is a very real thing that happens all around the world every day. To not allow students to be exposed to real-life hardships is to make them naive to the world around them. Gang violence, specifically, is not something that is relevant to all geographical settings; however, the places where it is happening, it is often happening in the lives of adolescents, not just adults. To ban a book from the eyes of students based on a topic that is relevant to some students is masking reality. Scales expands on this idea; “When adults try to shield students from the ‘darker side of life’ or from ideas that may be controversial, such adults are creating a generation of skeptics and cynics who don't really know the meaning of free speech” (Scales). Not only does banning a book hide the reality that we live in, but it also hinders the idea of free speech and may make the definition of that unclear to students.

Another issue that *The Outsiders* addresses is the use of drugs and alcohol, specifically the teen use of drugs and alcohol. Many books have been banned in the

past because of their causal portrayal of underage drinking or drug abuse. Throughout the novel, the reader has the opportunity to see the severe consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. The fight that takes place at the beginning between Ponyboy and Johnny and the group of Socs starts because the Socs were drunk and looking for a fight. In *The Outsiders*, all of the main characters are cigarette smokers, and most of them either drink while the novel takes place or there are references to them drinking in the past. Much of the plot is driven by drunken nights that lead to fights amongst the Socs and the Greasers. Again, thinking that banning a book is a good idea so that a student can be shielded from the reality of drugs and alcohol is detrimental. There is more benefit than liability when it comes to students reading about these things. Almost all of the instances where characters in *The Outsiders* were drinking were followed by negative consequences that rooted directly from that action. While reading about these situations in the classroom there is an opportunity to reflect on the severity of the repercussions of underage drinking. Not all students are going to be able to relate to gang violence; however, a teacher could have students look at other outcomes that could have happened due to the characters' poor decisions. For example, when Bob, the Soc, came to fight Ponyboy and Johnny it was mentioned that he and his gang were drunk. They had found Ponyboy and Johnny and pulled up to them in a blue Mustang. Here a teacher could have a discussion with students about drunk driving and what could have happened. We also see through all of the fight scenes that the decisions that the main characters in *The Outsiders* make while they are under the influence of alcohol are in poor taste.

One subject that *The Outsiders* exposes students to is death and how it can be dealt with. Students in middle school are at an age where they can grasp the heaviness and meaning of death and therefore it is something that through literature they should be exposed to. There are multiple deaths in the novel and each one holds a different meaning and is dealt with in a different way by the characters. The first death that the reader learns about is the death of Ponyboy, Sodapop, and Darry's parents who passed away in a car accident leaving the three children orphaned and on their own. This death shapes the way that the three boys develop their personalities and interact with each other. Darry decides not to go to college so that he can look after his "kid" brothers and all three are left with emotional scars. Other deaths that occur in the novel are those of Bob, Johnny, and Dally. Early adolescence is the point in life where many students encounter death in their personal lives for the first time whether that is the death of a grandparent, a family member, or another loved one. Through reading about death and seeing how characters deal with it, students can have an easier time processing their own emotions (Garner 136). The death of Bob, who was murdered by one of the protagonists of the novel, shows young readers the consequences of hastily and dangerous decisions. Throughout the remainder of the novel, Johnny has to deal with the burden that comes with murder, even if that murder was self-defense. The reader also sees the emotional toll that the action has on Johnny. At the end of the novel, Ponyboy reflects on the events that had taken place and wonders what Bob was really like, the other side of him that the Greasers never saw, spreading the message that there are two sides to every story, a lesson that is important in the middle school setting. Although Bob is viewed as an antagonist, there is a lot to learn through his death. It is

through the deaths of Johnny and Dally that middle school readers can really explore how to cope with the loss of a loved one. All of the main characters in the novel have close relationships with these two characters. The way that Dally deals with Johnny's death can help spark a conversation about impulsiveness, suicide, and healthy ways to deal with stress and sorrow. Readers can also look at the "tough" characters in the novel and recognize that it is both normal and healthy to express emotions and cry. Even Darry, who comes off as hard and unemotional breaks down at some points in the novel. While death may be viewed as a controversial topic to be teaching in the classroom, there are benefits that middle schoolers specifically can gain from it.

