

## Instruction

### Selection of Instructional Materials

#### The Right to Read

"The right to read, like all rights guaranteed or implied within our constitutional tradition, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways, education is an effort to improve the quality of choices open to people. But to deny the freedom of choice in fear that it may be unwisely used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we respect the right of individuals to be selective in their own reading. But for the same reason, we oppose efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

The right of any individual not just to read but to read whatever he/she wants to read is basic to a democratic society. This right is based on an assumption that the educated and reading person possesses judgment and understanding and can be trusted with the determination of his/her own actions. In effect, the reading person is freed from the bonds of discovering all things and all facts and all truths through his/her own direct experiences, for his/her reading allows him/her to meet people, debate philosophies, and experience events far beyond the narrow confines of his/her own existence.

In selecting books for reading by young people, English teachers consider the contribution which each work may make to the education of the reader, its aesthetic value, its honesty, its readability for a particular group of students, and its appeal to adolescents. English teachers, however, may use different works for different purposes. The criteria for choosing a work to be read by an entire class are somewhat different from the criteria for choosing works to be read by small groups....

But the teacher selects books; he/she does not censor them. Selection implies that a teacher is free to choose this or that work depending upon the purpose to be achieved.... Censorship implies that certain works are not open to selection....

Many works contain isolated elements to which some individuals or groups may object. For example, the

literary artist seeks truth as he/she is able to see and feel it. As a seeker of truth, he/she must necessarily challenge at times the common beliefs or values of a society. He/she must comment on people's actions and values and the frequent discrepancy between what they purport to live by and what they do live by. Moreover, the value and impact of any literary work must be examined as a whole and not in part, i.e. the impact of the entire work being more important than the words, phrases, or incidents out of which it is made.

...But youth is the age of revolt, and the times today show much of the world in revolt. To pretend otherwise is to ignore a reality made clear to young people and adults alike on television and radio, in newspapers, and magazines. English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not lie to the young about the perilous but wondrous times we live in....

#### The Threat to Education

The censorship pressures receiving the greatest publicity are those of small groups who protest the use of a limited number of books with some "objectionable" realistic elements, such as *Brave New World*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Stranger*, *Johnny Got His Gun*, *The Assistant*, *Catch-22*, *Soul on Ice*, or *Stranger in a Strange Land*. The most obvious and immediate victims are often found among our best and most creative English teachers.... Ultimately, however, the real victims are the students, denied the freedom to explore ideas and pursue truth wherever and however they wish.

Great damage may be done by book committees appointed by national or local organizations to pore over anthologies, texts, library books, and paperbacks to find sentences which advocate, or seem to advocate, causes or concepts or practices those organizations condemn. As a result, some publishers, sensitive to possible objections, carefully exclude sentences or selections that might conceivably offend some groups, somehow, sometime, somewhere."

-National Council of Teachers of English