



## Socially-based Curriculum Unit: Censorship in Literature and Media Bias

**Unit Title:** Censorship in Literature and Media Bias

**Time Frame:** 5 Lessons with an additional 5 day research project

**Unit Developer(s):** Karen Douglas

**Developed for Course Name and Course Code:** English, Grade 12, College Preparation (ENG4C)

### **Strand(s) and Curriculum Learning Expectations Addressed:**

#### **Reading and Literature Studies Strand**

RLV.02C -recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning

RL1.03C -identify the most important ideas and supporting details in texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts

RL1.08C -identify and analyse the perspectives and/or biases evident in texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, commenting with growing understanding on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power

RL2.02C -identify a variety of text features and explain how they help communicate meaning

RL2.03C -identify a variety of elements of style in texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance the effectiveness of the texts

#### **Writing Strand**

WRV.01C -generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

WRV.02C -draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience

WRV.03C -use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively

WR1.03C -locate and select information to effectively support ideas for writing, using a variety of strategies and print, electronic, and other resources, as appropriate

WR2.01C -write for different purposes and audiences using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms

WR1.04C -identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies and selecting the organizational pattern best suited to the content and the purpose for writing

WR3.06C -use a variety of presentation features, including print and script, fonts, graphics, and layout, to improve the clarity and coherence of their written work and to heighten its appeal and effectiveness for their audience

#### **Oral Communication Strand**

OCV.01C -listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes



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OC1.02C -select and use the most appropriate active listening strategies when participating in a range of situations  
OCV.02C -use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes  
OC2.01C -communicate orally for a range of purposes, using language appropriate for the intended audience  
OC2.04C -use appropriate words, phrases, and terminology, and a variety of stylistic devices, to effectively communicate their meaning and engage their intended audience

### **Media Strand**

MS1.01C -explain how media texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, are created to suit particular purposes and audiences  
MS1.02C -interpret media texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, identifying and explaining the overt and implied messages they convey  
MS1.04C -explain why the same media text might prompt different responses from different audiences  
MS1.06C explain how production, marketing, financing, distribution, and legal/regulatory factors influence the media industry  
MS2.01C -identify general and specific characteristics of a variety of media forms and explain how they shape content and create meaning  
MS2.02C -identify conventions and/or techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they convey meaning and influence their audience

## **Desired Results**

### **Unit Description:**

The “censorship” part of the unit allows students the opportunity to learn about censorship in its various forms and make critical analyses for themselves. Students have strong opinions, especially about the topic of censorship, and because the opinions are so strong, it allows a teacher to work on skills such as: listening, articulating an opinion, taking part in discussion, writing opinion pieces/journals, research, and debate.

The “media bias” part of the unit allows students to see how bias works in our society and open their eyes to the realities of bias and point of view. By being aware of bias, they are able to better inform themselves, and are able to look at issues with a more open mind. The unit causes them to re-think what they “know” to be true and consider multiple sides of issues. The unit also compels them to differentiate between news and propaganda.

This unit is not designed to create controversy; rather it is designed to make students use higher-level critical thinking skills.



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### **Enduring Understandings / Learning:**

In terms of content, students will get a better understanding of the media and its bias. They will have the opportunity to question the media, and the impact it has on their “informed” decision making. They will also have the opportunity to see what might be considered appropriate and inappropriate content for various audiences.

In terms of skill development, students will also have the opportunity to enhance listening skills, discussion skills, writing skills, and research skills.

### **Assessment Tasks**

#### **Performance Tasks and Other Evidence That Will Demonstrate the Knowledge and Skills Acquired:**

- Discussion participation
- Creative writing Assignment
- Position Papers
- Research Project

#### **Assessment Criteria:**

- Observation
- Rubrics

### **Unit Planning Notes**

#### **Prior Learning Necessary:**

Students will bring their own prior general knowledge to the discussions. No specifics would be required.

#### **Preparation Notes:**

- Make an overhead of Appendix A: Key Terms



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- Obtain a copy of *Control Room* (DVD – a few clips will be used) to be used on Day 3
- Obtain a class set of newspapers for Day 4. Students will need to find and clip a controversial article. Or, choose and clip articles ahead of time to distribute to students, or from which they can choose.
- List of challenged texts ([www.freedomtoread.ca](http://www.freedomtoread.ca)) - Day 5

### Learning Plan

#### **Lesson 1: Censorship and Political Correctness**

Day One is a discussion based introductory lesson. This lesson will provide you with the opportunity to find out about the students' prior knowledge. Also, the students will have the opportunity to discuss and explore some of the key unit ideas and terminology.

