

### **What is Censorship?**

*Censorship is not easy to define. According to Webster's Dictionary, to "censor" means "to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable." Its central characteristic is the suppression of an idea or image because it offends or disturbs someone, or because they disagree with it. Basically, it involves people or institutions in some position of power telling you what you can and cannot say, write, display, or think about. It can also be thought of as the official restriction of any expression believed to threaten the political, social, or moral order. For youth, censorship issues may include:*

#### **Internet filters**

**Abstinence only sex education**

**Dress codes issues**

**Student press issues- not allowing certain article to be published**

**Canceling artwork and theater performances**

**The suppression of school clubs (Gay/Straight Alliances, Anti War groups, etc.)**

**The banning of books**

**Textbooks omitted certain elements of history**

*Discuss these issues and identify if censorship has impacted your life as a student.*

#### **YFEN Films** *View and Discuss*

##### ***Lost Expression (4 minutes)***

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgA-H2Tc9Qk>

What forms of censorship does this film highlight?

What do you think the masks represent?

Why do think people would want to ban books or keep kids from listening to certain kinds of music?

##### ***Gay Straight Alliance (4 minutes)***

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjJGjUcneIQ>

What issues does this film bring up?

How is not allowing a student club to organize a form of censorship?

How did the students in the film respond to censorship?

Other YFEN films for discussion can be viewed here: <http://ncac.org/yfen-film-contest>

**Warning:** These films may be **CENSORED** by your school's internet filter. For a DVD copy of the films, contact [ncac@ncac.org](mailto:ncac@ncac.org)

**The First Amendment of the US Constitution** is the principal that is used most often in this country to fight censorship. It states that...

*“ Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. ”*

From this one sentence, it is generally agreed that the following rights are protected by US law...

**Freedom of Religion**  
**Freedom of Speech**  
**Freedom of the Press**  
**Freedom of Assembly**  
**Freedom to Petition the Government**

In small groups discuss these rights. Then answer these questions...

1. If you had to give up one of these five freedoms, which one would it be?
2. Why?
3. How would your life be different if you had to live without this freedom?
4. How are these freedoms interconnected?

(But none of us should have to live without these rights, regardless of what country we live in, or what the law of that country may or may not say...)

**Discuss the following quote:**

"The state can't give you free speech, and the state can't take it away. You're born with it, like your eyes, like your ears...freedom is something you assume, then you wait for someone to try to take it away. The degree to which you resist is the degree to which you are free."

- Joseph Campbell, as cited by Utah Phillips

*Discuss the follow student rights as they relate to your school experience.  
Your school district may have a similar document to use as a reference and discussion guide.*

**From the NYC Department of Education, Student Bill of Rights**

**II . THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PERSON**

*All students are guaranteed the right to express opinions, support causes, organize, and assemble to discuss issues and demonstrate peacefully and responsibly in support of them, in accordance with policies and procedures established by the New York City Department of Education.*

Students have the right to:

1. organize, promote, and participate in a representative form of student government;
2. organize, promote, and participate in student organizations, social and educational clubs or teams, and political, religious, and philosophical groups consistent with the requirements of the Equal Access Act;
3. representation on appropriate school-wide committees that have impact on the educational process, with voting rights where applicable;
4. publish school newspapers and school newsletters reflecting the life of the school and expressing student concerns and points of view consistent with responsible journalistic methods and subject to reasonable regulations based on legitimate pedagogical concerns;
5. circulate newspapers, literature, or political leaflets on school property, subject to reasonable guidelines established by the school regarding time, place, and manner of distribution, except where such material is libelous, obscene, commercial, or materially disrupts the school, causes substantial disorder, or invades the rights of others;
6. wear political or other types of buttons, badges, or armbands, except where such material is libelous, obscene, or materially disrupts the school, causes substantial disorder, or invades the rights of others;
7. post bulletin board notices within the school, subject to reasonable guidelines established by the school, except where such notices are libelous, obscene, commercial, or materially disrupt the school, cause substantial disorder, or invade the rights of others;
8. determine their own dress within the parameters of the Department of Education policy on school uniforms, except where such dress is dangerous or interferes with the learning and teaching process;
9. be secure in their persons, papers, and effects, and to carry in the school building personal possessions which are appropriate for use on the premises;
10. be free from unreasonable or indiscriminate searches, including body searches;
11. be free from corporal punishment;
12. decline to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance or stand for the pledge.

## **Continuing the Conversation**

*For classes/student groups that wish to make connections to global/human rights issues, below is a list of relevant articles from the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**:*

**Article 18.** Everyone has the right to **freedom of thought, conscience and religion**; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

**Article 19.** Everyone has the right to freedom **of opinion and expression**; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

**Article 20.** (1) Everyone has the right to **freedom of peaceful assembly and association**. (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

**Article 26.** (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

**Article 28.** Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

**The Full text of the UDHR can be found at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>**