



## What is ‘Completely Unnecessary’ is Censoring History

By Educator Barnes – January 30, 2022

Each September Banned Book Week is held. In 2022, the theme is “Books Unite Us; Censorship Divides Us.” Only one month into 2022, this narrative is being played out in school board meetings across our nation. Much of this is tied to the legislation referred to as anti-critical race theory (CRT) bills. Currently, here in Indiana, a bill like this might become law.

Across the nation, the ramifications and the impact of these bills are being seen. Tennessee is a state that has a law restricting what teachers can teach. The list includes 14 concepts. One way to help ensure, teachers abide by the law is by banning books to take the guesswork out of the equation for teachers. Recently, “Maus,” a Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel by Art Spiegelman which details the story of his Polish Jewish parents’ experience during the Holocaust and within a concentration camp has been banned in Tennessee.

All McMinn County Board of Education voted to remove the books (there are two “Maus” books) from schools. One board member stated that he found parts of the books “completely unnecessary.” It angers me to learn this book was banned and the reasons given as to why it was banned.

I learned about “Maus” early in my career as an English teacher. One of the topics my students were learning about is the Holocaust. The librarian at my school suggested “Maus.” Although we did not read it as a whole group, it was one of several options for my students to read. Many students shared that the graphic novel made the topic easier to understand. Topics like the Holocaust are not easy to discuss. As an educator, I want to make topics as accessible as possible. This is why we need book diversity and not book censorship.

There are so many books that I have read where I have found parts unnecessary. If you have ever read a Dickens novel (and I love him as an author), you know that man can ramble on with all of his descriptions. I find them completely unnecessary, at times, but I do not think that my opinion about whether or not parts of a book should be included should influence which books are options for students.

I am so tired of hearing that texts and topics have to be removed from schools because people, who aren’t even teaching the content, are uncomfortable. Where the hell were these concerned people when I was sitting in class learning about slavery? Was I uncomfortable? Yes. Did I need to know what happened in history? Yes.

It is hard for a teacher to predict how students will react. I have read books with students about the yellow fever, the Irish potato famine, and the Civil War. Students of all genders and racial backgrounds each had strong reactions to each of those topics. My job was not to make students believe what I believed about any of the events that occurred for these topics but to share the information objectively.

We are a collection of stories and historical events. Who is anyone to decide which parts of history are learned? We are going in the wrong direction. People keep forgetting that every time a book gets banned, students want to read it even more.