In class discussion:

- What is freedom of speech/expression?
- Why is it important?
- What are we guaranteed in the charter (*see Appendix A: Key Terms*)
- Why are we guaranteed this right in the charter?
- Are there instances where someone's freedom of speech should be limited? When? Why?
  
- What is censorship? (Get the students' ideas before giving them the formal definition – *see Key Terms*)
- When is it appropriate to censor? Why?
- What sorts of things do we see censored?
- Why do we censor: music, books, movies, videogames
  
- What is Political Correctness?
- What sorts of terms are popularly deemed "politically correct"?
- How does political correctness affect you?
- When should we draw the line on political correctness?
- When has Political Correctness gone too far?

If there is time left at the end of the period have students write a journal on one of: Freedom of Expression, Censorship, or Political Correctness.



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### Lesson 2: A Politically Correct Creative Writing Assignment

This assignment will enable students to interact with politically correct language and act first hand as censors. There are two types of text that may be adapted for this assignment. Or, you may have students write their own creative text from scratch.

#### Option 1: A “Magical Person” Story (Appendix B)

A “Magical Person” Story is a politically correct story.

1. Start by having students list off fairy tales they know. (Write the list on the board or on a transparency so they can see it)
2. Discuss common threads/themes in the stories. (ie. Witches are females, colour trends, evil animals, helpless women, heroic men)
3. Discuss how these things could be changed to make them more politically correct.
4. Have students individually, in pairs, or in small groups write a “magical person” story. They may use an already existing one as the basis for theirs, but they should censor it and make it politically correct. (You may want to read them an excerpt from a politically correct fairy tale as an exemplar. Politically correct fairy tales can be found on line, or may be purchased in bookstores.)
5. You may want students to share their stories with the class and then have the class listen carefully for offensive content that may have been missed. OR, you may have students submit a written version of their story for marking.

#### Option 2: Song Lyric assignment (Appendix C)

1. Have students make a list of different types of music (Write the list on the board or on a transparency so they can see it)
2. Discuss common threads/themes in the different types of music. Ie threads in rap music, country music, etc...
3. Discuss how the music could be changed to make it more politically correct.
4. Have students individually, in pairs, or in small groups re-write a song they like to make it politically correct. The tune must remain the same, only the lyrics may change.
5. To present their songs you may want they to record and play them, OR you may have them submit a written version of the lyrics.

#### Option 3: Creative Writing

1. Have students individually, in pairs, or in small groups write their own original song, poem, or story that is politically correct.



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### Lesson 3: Media Bias

This lesson will allow students to explore bias in the media. They will explore omission as a form of censorship as well as the spin approach. This exploration will take place via segments of the film *Control Room*, as well as a discussion of reality television and the tabloids.

1. Explain the role of media in a war zone
  - Central Hubs
  - Regular press conferences
  - Assigned military contacts
2. Define Propaganda – the spreading of ideas, information, or rumour for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person.
  - What is it? (get their thoughts before giving them the definition)
  - Why can't you wage a war without it?
  - What power does propaganda have?
3. What advantages are there to controlling the media during a conflict?  
Why might one side not want to allow airtime to the opposing faction?
4. Discuss some background information about the war in the Middle East:
  - What do they know about the war?
  - Where have they found their information?
  - Do they feel they are well informed?
  - Do they believe the information they have is accurate?
5. Give some background information on Al Jazeera:
  - What is Al Jazeera?
    - Middle East Equivalent of CNN
    - They pride themselves in being “non-biased and presenting just the facts”
  - What did they want?
    - They wanted to be allowed to televise in North America.
  - What could they not have?
    - Airtime. They were banned from broadcasting in various countries.
  - Why?
    - Why would they want to broadcast in North America?
    - Why might they not be allowed airtime?
6. After giving some background, ask the question: how many believe that Al Jazeera should be allowed to broadcast in North America?