Conclusions

Overall, the concept of banning books is one where people seem to have strong opinions. Some parents believe that their children should not be exposed to things such as explicit language, sexuality, and violence while they are at school. The benefits of talking about these topics in school, however, outweigh the negatives. When students can observe how characters in books deal with controversial topics, they are given the opportunity to use that information to reflect on their own lives. The idea is that students can learn from the mistakes of other characters by seeing the consequences of their actions. It is also important to expand the minds of young adults in a world that is ever-changing. Exposing teenagers to new ideas about sexuality can help them understand more about themselves and the people around them, and looking at the language that was used in the past but is now known to be controversial can educate students about

the past and how we as a society can grow from it. The discussions that come out of reading books with controversial topics is in itself enough of a reason to read books that have been banned in the English classroom.

When relating directly to S.E. Hinton's novel, *The Outsiders*, students can see the detrimental effects of gang violence and how it can lead to stress trauma and death. They then can look at the characters and how they process the deaths that occur throughout the novel and begin to reflect on how they process death themselves. They can also develop a deeper understanding of the risks of underage drinking and drug use, a behavior that middle schoolers and high schoolers are at least curious about. In a perfect world, these issues would not be something that students would have to be exposed to, however, the reality is that many of these topics will appear in their lives and with proper exposure and critical thought, students are in a better place to make smart life choices.

Eighth Grade Unit

The following is a Unit Plan for an 8th-grade classroom reading *The Outsiders*. All of the lessons address 8th grade Common Core ELA standards. Throughout the unit, students will be reading *The Outsiders* and will be using the text to promote opportunities to have discussions about controversial and difficult topics. By doing this, students will not only be improving their reading and writing skills, but they will also be improving social, emotional, and decision-making skills. They will be able to use the themes of *The Outsiders* and relate them to their own lives.

Between each of the lessons, the class will be reading the novel out loud as a group. This allows the opportunity for class discussion and questions and also prevents students from getting too far behind in reading. At the end, I have provided a list of discussion questions that will be asked as each chapter is read. I also created a character chart for the students to fill out in order to keep track of all of the characters in the novel. They will be filling that out at the end of each class where the novel is read.

8th grade Unit on *The Outsiders*
4 50-minute lessons and a final project

Lesson One

For the first lesson in this unit, students will be looking at how their identity can affect their decisions. This lesson will show the differences between individual identity, cliques, and gang identity. It will take place after the students have read chapter four of the novel. In this lesson, students will be taking a deep look into how their peers and the people that they associate with can influence them and their actions. Students will have time to explore and reflect on how they identify personally and how they identify within their group of friends. They will have the opportunity to consider if they make different decisions when they are alone compared to when they are with friends and the effects that those decisions have. This links directly with dealing with controversial topics because it gives students insight on the positive effects that can come from dealing with difficult situations on their own compared to reaching out to people that they trust. On the other hand, students may find that they make worse decisions when they are with their friends and come to the conclusion that in order to make the safest and smarter

decisions in difficult times they should follow different advice. Students will also have the opportunity to reflect on the idea that it is sometimes difficult to stay true to your core values when they differ from the values of the people with whom you spend the most time. This can relate to real-life situations such as underage drinking and drug use. Through this lesson, students can reflect on the positive and negative influences around them and how they can embrace the positive and deal with peer pressure. Some important questions for class discussion include:

1. How can individual identity, group identity, and gang identity differ?
2. How did Ponyboy and Johnny's affiliation with their gang affect their decisions in chapter four?
3. How did alcohol play a role in the fight scene at the fountain?
4. What is peer pressure? Can you think of a time in which peer pressure affected you or a decision that you made? What were the consequences of this decision? Is there such a thing as positive peer pressure?
5. What are some ways in which you can deal with peer pressure?
6. Are we a reflection of the people who we spend time with? When is this true? When isn't it true? Are there situations when this can be a good thing?
7. Are there certain situations where violence is the answer?
8. What are alternate ways that the scene at the fountain could have been handled?

Grade Level: 8

Subject / Content area: English 8

Unit of Study: *The Outsiders*

Lesson Title: Self-identity vs group identity

<p>Central Focus for the learning segment: Identity related to individuality, cliques, and gangs</p>
<p>Content Standard(s): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.D Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p>
<p>Learning Objectives associated with the content standards: Students will be able to define the term identity and explain how it can mean various things in different social settings. Students will be able to present information effectively.</p>
<p>Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning: For this lesson, I will need blank paper for the students to take notes on and large white paper for the students to use for the group work section. I will also need markers for the students to write with.</p>
<p>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs: Throughout the group project, I will be walking around the class and answering any questions the students or groups, in general, have about the assignment.</p>
<p>Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports: Through this lesson students will be working on some presentation and group work skills.</p>

- **Informal Assessment:** Classroom discussions and the poster project will be informal assessments.
- **Formal Assessment:** The exit slip at the end of class will be a formal assessment.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** If students do not finish the exit slip before class is over they may take it home for homework and bring it to the next class.

