

Name: _____ Hour: _____ Date: _____

Synthesis Essay

Suggested reading and writing time - 55 minutes

It is suggested that you spend 15 minutes reading the question, analyzing and evaluating the sources, and 40 minutes writing your response.

Note: You may begin writing your response before the reading period is over.

(This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Much debate has erupted throughout the United States about what are considered appropriate books for a classroom. As reading scores have decreased throughout much of the nation, the complexity of a text is not the only concern school boards, administration, teachers, parents, and community members have. Factors including morality and diversity are also some of the many issues discussed when building or revising reading curriculums.

Carefully read the seven sources, including the introductory information for each source. Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three sources and evaluates the factors a school should consider before bringing a book into the curriculum.

Source A (Sacks)

Source B (AdLit)

Source C (DPI)

Source D (ACT)

Source E (Friedman)

Source F (Pro/Con)

Source G (BN Editors)

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Select and use evidence from at least 3 of the provided sources to support your line of reasoning. Indicate clearly the sources used through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Sources may be cited as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the description in parentheses.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Source A

Sacks, Ariel. "Tips for Selecting a Book for the Whole Class." *Education Week*, 26 July 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-tips-for-selecting-a-book-for-the-whole-class/2018/07>.

The following is written by a middle school language arts teacher and instructional-support coach excerpted from an online article in a national education newspaper.

When I search for books for whole novel studies, I consider the merits of each title in five key dimensions by asking myself these questions:

- 1. Development.** How does the content of the novel connect to my students' developmental stage? Why do I think this book is appropriate for my age group?
- 2. Identification / Diversity.** How do the book's content and setting relate to the life experiences of my students? Are they mirrors (familiar) or windows (unfamiliar)? Directly or indirectly connected? How does this title contribute to an overall balance of diverse characters and authors throughout the year?
- 3. Reading level.** What is the reading level of this book in relation to the reading levels of my students? Is this book accessible for all, half, or just some of my students? Is it good for the beginning, middle, or end of the year?
- 4. Thematic connections.** How does this book connect thematically or structurally to what came before it and what will come later in our curriculum? How does it connect to the books students have been choosing and loving most for their independent reading? To issues students care about in the world?
- 5. Literary strengths.** Which literary elements are strongest in this work? What opportunities does it provide to focus on the author's craft?

Source B

“How Parents Can Encourage Teens to Read.” *AdLit*, WETA, 2023, Washington, D.C., <https://www.adlit.org/topics/parent-tips/how-parents-can-encourage-teens-read>

The following is from an education service in Washington D.C that supports readers and writers in middle school and high school.

1. **Set an example.** Let your kids see you reading for pleasure.
2. **Furnish your home with a variety of reading materials.** Leave books, magazines, and newspapers around. Check to see what disappears for a clue to what interests your teenager.
3. **Give teens an opportunity to choose their own books .** When you and your teen are out together, browse in a bookstore or library. Go your separate ways and make your own selections. A bookstore gift certificate is a nice way of saying, “You choose”.
4. **Build on your teen’s interests.** Look for books and articles that feature their favorite sports teams, rock stars, hobbies, or TV shows. Give a gift subscription to a special interest magazine.
5. **View pleasure reading as a value in itself.** Almost anything your youngsters read — including the Sunday comics — helps build reading skills.
6. **Read some books written for teens.** Young adult novels can give you valuable insights into the concerns and pressures felt by teenagers. You may find that these books provide a neutral ground on which to talk about sensitive subjects.
7. **Make reading aloud a natural part of family life.** Share an article you clipped from the paper, a poem, a letter, or a random page from an encyclopedia — without turning it into a lesson.
8. **Acknowledge your teen’s mature interests.** Look for ways to acknowledge the emerging adult in your teens by suggesting some adult reading you think they can handle.
9. **Keep the big picture in mind.** For all sorts of reasons, some teenagers go through periods without showing much interest in reading. Don’t panic! Time, and a few tips from this brochure, may help rekindle their interest.

