

Banned Books Week 2024
Freedom of Expression Workshop
Amnesty International USA

Post Workshop Survey

Grades:

- 6-12, University

Time:

- 120 minutes

Materials:

- [Slide Deck](#)

Essential Questions:

- What is freedom of expression?
- What is censorship?
- What is Banned Books Week?
- What are the limitations, if any, to freedom of expression?
- How is freedom of expression protected both in the U.S. and abroad?

Recommended Sequence for This Lesson:

Warm Up (15 minutes)

Spark Up a Convo

- Participants walk into classroom and help themselves to snacks & refreshments
- Participants find their seats (small groups 5-6) while cafe music plays in the background
- Each table is set with discussion questions for the participants to engage with:
 - What does freedom of expression mean to you?
 - Can you talk about a time where you felt as though your right to freedom of expression was being infringed upon?
- Participants eat their snacks while engaging in conversation with their peers

Lecture (15 minutes)

- Teach Introduction slide through 2024 BBW Cases slide. Detailed lecture notes are provided at the end of this document.

Breakout Groups (45-60 minutes)

- [Color to Learn](#)
- [2024 BBW Case Analysis](#)
- [The Price of Freedom](#)
- [Creation Station](#)

Wrap Up (10 minutes)

- [Banned Books Week 2024 Trivia Kahoot](#)

Lecture Notes

Slide: Introduction

- Introduce this workshop: Freedom of Expression
- Introduce yourself (Facilitator) including name, pronouns, and why you are excited to facilitate this workshop
- Participants introduce themselves including name, pronouns, and some thoughts on the following:
 - What does freedom of expression mean to you?
 - Can you talk about a time where you felt as though your right to freedom of expression was being infringed upon?

Slide: What is Amnesty International?

- Amnesty International is a global movement of millions of people demanding human rights for all people – no matter who they are or where they are. Founded in 1961, Amnesty works to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth, and dignity are denied.

- Amnesty's strategy is to conduct research into human right violations and concerns, address root causes and advocate for human rights, and mobilize millions of people worldwide to take action.
 - **Research:** Crisis response teams and researchers travel to impacted areas to uncover and document human rights abuses all around the world
 - **Advocate:** Staff and volunteers meet with policy makers and rally activists to put pressure on state and federal governments to protect human rights
 - **Mobilize:** Campaign teams educate the public and give members and grassroots activists information and tools to demand that human rights be protected
- Amnesty is a non-partisan organization that does not align with any political or religious ideology.

Slide: Community Norms

- **One mic, one voice:** One person speaks at a time
- **"Ouch:"** Should a participant feel offended or upset by a comment made during community discussion, that participant can call "ouch" and then educate the rest of the group as to why the comment was offensive/hurtful. This can lead to deeper discussions and strengthen understanding about people's specific lived experiences.
- **Embrace discomfort:** Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Growth hurts but the expansion is worth it!

Slide: The UDHR

- Direct response to the atrocities of WWII
 - International community vowed to guarantee the rights of everyone, everywhere
- Drafting committee consisted of individuals holding different political, social, cultural, geographic backgrounds
 - Eleanor Roosevelt, Pen-Chun Chang, Rene Cassin, John Humphrey
 - Chile, Australia, France, China, Soviet Union, Canada
- Guiding principles for how all people should live – Human Rights are universal, inalienable, and interconnected.
 - Outlines fundamental Human Rights to be universally protected - basic social, cultural, economic, political rights
 - 30 articles
 - all human beings are born free

- no one should be subjected to torture arbitrary arrest/detainment
- everyone has the right to leave any country and return home
- everyone has the right to seek asylum
- we all have the right to marry
- freedom of thought
- freedom of expression
- Everyone has the right to social security and medical care
- Paved way for adoption of 70+ HRTS treaties

Slide: International Human Rights Law

- The International Bill of Human Rights is comprised of The UDHR, International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant on Economic, Social, & Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
 - The ICCPR & ICESCR were adopted in December 1966
- Outlines State obligations to:
 - PROTECT - State must protect individuals/groups from HRTS abuses
 - RESPECT - States do not interfere with enjoyment of HRTS
 - FULFIL - States must take action to facilitate the enjoyment of HRTS
- ICCPR protects freedom from discrimination, freedom from arbitrary expulsion of non-citizens, right to marry and found a family
- ICESCR protects right to strike, right to health, right to social security
- Examples of Violations:
 - Instituting a minimum wage that does not support decent living
 - Denying access to information on sexual and reproductive health
 - Banning the use of Indigenous languages
- Ratification of international HRTS treaties means that Governments must implement domestic measures & legislation to uphold responsibilities outlined in treaties
 - Ratification - Expressly agree to abide by covenants, officially binding

Slide: What is Freedom of Expression?

- You have the right to seek & share information
- You have the right to agree or disagree with governments
- You have the right to demand a better world & peacefully protest
- Article 19 of International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights

- “Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
- Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
- The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
 - For the protection of national security or of public order (order public), or of public health or morals.” -Ohchr.org
- First Amendment of the US Constitution
 - 1 of 10 amendments that make up the Bill of Rights
 - Adopted on December 15, 1791
 - “The First Amendment provides that Congress make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. It protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” -Whitehouse.gov

Slide: What is Censorship?

