



ESL Podcast 439 – Talking about Censorship

GLOSSARY

to ban – to not allow something to be used, bought, seen, or heard

* The university wants to ban cigarette smoking in all of its buildings.

inappropriate – not right or correct for someone or for a particular situation

* It is inappropriate to make jokes about people's religions in the office.

to talk over (something) – to talk about something; to discuss something

* They've found two houses that they like, so they're going to talk over their decision tonight before deciding which one to buy.

obscene – very offensive because something is dirty in a sexual or hateful way

* When Lynn was a child, her father washed out her mouth with soap when she said obscene words.

filth – dirt; garbage; something that is disgusting and unclean and shouldn't be touched or used

* The college student's apartment was covered with empty pizza boxes, dirty socks, and other filth.

absurd – bizarre; not logical or rational; silly

* He's reading an absurd book about what the world would be like if there wasn't any gravity.

free speech – Americans' freedom or ability to say or write almost anything they want, without being told that they cannot or should not say or write certain things

* Thanks to free speech, Americans can criticize their government without much fear of punishment.

to violate – to go against something; to break a rule, law, or principle

* She violated the speed limit by driving 75 miles per hour in a 55-mile-per-hour zone.

to believe in (something) – to strongly think that something is good, correct, or right

* I believe in children's right to a good education.



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to portray – to represent or illustrate something; to express something in a certain way

* That painting portrays her as a much more beautiful woman than she actually was.

morally objectionable – something that goes against one's beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong

* Do you think that marriage before the age of 16 is morally objectionable?

graphic violence – attacks that hurt one or more people, described or shown in great detail with a lot of blood

* I would never show that movie to my son! It has too much graphic violence and it would give him nightmares.

to be exposed to (something) – to be allowed to see or hear something; to not be protected from something

* Were you exposed to people from other cultures when you were growing up?

to fear monger – to use fear to change people's opinions about something or the way that they act; to frighten people into doing or not doing something

* The advertisements are fear mongering, showing pictures of horrible accidents to make teenagers understand the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol.

to not give (someone) credit – to underestimate someone; to not believe that someone is capable of doing something; to not think that one can do something

* You should give Jonathan more credit. He isn't as stupid as you think he is.

shouting match – a conversation where people are yelling louder and louder to have their opinions heard, but really aren't communicating well

* That couple down the street argues all the time, and we can hear their shouting matches almost every night.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What would most American parents want their children to be exposed to?
 - a) Free speech.
 - b) Filth.
 - c) Graphic violence.

2. What does one parent mean by, “They don’t give our kids enough credit.”
 - a) The books don’t offer enough course credit for graduation.
 - b) The kids don’t have enough money on their credit cards to buy the books.
 - c) The kids will be able to understand the book’s real message.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to ban

The verb “to ban,” in this podcast, means to not allow something to be used, bought, seen, or heard: “Did you hear that the city wants to ban plastic bags in grocery stores?” A “banned substance” is a drug, especially a steroid, that is not allowed in a competition: “The cyclist was taken out of the race because the doctors found a banned substance in his blood test.” A “test ban treaty” is an international agreement to not test nuclear weapons: “Which countries have signed a test ban treaty with the United States?” Finally, a related word, a “banner,” is a long piece of cloth with writing and/or pictures on it that people carry or hang in a window, often to advertise: “The company bought a big banner to advertise its sale.”

to be exposed to

In this podcast, the phrase “to be exposed to (something)” means to be allowed to see or hear something, or to not be protected from something: “Janis was exposed to all kinds of foods when he was young because his family traveled so much.” The verb “to expose (something)” can also mean to tell the truth about something, especially when it is bad news: “That film exposes the consequences of smoking over one’s lifetime, for the smoking and for the smoker’s family.” The word “exposed” can also mean not covered or hidden: “The army’s position was exposed to the south.” Or, “She got sunburned where her neck was exposed below her hat.” Finally, the phrase “to expose (oneself)” means for a man to show his sexual parts to another person when it isn’t wanted: “The police arrested a man for exposing himself to women on the subway.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Every fall, the American Library Association celebrates Banned Books Week. It reminds Americans of the importance of free speech. Banned Books Week is about Americans being able to choose what they want to write and read, regardless of whether other people like those ideas. During Banned Books Week, many people read books that have been banned in the past, or books that some people want to ban even now.

Between 2000 and 2005, people tried to ban books from schools and libraries in the United States more than 3,000 times. Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling was the most “challenged” book, or the book that people most often wanted to ban during that period of time. The Harry Potter “series” (a group of books with the same characters) was written for children, but it “deals with” (is written about) “magic” (powers that do not exist in real life) and some people think that the books have hidden messages that are inappropriate for children.

The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier was the second-most challenged book. It is about power and control in a boys’ Catholic school. The book is most often challenged because it has sexually “explicit” (with a lot of details) text, violence, and offensive language.

Often books are banned in a school or library when children bring them home and tell their parents about what they are reading. When parents don’t like what they hear, some of them go to the “school board” (the leadership group that is responsible for the school) and ask to have the book banned. Most education professionals don’t like the idea of banning books, but when enough parents “demand” (say that something must happen) it, they often agree to the idea.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 439: Talking About Censorship.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 439. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Talking About Censorship." It's a story about a parent who goes to a school, the school for their children, and the parents have a meeting and they're discussing what to do about certain books that are in the school's library or that the teachers are using. This is often a problem in the U.S., some parents may not like the books that the children are being asked to read or that are available to them. Let's get started.