Evaluation Criteria: I will know that students have met their objectives when they are able to define the term identity and can explain how it can be different when it comes to individuality, cliques, and gangs.

Lesson Timeline:

Before the students enter the classroom: I will write the learning objectives on the board.

Students will come into the classroom. We will go over the learning objectives on the board. We will go over the term identity and name some examples. (5 min)

On a blank sheet of paper, they will take some time to jot down notes about how their personal identity and their group of friends' identity. They can think about what makes them unique. There will be time for some students to share out. (5 min)

Students will then be broken up into three groups; individuality, cliques, and gangs. As a group, on a large white paper, they will brainstorm and take notes on what their term means and can look like and how it can relate to identity. (20 min)

They will then each get a turn to quickly share with the class what they came up with. At this time their peers from other groups can give feedback on what to add to each poster. (15 min)

As an exit slip, students will define the term identity and explain how individuality, identity in cliques, and identity in gangs are different. (5 min)

Lesson Two

In this lesson, students will be learning about and discussing gangs. Since gangs, in general, can be a taboo subject but are also such a central part of the novel it is important to have a classroom understanding about them. In this lesson, students will be watching a TedTalk video. The speaker in the video is a man who once belonged to a gang and has since broken out of it. He explains some of the expectations that he was held to when he was in the gang and some of the consequences he had to deal with for his actions including jail time. He also goes on to explain how he got out of the gang and the positive consequences that came with that. He emphasizes the difficulty of this and the mental struggle that he endured. There are plenty of schools that deal with gangs and an honest discussion about them in the classroom can be beneficial. Through this video not only can students see the consequences that might be in front of them if they are in or choose to be a part of a gang, but they can also see that even though it may seem impossible there are ways to get out of one. Some important questions that should be brought up in class discussion include:

1. Why is there a negative stereotype surrounding gangs?
2. Why might someone join a gang?
3. What are some of the things that make leaving a gang challenging?
4. What are the positive and negative consequences of joining a gang and how can you deal with them?

5. What are the positive and negative consequences of leaving a gang and how can you deal with them?

Grade Level: 8

Subject / Content area: English 8

Unit of Study: *The Outsiders*

Lesson Title: The Gang

Central Focus for the learning segment: Gangs and breaking stereotypes
Content Standard(s): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation
Learning Objectives associated with the content standards: Students will be able to analyze the speech that is given in the Ted Talk and compare the speaker in the video to the characters in <i>The Outsiders</i> .
Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning: For this lesson, I will need a SmartBoard and access to YouTube. Students will need a copy of the gang worksheet.
Differentiation and planned universal supports: I will make sure to turn on the subtitles on the video so that students who have hearing disabilities can follow along easily.
Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informal Assessment: The worksheet and class discussion will both be informal assessments.
Evaluation Criteria: I will know that the students have met their objectives when they are able to answer the worksheet questions and have a class discussion about the topic of gangs and stereotypes.

Lesson Timeline:

Before the students enter the classroom: I will write the learning objectives on the board.

Students will take their seats and we will go over class objectives. They will pick up the worksheet. (1min)

Students will answer just the first question on the worksheet that asks them what they think of when thinking of gang members. These can be personality traits or physical appearance. (4 min)

Students will have the opportunity to share out their answers. We will create a class understanding of what we already know about gangs and what they do. (5 min)

I will play the Ted Talk video "I was an MS-13 gang member. Here's how I got out. I Gerardo Lopez | TEDxMileHigh" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qkSMkiGWdg>) (16 min)

Students will have time to answer the questions that go along with the video. (15 min)

We will have a fishbowl discussion focused mostly on the last question about who the speaker and the characters in *The Outsiders* break the stereotypes that are associated with gang members and why it is relevant. (14 min)

Lesson Three

This lesson will allow students to dig deeper into finding resources that they can use if they find themselves in a real-life crisis. This lesson will come after the students read chapter ten of the novel. This is the chapter where Dally essentially commits suicide by provoking the cops to come after him and allowing himself to be shot. This can be a triggering scene and this lesson helps students to understand that if they are ever feeling that death is the only solution, there are people out there who can help them. This is such an important thing for middle schoolers to know. While death and suicide are certainly difficult and controversial topics to talk about they should not be avoided.