Source C

“Wisconsin Standards for English Language Arts.”
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, May 2020,
<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/standards/New%20pdfs/ELAStandards2020.pdf>

The following is an excerpt from a standards framework published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

English Language Arts Education in Wisconsin

Wisconsin Standards for English Language Arts provide a description, or portrait, of students who have met the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

These standards articulate end-of-grade level expectations...

Students in Wisconsin:

- **Demonstrate independence.** Students can, without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information...
- **Build strong content knowledge.** English language arts is its own discipline or content area; as such, it teaches students knowledge, skills, and behaviors unique to the discipline. This includes understanding and creating texts for a variety of audiences, tasks, and purposes...
- **Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.** Students adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They set and adjust purposes for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use as warranted by the task...
- **Comprehend as well as critique.** Students are engaged and open-minded—but discerning—readers and listeners. They work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, but they also question an author’s or speaker’s assumptions and premises and assess the veracity of claims and the soundness of reasoning.
- **Value evidence.** Students cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to the reader or listener, and they constructively evaluate others’ use of evidence.
- **Use technology and digital media strategically and capably.** Students employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use...
- **Come to understand other perspectives and cultures.** Students appreciate that the 21st century classroom and workplace are settings in which people from often widely divergent cultures representing diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together... Through reading great classic and contemporary works of literature representative of a variety of periods, cultures, and worldviews, students can meaningfully inhabit worlds and have experiences much different from their own.

Source D

“Reading Test Description for the ACT.” *ACT*, 2023,
<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/description-of-reading-test.html>

The following is excerpted from the official ACT website.

Content Covered by the ACT Reading Test

Five scores are reported for the reading section: a score for the section overall; three reporting category scores based on specific knowledge and skills; and an Understanding Complex Texts indicator. The approximate percentage of the section devoted to each reporting category is:

Key Ideas and Details (55–60%)

This category requires you to read texts closely to determine central ideas and themes. Summarize information and ideas accurately. Understand relationships and draw logical inferences and conclusions, including understanding sequential, comparative, and cause-effect relationships.

Craft and Structure (25–30%)

These questions ask you to determine word and phrase meanings; analyze an author's word choice rhetorically; analyze text structure; understand the author's purpose and perspective; and analyze characters' points of view. Interpret authorial decisions rhetorically and differentiate between various perspectives and sources of information.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (13–18%)

This category requires you to understand authors' claims, differentiate between facts and opinions, and use evidence to make connections between different texts that are related by topic. Some questions will require you to analyze how authors construct arguments, and to evaluate reasoning and evidence from various sources.

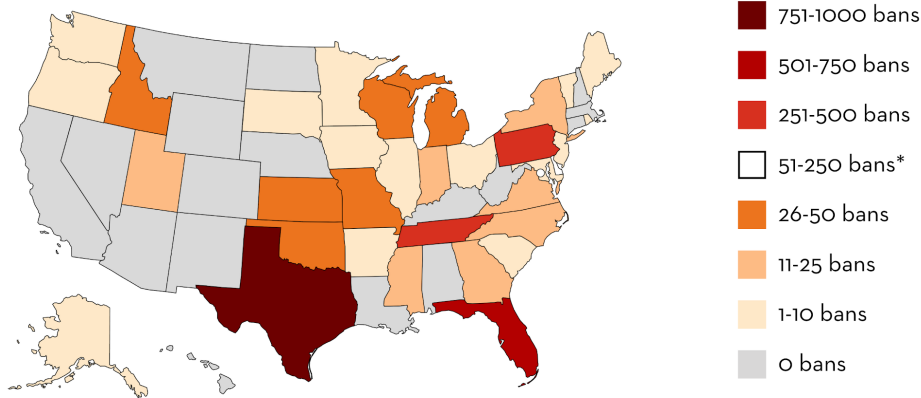
Source E

Friedman, Jonathan, Ph.D. and Nadine Farid Johnson.
"Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools." *PEN America*, 19 Sept. 2022,
<https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/>

The following is excerpted from a report conducted by a hundred-year-old organization committed to defending freedom of expression.