[start of story]

The school that my daughter attends is trying to decide whether or not to ban certain books, which some parents think are inappropriate. The school called a parents meeting to talk over the issue.

At the meeting, one woman said: "The books on this list are obscene! I don't want my children reading that filth!"

Another parent responded: "That's absurd! Haven't you ever heard of free speech? Banning books violates everything we Americans believe in."

Another parent said: "I don't like the way this book portrays history. To me, it's morally objectionable."

Still another parent complained: "There is too much graphic violence in these books and I won't allow my son to be exposed to it."

A parent stood up and yelled: "People who want to ban books are fear mongering. They don't give our kids enough credit."



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The meeting turned into a shouting match. If you ask me, I'm very glad that none of the students were at this meeting. They would be learning an important lesson, but not one that any parent would want!

[end of story]

Our story is called "Talking About Censorship." "Censorship" means not allowing certain things to be seen or heard or published because you don't like the ideas that are in that thing, or perhaps the visual images that are part of that thing. Censorship usually is considered a negative thing, at least in American society, but of course, it all depends on who you talk to.

The story begins by saying that the school that my daughter attends (my daughter goes to – is a student at) is trying to decide whether or not to ban certain books. "To ban" (ban) means not to allow something to be used, bought, seen, or heard: "The university bans cigarette smoking in all of its buildings." That means that it's not allowed. Most restaurants in many cities in the U.S. have smoking bans; you cannot smoke there. "To ban" can also mean not to allow certain books in the library or certain movies to be shown in a city or town.

The meeting of the parents, then, is to discuss whether they should ban certain books from the school – not allow them to be there. Of course, all schools ban certain books that are, for example, considered pornographic, or magazines that are not appropriate for young children. So, it really isn't a question of banning or not banning, it's deciding which things you're going to ban. Some parents think that there are books that are "inappropriate." This means they are not right for someone in a particular situation. That could include books that young children, for example, shouldn't be reading because they're not right for their age.

The school called a parents meeting to talk over the issue, or to talk the issue over. "To talk over" something is a phrasal verb meaning to talk about something, to discuss something. One woman said, "The books on this list are obscene!" Something that is "obscene" (obscene) means it is very offensive, it causes people to get angry or upset because it is dirty in a sexual or a hateful way. So, pornography, for example, showing sexual scenes of men and women in certain cases could be considered by some people obscene. The woman says, "I don't want my children reading that filth!" "Filth" (filth) means dirt or garbage. Here, it's being used to say that something is very wrong; something is unclean or disgusting. When a parent describes a book as being "filth," they usually mean that it is sexually inappropriate for a given student.



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Well, another parent said, “That’s absurd!” Something that is “absurd” is something that would be illogical – not logical, not rational, silly. The parent says, “Haven’t you ever heard of free speech?” “Free speech,” in the United States, means the freedom or ability to say and write just about anything you want. It’s part of our U.S. Constitution that people have freedom of speech, or free speech. The government tries not to limit free speech, although free speech is not absolute. That is, there are cases where things cannot be said. Schools, for example, do not give their students complete freedom of speech. This parent says, “Banning books violates everything we Americans believe in.” “To violate,” here, means to go against something, to break a law or break a rule or break a principle, to go against our beliefs. It goes against, or violates, everything we Americans believe in. “To believe in” means to think that something is good; you believe something is correct.

Another parent said, “I don’t like the way this book portrays history.” “To portray” (portray), here, means to represent something, to express something in a certain way; the way something is described or illustrated. The parent says, “To me, (this book) is morally objectionable.” “Moral” refers to right or wrong; “objectionable” is something that you don’t like, something that you disagree with. So, something “morally objectionable” is something that a person doesn’t believe in, or goes against his or her beliefs of what is right and wrong.

Another parent complained: “There’s too much graphic violence in these books.” “Graphic violence” is violence that is described or shown in a lot of detail. You don’t have to use your imagination; it’s described or shown in the book or in the movie. This parent does not want her child “to be exposed to it,” meaning to be allowed to see or hear something, not to be protected from something. The verb “exposed” has a couple of different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. You’ll also find some additional meanings of the verb “to ban,” which we talked about at the beginning of this episode.

Another parent stood up and yelled: “People who want to ban books are fear mongering.” “To fear monger” means to use fear to change people’s opinions about something; to frighten people to do something by talking about the terrible things that will happen, things that they will find fearful, or will be afraid of. “They don’t give our kids enough credit.” Not to “give someone credit,” or “enough credit,” here means not to believe that someone is capable of doing something, or not to think that someone can do something. If your friend says to you, “Here, let me talk to that girl and ask her if she wants to go on a date with you,” you



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might say, “Give me a little credit!” meaning you are not believing in my capabilities, you don’t think that I can do something but I can.

The story ends: The meeting turned into a shouting match. A “shouting match” is a loud conversation that has people yelling at each other. They’re trying to express their opinions, but it ends up being more people yelling and not listening to each other. So, a shouting match is usually a bad thing. The story ends by the man saying that he’s glad the students, their children, were not there because the parents did not act like adults. They started yelling at each other rather than talking about things in a reasonable way.

Now let’s listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]



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The script for this episode was written by who never writes things that are inappropriate, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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