Discussions about such things could quite literally save lives. Through this lesson, students will discover that not only can they often turn to their friends and family for support, but there are services in the community and nationwide that are already in place to support them. There are numbers that students can call when they are dealing with depression, anxiety, bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, and embracing their identity. In addition, there are community supports whether that is through church groups, therapy, or group counseling that can help people who are dealing with a crisis. Through exploring their options and having a class discussion where they can hear the findings of their classmates students can be better prepared for if they ever find themselves in a situation where they feel as though they need help. Some questions that should be incorporated into class discussion include:

1. What are some examples of situations where it can be helpful to reach out to someone else for help or emotional support?
2. Who do you have in your life that you feel like you can trust, talk to, and go to for help in a crisis?
3. How does Dally handle Johnny's death and why does he respond this way?
4. How do Ponyboy and the other Greasers deal with their friend's death?
5. How do you handle a crisis?
6. Where or to who could have Dally gone to for help?

7. What are some of the resources that you found that are in place for people going through a crisis and how can they help?

Grade Level: 8

Subject / Content area: English 8

Unit of Study: *The Outsiders*

Lesson Title: Crisis and help

Central Focus for the learning segment: Crisis in <i>The Outsiders</i>
Content Standard(s): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
Learning Objectives associated with the content standards: Students will be able to identify various places and people they can go to in a crisis. Students will be able to understand various ways to handle a crisis and compare them to how characters in the novel handle crisis.
Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning: For this lesson, all I will need is my lesson 6 worksheets. Students will also all need computer access to look up online and community sources that can help in a crisis situation.
Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.): I will be walking around as students answer their worksheets to answer any questions.
Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informal Assessment: The class discussion and worksheet will both be informal assessments.
Evaluation Criteria: I will know that my students have met their objectives when they can participate in class discussions and identify how various characters handle a crisis in <i>The Outsiders</i> .

Relevant theories and/or research best practices: This lesson is important because it takes situations that happen in the novel and applies them to real-life scenarios that could be happening in students' lives. In addition to the class discussion, I would be posting on Google Classroom links and phone numbers that students can use if they ever find themselves in a crisis situation and need someone to reach out to.

Lesson Timeline:

Before the students enter the classroom: I will write the learning objectives on the board.

Students will take their seats and we will go over the class objectives. (1 min)

We will have a class discussion. Questions will include things such as

1. How does Dally handle Johnny's death and why does he respond this way?
2. How do Ponyboy and the other Greasers deal with their friend's death?
3. How do you handle a crisis?
4. Where could Dally have gone for help? (10 min)

Students will then have time to brainstorm some ideas of where they know that they could go for help if they ever needed it. They will fill out the worksheet to help propel their thinking. They will need their computers to look up sources of online and community resources that are there to help people who are going through a crisis. (25 min)

We will then have a class discussion about what the boys could have done in this situation and who or what is to blame for Dally's death. I will let the students take over the discussion as much as they can and be there to keep them on track or steer them towards different perspectives. (14 min)

Lesson Four

During this lesson, students will be having conversations about the controversial topics that are presented in *The Outsiders* through debate. They will be looking at a list of statements and deciding whether or not they agree with them. Examples of the statements include:

Teenagers everywhere face the same problems.

Drug and alcohol use is not a big issue for teenagers.

People from different groups are treated differently in society.

Sometimes physical aggression is the only way to solve a problem.

It is important to be similar to the people you spend time with.

Through the first statement presented here, students can discuss the real-life issues that teenagers face. The second statement then focuses specifically on the consequences that come with drinking alcohol and doing drugs. The third topic changes things up and can spark conversations about racism and classism. The fourth topic relates back to lesson two where students had conversations about the consequences of violence. Finally, the fifth statement relates back to lesson one which dealt with handling peer pressure. For each of these statements, by comparing their experiences to textual evidence students can be using the themes and content that get books banned to develop a better understanding of the choices that they make and the consequences of those choices.