- Individuals, groups, or state officials may find information dangerous or offensive
- Try to impose their view of what is truthful and appropriate - Imprison, torture, murder individuals whose information is perceived as dangerous or offensive
- Direct censorship v. Soft censorship
 - **Direct:**
 - Withhold information
 - **Educational Censorship** – Policies/laws that ban or restrict access to specific books, curriculum, speech, digital information, ideas.
 - **Moral Censorship** – Information is denied or removed because content is considered “morally questionable.”
 - **Political Censorship** – When the government attempts to conceal, distort, or withhold information from its citizens.

- **Religious Censorship** – Information is denied or removed because content is considered objectionable by a religious group or organization.
 - **Corporate Censorship** – Policies that restrict speech or access to information and can lead to job loss, monetary loss, or denial of access to a platform.
 - Ex: Social media platforms implement policies that allow them to [remove posts](#), block users, and de-platform users.
- Destroy information – [Burn books](#), tear pages out of books
 - Qin Shi Huang, emperor of China, ordered government sanctioned book burnings in 213 B.C. Huang wanted history to start with him even though there were emperors before him. He also ordered the deaths of hundreds of Confucious scholars who were buried alive.
 - Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire, burned 2,000+ books about “prophecies and destinies.”
 - The Library of Alexandria established by Alexander the Great in ~331 B.C. was burned down 3 times over the course of hundreds of years. This library housed hundreds of thousands of documents from Syria, Greece, Persia, India, and Egypt. It is now permanently gone.
 - In the 13th century, Pope Gregory IX, ordered the burning of The Talmud which is the primary source of Jewish law and theology after the Torah.
 - [Nazi Germany book burnings of May 10, 1933](#) – University students from 34 universities across Germany burned 25k+ “un-German” books that were by Jewish authors like Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.
- **Soft:** Books are available to patrons but placed in restricted areas or in hidden, obscure places
 - These books are also not used in book talks or put out on display due to fear of challenges
- **Self-censorship** - You censor your own speech/opinion out of fear or pressure about your job, safety, funding, or reputation.
 - Journalists, content creators, and independent media platforms face significant risk
- Other examples of censorship in the US:

- 1798 French Indian War – Congress passed Alien and Sedition Act which made it a crime to publish anything against the government that was considered “false, scandalous and malicious writing.” This law was used to prosecute newspaper editors during the 18th century.
- 19th century US – Laws were used to suppress speech of religious minorities, abolitionists, suffragists, and labor organizers.
 - 1912 Margaret Sanger (feminist) was arrested for giving a speech on birth control.
 - Trade union meetings were banned
 - Peaceful protestors opposing US entry into WWI were jailed
 - 1920s many states outlawed flags that represented communism or anarchism
 - 1923 Upton Sinclair was arrested for reading the First Amendment at a union rally

Slide: Are There Limits to Freedom of Expression?

- Allow participants to partner up with a neighbor and discuss this question for 6-7 minutes: *Are there limits to freedom of expression?*
- Play [“Soo..What About Hate Speech?”](#) for the community
- Partners can break away for another 5-7 minutes to discuss their takeaways from the video.
- Encourage participants to share what they discussed about limitations to freedom of expression and the [“Soo..What About Hate Speech?”](#) video.
- Limits to Freedom of Expression:
 - Obscenity, child pornography
 - Defamation – Making false statements about an individual or entity that can harm their reputation, livelihood, or well-being.
 - Incitement to violence, threats

Slide: Breakout Groups

- **Station 1: Color to Learn**
 - Participants break into small groups and are given [coloring pages](#) illustrating this year's BBW highlighted cases
 - Participants take time to read about the cases and discuss the following questions while coloring together:
 - What did you learn about the Individuals at Risk described in these cases?

- How has your understanding of freedom of expression and censorship been changed, influenced, or deepened by the cases you learned about today?
 - Participants can take time after coloring to scan the QR code to act on the cases.
 - **Station 2: BBW 2024 Case Analysis**
 - Participants break into small groups and are given this year's [case sheets](#).
 - Participants analyze the cases and take turns reciting, singing, and reading [materials](#) from their work.
 - Participants discuss the following:
 - What resonated with you about this year's cases?
 - How has your understanding of freedom of expression and censorship been changed, influenced, or deepened by the cases you learned about today?
 - **Station 3: The Price of Freedom**
 - Participants research, using fact-based sources, one human rights issue that impacts their community. Examples of topics include climate justice, institutionalized racism, Indigenous peoples' rights, economic inequality, refugee and migrant rights, and abortion access. *Encourage students to find stories from their state, town, or community.*
 - Students should intend on answering the following questions in their research:
 - What is the human rights violation that you researched?
 - How does this human rights violation impact the community?
 - What actions can you take to address this violation?
 - Inspired by [Aleksandra Skochilenko](#), students create '[price tags](#)' to post around their school and community about the human rights issue they researched.
 - **Station 4: Creation Station**
 - Participants create their own artistic piece about what freedom of expression and/or censorship means to them.
 - Encourage participants to paint, write a song, rap, or poem, create a skit, write a short story, etc.

[Slide: Wrap Up Kahoot](#)