School Book Bans by State

July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022



Data from PEN America Index of School Book Bans, July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022.

*There are no states with 51-250 bans

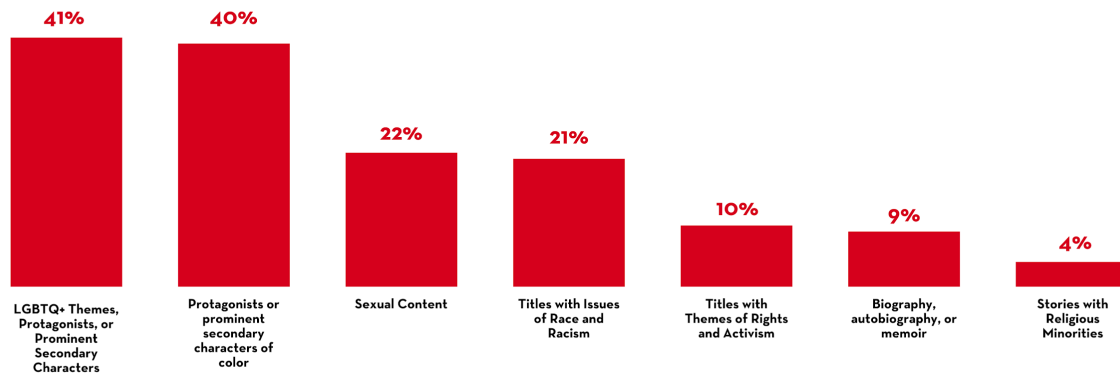
Created with mapchart.net

Subject Matter of Banned Content

By Percentage of Unique Banned Titles, July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022



Note: many titles contain more than one type of content.



Data from PEN America Index of School Book Bans, July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022.

Source F

Pro/Con.org. "Banned Books – Top 3 Pros and Cons."
Pro/Con Encyclopedia Britannica, 27 March 2023,
<https://www.procon.org/headlines/banned-books-top-3-pros-and-cons/>

The following is excerpted from a nonpartisan website published by a renowned encyclopedia organization.

Should Parents or Other Adults Be Able to Ban Books from Schools and Libraries?

Pro 1

Parents have the right to decide what material their children are exposed to and when.

Having books with adult topics available in libraries limits parents' ability to choose when their children are mature enough to read specific material...

If books with inappropriate material are available in libraries, children or teens can be exposed to books their parents wouldn't approve of before the parents even find out what their children are reading. [16]

Bans are necessary because "opting your child out of reading [a certain] book doesn't protect him or her. They are still surrounded by the other students who are going to be saturated with this book," said writer Macey France. [17]

Pro 2

Children should not be exposed to sex, violence, drug use, or other inappropriate topics in school or public libraries.

Books in the young adult genre often contain adult themes that young people aren't ready to experience. Of the top ten most challenged books in 2020, one had LGBTQ+ content, two were sexually explicit, five dealt with racism and anti-police opinions, and others had profanity and drug use. [18] [27]...

The American Academy of Pediatrics has found that exposure to violence in media, including in books, can impact kids by making them act aggressively and desensitizing them to violence. [17]

Con 1

Parents may control what their own children read, but don't have a right to restrict what books are available to other people.

Parents who don't like specific books can have their kids opt out of an assignment without infringing on the rights of others.

The National Coalition against Censorship explained that "Even books or materials that many find 'objectionable' may have educational value..."

In the 1982 Supreme Court ruling on *Board of Education v. Pico*, Justice William Brennan wrote that taking books off of library shelves could violate students' First Amendment rights...

Con 2

Many frequently challenged books help people get a better idea of the world and their place in it.