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7. Take a look at some clips from the film *Control Room* (2004), a documentary that investigates the ethics of media-managed wars. This film particularly focuses on the U.S. led war in Iraq.
8. Discussion questions for after each clip (*clips are numbered according to the DVD scene select*):

### Show Clip #1

- Why did Bush say they invaded?
- What did we hear about the invasion (think back a few years)?
- What didn't we hear? (Arab perspective)
- The video gives some of the Arab's opinions. What are they?
- Should any country be allowed to decide what is in the best interest of another country? (*in the video, it was outlined that the citizens did not want the invasion, but that the invasion was being made in the citizens best interest*)

### Show Clip #4

- Define "**bias**"
  - Why is the military upset with Al Jazeera?
  - Why does the media analyst "need pictures"?
- (Remember that a picture is worth a thousand words)

### Show Clip #7

- Define "**objective**"
- Are any journalists objective?
- Where should the line be drawn in terms of what morally should or should not be shown?
- Why did Al Jazeera say they presented the footage?

### Show Clip #10

- Here is a prime example of military censorship.
- How did the military censor information in this scene?
- Draw attention to the lack of follow through on the public promise (the cards)

### Show Clip #12

- Define "**spin**" - They tell their side of the story, we tell ours. Somewhere in the middle is the truth.
- Question: What happens if we don't hear both sides?
- How might omission be considered censorship?

9. Re-visit the idea presented before: what would the benefits be of allowing other countries to broadcast here in North America?



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10. After thoughts – These may either be dealt with via discussion, or a journal:

- What does this tell you about the news?
- How does this change your perspective about how the news is told?
- Will you be a more conscientious viewer?
- Should various stations be allowed to broadcast news here in Canada?

Depending on time left over, you may want to bridge into the following topics:

“Reality” Television – talk shows, entertainment

- How real are they?
- What is the appeal?
- What spins are taken?
- What types of things may be omitted?

Gossip Rags (Tabloids) – Enquirer, Sun, Star

- What are your thoughts on them?
- How real are they?
- What's the intrigue?
- How is the information obtained?

### Lesson 4: Position Papers

This assignment allows students to reflect on some of the things discussed in the previous lesson in terms of spins and media bias. They will have the opportunity to look at an issue from another person's point of view and think about what might have been omitted, and how things might be seen from another person's perspective.

The main purpose of the fourth lesson is to drive home the point about perspective, and the importance of finding out several points of view to truly have all the facts.

1. Hand out newspapers to the students (depending on availability of newspapers, you may want to cut out articles – one per student)
2. Have students choose an article – the more controversial the better – and make a list of other perspectives that might be omitted, as well as relevant facts that might bear weight. (Think of it as a trial. There are always two sides to the issue. Which one is correct?)





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3. They will then write an article from another perspective using relevant facts. (appropriate newspaper article format should be observed)

ALTERNATIVE: This lesson may also be done using debate.

1. Put students into small groups.
2. Choose a topic and have the students develop their respective arguments, then present them to the class in the form of debate.
3. Discuss the idea of perspective and re-affirm the importance of knowing different points of view before forming a clear opinion.

### Lesson 5: Censorship Research Project

This project will allow students to explore censorship and how it affects them first hand. They will have the opportunity to see how the process works and the number of texts that have been censored and for what reasons. This also allows them an opportunity to work on their research and report writing skills.

Handout Appendices D and E. Appendix D is the research project handout for the students. Appendix E is the evaluation rubric.

Start by introducing a list of texts that have been challenged in Canada in the past few years. This can be found on [www.freedomtoread.ca](http://www.freedomtoread.ca). Choose several titles that might be familiar to the students in your class. This will shock them and they will be interested to find out why.

On the “Freedom to Read” website there are reasons as to why the various texts have been challenged, where the texts have been challenged, and the results of the challenges.

Each student will sign up for a text and do some research about:

- A. What the novel is about – they are not required to read the novel, but they should do some research to find out some background.
- B. Why the novel has been challenged, where, and the results

They will have to use a variety of sources to do their research (both internet and print).

Students will be presenting their projects to the class so they may have the opportunity to learn about several texts and several points of view.



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### **Appendices**

Appendix A: Key Terms

Appendix B: Magical Person Story

Appendix C: Song Lyric Assignment

Appendix D: Research Assignment

Appendix E: Research Assignment Rubric

### **Other Possible Course Applications**

This unit can apply to any English class, History Class, Class, or Media Studies Course. Due to the level of maturity, I recommend senior level classes. The censorship unit may be, used in conjunction with “Freedom to Read Week” which is an annual event (see [www.freedomtoread.ca](http://www.freedomtoread.ca)).