

**STATE OF MICHIGAN LAW DAY 2007 ESSAY CONTEST**  
**“LIBERTY UNDER LAW: EMPOWERING YOUTH, ASSURING DEMOCRACY”**

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*Should a school board have the right to remove books  
containing profanity and vulgarity from a school library?*

The possibility of anyone banning books from a high school library appalls me. Books should not be banned merely because they contain something that somebody finds offensive. Swear words, violence and sexual sequences are offensive to some people, but, in some cases, may be instructive, or at least increase awareness.

Lord of the Flies, for instance, has been challenged and banned from many school libraries over the years although it is among a group of literary works endorsed by the American Library Association. The book was probably challenged for the scenes where the children resort to violence and attack the weakest of their group.

Another book that has been often banned is Huckleberry Finn. The major problem in this case is the use of the n-word. Most of us agree that it is a highly offensive word, but in Mr. Twain's time it was commonly used. Other books such as The Catcher in the Rye have been banned from many school libraries for excessive use of the f-word, another word many of us find offensive. Go Ask Alice is another book that has often been banned over the decades. The problems are language and drug usage. The book is actually an anti-drug book since it portrays drugs as extremely dangerous.

In the court case Board of Education v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853(1982), a school board states that the books are "anti-American, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian and just plain filthy." Our Constitution states in the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press". Therefore the Constitution states that no one may choose what an author puts in his or her book. One should remember that if the book is on the library shelf the student does not have to read it.

I interviewed a high school librarian and a librarian who currently works in book publishing. After I talked with them, I knew that I was not alone in my strong objections to book removal. The high school librarian said that in her thirty years working as a librarian, only ten books had been challenged and banned. The library compromised with the high school by placing the books most likely to be challenged behind a counter. Students could still see the books but had to ask for them. She admitted that placing the books behind the desk is a form of censorship because it is denying equal access to everyone.

"Challenged" is the term that libraries use if an authority figure objects to a book. The person must fill out a form citing the objection. A committee of people involved in the school system makes a recommendation to either keep the questioned material or to remove it from the library.

I am completely against banning books from high school libraries. If people find something offensive in a book, they have the right not to read it. They should not be allowed to tell me that I may not read it.