Robie H. Harris, author of frequently challenged children's books..., stated, "I think these books look at the topics, the concerns, the worry, the fascination that kids have today... It's the world in which they're living." [8]

Many books that have long been considered to be required reading to become educated about literature and American history are frequently challenged...

Con 3

Books are a portal to different life experiences and reading encourages empathy and

Pro 3

Keeping books with inappropriate content out of libraries protects kids, but doesn't stop people from reading those books or prevent authors from writing them.

Peter Sprigg of the Family Research Council noted that removing certain books from libraries is about showing discretion and respecting a community's values, and doesn't prevent people from getting those books elsewhere...

What some call "book banning," many see as making responsible choices about what books are available in public and school libraries. "...For better or for worse, these books are still widely available. Your local community has simply decided that finite public resources are not going to be spent disseminating them," *Weekly Standard* writer and school board member Mark Hemingway stated. [18]

social-emotional development.

One study found that reading J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which is frequently challenged for religious concerns about witchcraft, "improved attitudes" about immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees. [11]

Another study found that reading narrative fiction helped readers understand their peers and raised social abilities. [12][13]

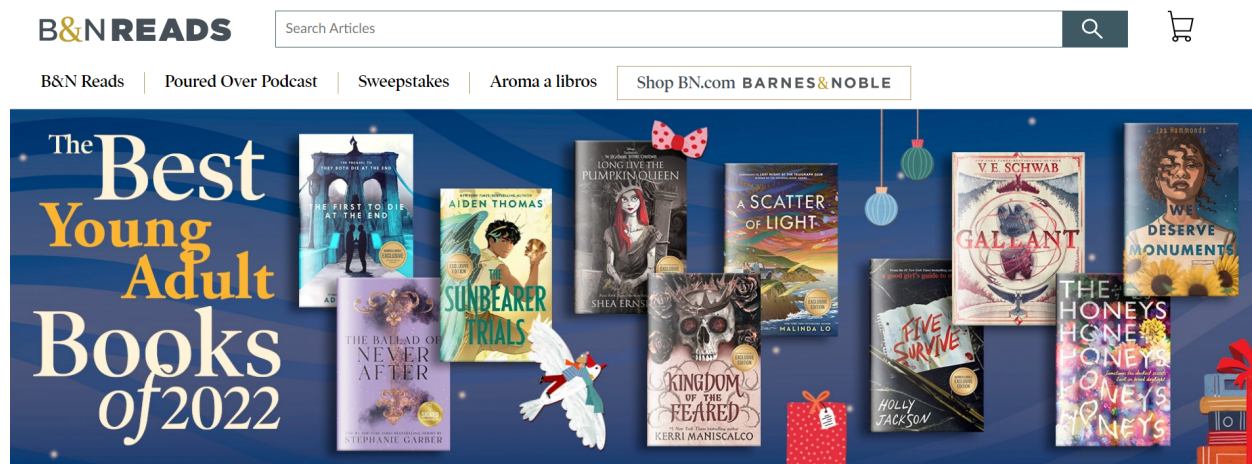
A study published in *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* found that people who read a story about a Muslim woman were less likely to make broad judgments based on race. [14]

Neil Gaiman, author of the frequently challenged novel *Neverwhere*, among other books, stated that fiction "build[s] empathy... You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know..." [15]

Source G

BN Editors. "Best Young Adult Books 2022." *B&N Reads*, Barnes and Noble Booksellers*Blog*, 10 Oct. 2022, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/best-young-adult-books-2022/>

The following is excerpted from a popular bookstore's website.



B&N READS, BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Best Young Adult Books 2022

By [BN Editors](#) / October 10, 2022 at 6:50 am

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We've been enraptured by our best young adult books of 2022, with books ranging from fantasy to mystery to historical fiction to horror and spin offs of beloved movies. If you're looking for books to give readers in your life, we can't recommend these ten books enough. Spanning a range of topics and genres, these masterfully written young adult books will capture the hearts of all readers.