Grade Level: 8

Subject / Content area: English 8

Unit of Study: *The Outsiders*

Lesson Title: Classroom Debate

Central Focus for the learning segment: Debate using text details

Content Standard(s):

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C

Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Learning Objectives associated with the content standards: Students will be able to provide a claim and present evidence from the text to support their claim. Students will be able to acknowledge and address opposing claims.

Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning: I will need a sign that has "AGREE" written on it and another sign that has "DISAGREE" written on it. Students will all need a copy of the Agree/Disagree worksheet. Students will need their copies of *The Outsiders* to refer back to the text.

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.): Throughout the debate, I will be prompting the students in order to keep the conversation flowing. At the beginning of class, I will read the learning objectives and will read the directions so that there is no confusion as to what is expected of the students.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports: Students will be practicing their speaking and listening skills in this activity through classroom debate.

- **Informal Assessment:** The class debate will be an informal assessment.

Evaluation Criteria: I will know that students have met their objective when they can all participate in the classroom debate, using evidence from the text to defend their claims.

Lesson Timeline:

Before students enter the classroom: I will write the learning objectives on the whiteboard and put the AGREE sign on one side of the room and the DISAGREE sign on the opposite side.

Students will enter the class and pick up the Agree/Disagree sheets. We will quickly go over the learning objectives. I will explain that this lesson is similar to the first lesson that we did, however, this time they will need to use details from the text as the evidence for their claims. They will have time to look over the statements and write if they agree or disagree with them and what evidence they will use to support that claim. (7 min)

Students will all stand up and as a class, we will go through the sheet. Each student will move to the side of the room that corresponds with their answer for each statement, spending about four minutes on each topic. They cannot stand in the middle; they must either pick agree or disagree. I will have multiple students on each side share out why they have made the claim they did requiring them to provide evidence directly from the text. When responding to their peers who have opposing opinions I will have students address one of the opposing points and then go on to explain why they disagree with it. This will mimic how students need to address a counterclaim in a formal argumentative essay. (40 min)

We will have a brief class discussion about the activity. We will discuss if their opinions have changed since the beginning of the unit and if so, how. (3 min)

Lesson Five

This lesson is the final assessment for the students. For this assessment, students will be creating a brochure in which they reflect on some of the lessons that can be learned from the characters in *The Outsiders*. Through the lessons that they have already done

in the unit, students have already seen many ways in which the struggles that the characters in the novel face can be similar to struggles that teenagers all around the world can face. The students will be reflecting on ways in which readers can learn from the mistakes of the characters in the novel and show that they have an understanding of what the consequences of risky actions can be as well as places to go for help if someone finds themselves in those situations. This final project is a clear way to find out what the students learned and got out of reading about and discussing controversial topics throughout reading *The Outsiders*.

Grade Level: 8

Subject / Content area: English 8

Unit of Study: *The Outsiders*

Lesson Title: Final Project

Central Focus for the learning segment: Final project and assessment for *The Outsiders*

Content Standard(s):

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.B

Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

Learning Objectives associated with the content standards: Students will be able to use their knowledge of *The Outsiders* and perspective to create written work.

Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning: For this lesson, I will need the lesson 9 handouts as well as paper and colored pencils for the brochures.

- **Formal Assessment:** The completed project will be a formal assessment.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** If students do not finish in the three days they make take the project home and finish it for homework.

Evaluation Criteria: I will know that students have met their objectives when they use their knowledge about the novel to create their final project.

Lesson Timeline:

Before students enter the classroom: I will write the learning objectives on the whiteboard.

Students will enter and pick up a worksheet with the instructions for the final project. We will go over the learning objectives. We will go over the instructions together and I will address any questions.

Students will have one period to plan their project and the next two to work on and complete it.

Materials

Name: _____

Character Chart

Fill out the chart below to keep track of the characters in *The Outsiders*.

Character	Gang	Physical Appearance	Personality Traits
Ponyboy Curtis			
Darry Curtis			

Character	Gang	Physical Appearance	Personality Traits
Sodapop Curtis			
Two-Bit Mathews			
Steve Randall			

Character	Gang	Physical Appearance	Personality Traits
Dally Winston			
Johnny Cade			
Cherry Valance			

Character	Gang	Physical Appearance	Personality Traits
Randy Adderson			
Bob Sheldon			
Tim Shepard			

Name: _____

Identity exit slip

Lesson 1

Below you will write a brief definition of the term identity and how it can mean something different when it comes to individuality, cliques, and gangs.

