

Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom

WCTE has adopted this position statement to address censorship and the rights of students and teachers of English.

The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (WCTE) is committed to promoting a society where intellectual activity and creativity, freedom of expression and debate, and access to information are encouraged and nurtured as vital elements underpinning individual and community fulfillment. In this respect, WCTE declares that, while we are all free to reject books and other materials of which we do not approve, we cannot exercise this right of censorship to restrict the freedom and choices of others.

The Rights of Educators

WCTE supports the role of educators and librarians in providing access to all publicly available information. If this material has not incurred legal penalties, then it should not be excluded on moral, political, religious, racial, or gender grounds to satisfy the demands of private interests.

At the same time, WCTE encourages parents and school districts to respect the role of teachers and librarians as professionals with broad knowledge of language, literature, and cultural traditions, just as WCTE encourages teachers and librarians to respect the concerns and convictions of both external critics and professional colleagues who have opposing ideas about either principles or practices.

WCTE also believes that school districts must establish formal policies and procedures for handling criticism of selected texts, including a system for communicating openly with civic, educational, political, religious, and other bodies within the community. Both inside and outside the classroom, teachers should explain the curricular purpose of a book or how a book with questionable language and/or subject matter can still have educational merit.

The Rights of Students

WCTE fully supports the Resolution on Students' Rights of Expression, written and approved by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 2004. According to this resolution, because we as educators must provide safe spaces for students to voice their own thoughts and opinions through both writing and speaking, we must

- reaffirm the rights of expression by students at all levels in a variety of media;
- acknowledge the need for educators to develop competencies in responding to such expression in ways that ensure safety, welfare, and respect for students and others;
- encourage educators and school authorities to develop written procedures for logical and prudent interventions when student expression may warrant an intervention;

WCTE Intellectual Freedom Statement

- provide professional development that supports students' right of expression in the context of school safety; and
- collect and disseminate exemplary policies and processes that school leaders have developed as reasonable responses to troubling and difficult expression

John Pruitt, Chair
Intellectual Freedom Committee
Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English

*Copyright © 2011 by the Wisconsin Council of
Teachers of English.*