Question 1

(Suggested time – 40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Directions: The following prompt is based on the accompanying seven sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources, you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. Your argument should be central; the sources should support your argument. Avoid merely summarizing the sources.

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect references.

Introduction

According to the American Library Association, books are challenged or censored in cities and towns all over the country for a multitude of reasons. The “hot button” issues that have caused the most controversy are sexually explicit material, offensive language, unsuitable material for children, homosexuality, objectionable religious views, nudity, racism, and sexual education, among others. Critics of censorship hold that the First Amendment protects free speech. Proponents of censorship focus on the individual and parental rights to select what type of materials their children encounter.

Assignment

Read the following sources (including the introductory information) carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, evaluate the most important factors that a school should consider before using particular texts in curriculum and instruction.

You may refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Henry)
Source B (Doe)
Source C (Island Tree)
Source D (Orwell)
Source E (student responses)
Source F (U.S. Constitution)
Source G (“Words Hurt”)
The following is excerpted from a book on censorship

The debate surrounding the racial implications of *Huck Finn* and its appropriateness for the secondary school classroom gives rise to myriad considerations. The actual matter and intent of the text are a source of contention. The presence of the word "nigger," the treatment of Jim and blacks in general, the somewhat difficult satiric mode, and the ambiguity of theme give pause to even the most flexible reader. Moreover, as numerous critics have pointed out, neither junior high nor high school students are necessarily flexible or subtle readers. The very profundity of the text renders the process of teaching it problematic and places special emphasis on teacher ability and attitude. Student cognitive and social maturity also takes on special significance in the face of such a complicated and subtle text.

The nature of the complexities of *Huck Finn* places the dynamics of the struggle for its inclusion in or exclusion from public school curricula in two arenas. On the one hand, the conflict manifests itself as a contest between lay readers and so-called scholarly experts, particularly as it concerns the text. Public school administrators and teachers, on the other hand, field criticisms that have to do with the context into which the novel is introduced. In neither case, however, do the opponents appear to hear each other. Too often, concerned parents are dismissed by academia as "neurotics" (14) who have fallen prey to personal racial insecurities or have failed to grasp Twain's underlying truth. In their turn, censors regard academics as inhabitants of ivory towers who pontificate on the virtue of *Huck Finn* without recognizing its potential for harm. School officials and parents clash over the school's right to intellectual freedom and the parents' right to protect their children from perceived racism….

The factor of racial uncertainty on the part of Twain, its manifestation in his best-loved piece, and its existence in American society should not be a barrier to Huckleberry Finn's admittance to the classroom. Instead, this should make it the pith of the American literature curriculum. The insolubility of the race question as regards Huckleberry Finn functions as a model of the fundamental racial ambiguity of the American mind-set. Active engagement with Twain's novel provides one method for students to confront their own deepest racial feelings and insecurities. Though the problems of racial perspective present in Huckleberry Finn may never be satisfactorily explained for censors or scholars, the consideration of them may have a practical, positive bearing on the manner in which America approaches race in the coming century.
The following is an excerpted section from a letter submitted by a community member

…The freedom of speech and the written word in our country should in no way be abused or misconstrued as to prevent parents from making conscious decisions about what their children are exposed to.

Several of the images, scenes and content of this book if made into a movie would likely be given a rating of Restricted to over age 17. In elementary school children must get permission slips to watch PG rated movies. In middle school they are required to have parental permission to watch PG-13 movies. Parental permission is required for children to hear sex education in schools. I see this as a highly similar situation and am appalled at the staff’s lacking sense of responsibility, respect and sensitivity to the parents and the value those parents have a responsibility to teach to their children…
The following is the court ruling dealing with a censorship issue

ISLAND TREES SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION v. PICO

Facts of the Case

The Island Trees Union Free School District's Board of Education (the "Board"), acting contrary to the recommendations of a committee of parents and school staff, ordered that certain books be removed from its district's junior high and high school libraries. In support of its actions, the Board said such books were: "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy." Acting through his friend Francis Pico, and on behalf of several other students, Steven Pico brought suit in federal district court challenging the Board's decision to remove the books. The Board won; the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit reversed. The Board petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court, which granted certiorari.

Question

Did the Board of Education's decision to ban certain books from its junior high and high school libraries, based on their content, violate the First Amendment's freedom of speech protections?

Conclusion

Decision: 5 votes for Pico, 4 vote(s) against
Legal provision: Amendment 1: Speech, Press, and Assembly

Yes. Although school boards have a vested interest in promoting respect for social, moral, and political community values, their discretionary power is secondary to the transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment. The Court, in a 5-to-4 decision, held that as centers for voluntary inquiry and the dissemination of information and ideas, school libraries enjoy a special affinity with the rights of free speech and press. Therefore, the Board could not restrict the availability of books in its libraries simply because its members disagreed with their idea content.
The following is an excerpt from the novel.

When Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded, the last link with the past would have been severed. History had already been rewritten, but fragments of the literature of the past survived here and there, imperfectly censored, and so long as one retained one’s knowledge of Oldspeak it was possible to read them. In the future such fragments, even if chanced to survive, would be unintelligible and untranslatable. It was impossible to translate any passage of Oldspeak into Newspeak unless it either referred to some technical process of some very simple everyday action, or was already orthodox (good-thinkful would be the Newspeak expression) in tendency. In practice this meant that no book written before approximately 1960 could be translated as a whole. Prerevolutionary literature could only be subjected to ideological translation – that is, alteration in sense as well as language. Take for example the well-known passage from the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of those ends, it is the right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government...

It would have been quite impossible to render this into Newspeak while keeping to the sense of the original. The nearest one could come to doing so would be to swallow the whole passage up in single word crimethink. A full translation could only be an ideological translation, whereby Jefferson’s words would be changed into a panegyric on absolute government (255-256).
**The following are student response to a survey regarding a challenged book in their class**

- I really liked how it was written. Also I really liked the messages that were portrayed (anorexia, drinking, chasing your dreams, etc.).
- I liked that Junior really cared about his education and wanted something out of his life instead of being another poor Indian living on the rez.
- I really enjoyed the whole book.
- I did not want to put the book down.
- This was a book that I never wanted to let go of this book.
- I liked the point of view and the style of writing.
- I liked how Junior was able to overcome those who were bullying him.
- I like that Arnold spoke like a real high school boy and not all formal or like a Kindergartener.

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- I grew up told not to use swear words like everybody else, and I just never do. I think it is a virtue that I have to not use the words.
- The start of the book is too slow and didn’t have a “hook.”
- He was a sour mouth.
- The story was really sad.
- I felt like if Arnold was a real person, we wouldn’t get along.
- I think bullying is a horrible thing.
- There was no reason for me to read this book and quite frankly, I have more important things to do than read inappropriate, pointless books.
- Parts were boring.
- The book just wasn’t funny or any fun to read.
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

Source F
U.S. Constitution
The following is a visual representation of a censorship related issue

Source G