Name: _____

Identity exit slip

Lesson 1

Below you will write a brief definition of the term identity and how it can mean something different when it comes to individuality, cliques, and gangs.

Name: _____

Gang video

Lesson 2

What do you think if when you imagine a gang member?

Why did the speaker choose to join MS-13?

Why did he quickly regret his decision to join a gang?

What parts of his gang did he enjoy?

What did he learn from the gang intervention group?

How does the speaker of this Ted Talk break the stereotypes that are often surrounded around gang members? How do the characters in *The Outsiders* do the same thing?

Name: _____

Crisis and help

Lesson 3

A crisis can come when you least expect it. Whether it be big or small, what is the best advice that you would give a friend going through a crisis?

Who are some people that you can reach out to in times of crisis?

What online or community services are available for people going through a crisis? Find at least three and provide sources.

Would you reach out to an adult if you were going through a crisis, go to a friend, or try to solve it on your own? Why?

Name: _____

Agree/Disagree Worksheet

Lesson 4

For this activity, you will read the statements below and on the time write whether you agree or disagree with them.

1. Being street smart is more important than being book smart. _____

Text evidence: _____

2. There are cases in which murder is justifiable. _____

Text evidence: _____

3. Teenagers everywhere face the same problems. _____

Text evidence: _____

4. You should stick by and defend your family no matter what. _____

Text evidence: _____

5. Drug and alcohol use is not a big issue for teenagers. _____

Text evidence: _____

6. One can form accurate opinions about others without getting to know them. _____

Text evidence: _____

7. People from different groups are treated differently in society. _____

Text evidence: _____

8. Sometimes physical aggression is the only way to solve a problem. _____

Text evidence: _____

9. It is important to be similar to the people you spend time with. _____

Text evidence: _____

Name: _____

Final Project

Lesson 5

For your final project, you will follow the prompt below. You will have one class period to plan your project and two to work on it. You will be graded on spelling and grammar, the accuracy of information from the text, and effort. This project will be worth 20 points.

What are some of the lessons that can be learned from this novel? Do some of the characters face similar problems as all teenagers do? Create a brochure mentioning three things that readers can learn from the mistakes or actions of the characters in *The Outsiders*. There should be pictures as well as descriptions that use details from the text. It should be a trifold brochure with a title on the cover and no sections should be left empty.

Spelling and Grammar _____/5

Accuracy _____/10

Effort _____/5

Name: _____

Final Project

Final Project Rubric

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Accuracy	Student includes three scenes from the novel that readers can learn from with multiple details from the text for each one.	Student includes three scenes from the novel that readers can learn from with details from the text for each one.	Student includes three scenes from the novel that readers can learn from, but lacks details from the text for each one or details are inaccurate.	Student includes two scenes from the novel that readers can learn from with multiple details from the text for each one.	Student includes two scenes from the novel that readers can learn from with details from the text for each one.	Student includes two scenes from the novel that readers can learn from, but lacks details from the text for each one or details are inaccurate.	Student includes one scene from the novel that readers can learn from with multiple details from the text.	Student includes one scene from the novel that readers can learn from with details from the text.	Student includes one scene from the novel that readers can learn from but lacks details from the text or details are inaccurate.	Scenes from the novel are unclear or inaccurate. There are no details from the text or the details are unclear or inaccurate.	The student did not do the project.
Spelling and Grammar	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	There are no spelling or grammar errors.	There are 1-3 spelling or grammar errors.	There are 4-10 spelling or grammar errors.	There are 11-15 spelling or grammar errors.	There are 16 or more spelling or grammar errors.	The student did not do the project.
Effort	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	The student worked on the project with little to no distractions for both class days.	The student worked on the project for one day with little to no distractions and one day with some minor distractions	The student worked on the project for both days with minor distractions	The student worked on the project for one day with minor distractions and one day with major distractions	The student worked on the project for both days with major distractions	The student did not do the project.

Name: _____

Final Project planning page

Lesson 5

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Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

For centuries books have been banned and challenged in libraries and schools. The specific reasons for the banning of these books have a wide variety, however, when it comes down to it all books that are banned are done so in fear that people will be exposed to content that others do not deem appropriate for them. They are essentially picking and choosing the information that they want students to have available to them. Banned books, however, have benefits that can provide students with unique opportunities. Banned books can be used to teach students lessons that are too controversial to be a part of the standard English curriculum. The English classroom is a safe and appropriate setting for students to be exposed to difficult and real-life topics. Effective teachers can guide lessons and class discussions to teach their students social and emotional skills as well as reading and writing skills. This added layer of education should be supported and encouraged. School is not simply a place where students should go to improve their test scores. Through effective education, students can also gain skills in empathy and decision making.

While books continue to be banned, there are some people who actively promote them. These people who support the reading of banned books are often supporters of the first amendment, the right for any content to be published and distributed. Teachers can embrace banned books not only by incorporating them into their curriculum, but also exposing their students to things such as banned book week, going as far as to showing students lists of books that have been banned and challenged and encouraging them to seek them out and read them in their spare time.

This topic is especially relevant for this generation of students. Generation Z has grown up with technology that has the ability to give them access to controversial content whenever they please. Music, television, and movies can be littered with mature content, but are just a click on an app away from anyone with a smartphone, computer, or tablet. The English classroom is a safe environment for students to be exposed to similar content. After students read a banned book, teachers then have the opportunity to take the time to have discussions with their class about what they just read. It is during these discussions where students can share their opinions and think deeply about the consequences that come with the actions of the characters. Not only do students see physical consequences in novels, but they can also get a good grasp of the emotional burden that can go along with them. When students have the opportunity to take time and think intently on different ways to deal with emotions and stress they are setting themselves up for success if they ever find themselves in similar situations. Additionally, English teachers should strive to foster an appreciation for reading. Good English teachers get students excited about reading. Since banned books contain topics that are controversial they are edgier and can be more likely to appeal to middle school students. Simply telling some students that the book is banned and some people think that they should not be reading it at all can be enough to spark a middle schooler's interest. Teachers should be embracing the fact that through teaching banned books they can not only spark an interest in reading in their students, but they can also introduce them to perspectives, coping strategies, though processes that be beneficial to them in their real lives.

Through this project, I hope to raise awareness about the benefits that can go along with reading a banned book in the classroom. It is important that not only teachers understand these benefits, but parents as well. Parents are commonly the ones who ban books in the first place. They do so to protect their children from uncomfortable and controversial topics. Through this project, it can be concluded that reading banned books actually sets students up for success in ways that go above and beyond the common standards for English. The topics that can get books banned such as alcohol use, drug use, violence, offensive language, and sex, are some of the things that middle schoolers are facing in their lives whether adults think they are too young for it or not. Through reading banned books, teachers have the opportunity to have class discussions with students about safe ways to tackle these issues in real life. Students are also given the opportunity to learn through the experiences of the characters in the novel, hopefully putting them in a better position to make healthy and safe choices in their own lives. These practices help students develop life skills alongside the reading, writing, and listening skills that are required for English class. If teachers were to include more banned books in their curriculum they would have more opportunities to teach this larger array of skills.

The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton is a book that is both commonly banned and frequently used in the eighth-grade classroom. This novel exposes students to gang violence, alcohol use, broken families, death, and suicide. This project provides examples of how teachers can take these difficult topics and have meaningful classroom discussions allowing their students to take time to think deeply about things such as decision making and consequences all while incorporating the standards that

are required by New York State. This combination of learning is what can set good lessons apart from great ones.

Appreciating the benefits of reading banned books is not a new idea, however, given the fact that books continued to be banned to this day bringing awareness to these benefits is still necessary. There are certainly topics related to teaching banned books that can still be further explored. I argue that many topics that cause books to be banned should be embraced in the classroom, but are there any topics that are too intense or horrific for this setting? Should the topics that we teach be linked to specific grade levels or are controversial topics appropriate for all ages? How can teachers and librarians effectively spread awareness of the benefits of banned books to reluctant parents and community members? Which banned books work best in addressing both controversial topics and the Common Core Standards placed by New York State and which do not? Through addressing these questions not only can the importance of teaching banned books be highlighted, but we can start to find more effective ways to spread this idea to people who are more reluctant about exposing children to controversial topics. In order for students to be getting the most out of their learning experience, they need to be learning more than just reading and writing skills in the English classroom. They need to be exposed to real-life, difficult situations and learning social, emotional, and decision-making skills. Banned books are the perfect tool to do all of this.

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