

OPINION

It is Never Okay to Ban Books

BY MARA GRAU

When I was growing up, my parents always encouraged me to read and it naturally became something that I love with all my heart to this day. The best days of my childhood were those when my mom would take me to the library. It was amazing to me that I could be transported to different places and times and learn new things.

With such a deep love for reading, I needed constant access to an unlimited number of books to keep me entertained. I never wanted someone to tell me that I wasn't allowed to read certain books just because they decided that the content was unsuitable. Books get banned for all kinds of reasons, but the bottom line is that banning books is unacceptable.

Most books get banned from schools because people believe that children and adolescents shouldn't be exposed to certain topics. Books are commonly banned from schools because they contain violence, profanity, racial slurs, sexual content, drug use, LGBT content, or religious themes. These topics are obviously sensitive and most likely difficult for young people to understand. However, the reality of the situation is that topics like these are prevalent in society, which probably won't change anytime soon. People have to face these topics at increasingly younger ages, so why keep them from reading books that could prepare them to deal with their content?

Reading is a form of self-education that has the power to help people learn about human behavior and social interactions. Some people may think that this kind of learning is best done through real life experiences; however, not everyone gets the opportunity to face a great variety of situations in their lives. By reading a wide array of books people prepare for these situations without even realizing it.

I certainly understand that some parents don't want their children to be exposed to some books because of their content, and if they want their children to grow up to be sheltered and close-minded, then that's fine. What is not okay, is attempting to get those books banned from schools, thus restricting their availability to other people. Parents should be the only ones who have a say in the reading materials for their children; they shouldn't be able to stop other children and adolescents from becoming more educated about the social issues they will face when they get older. You can prevent your child from reading books that contain content that may be viewed as unsuitable, but that doesn't mean that they won't come face to face with them when they are older. †

How SpongeBob Has Impacted Me

BY ETHAN LANGEMO

The first time I was exposed to the popular TV show *SpongeBob SquarePants* was not through watching the show itself; it was an preschool experience sparked by eating candy. I remember sitting at a long table in the classroom, at the now-closed Central Lutheran School in St. Paul. It must have been around Halloween time because we were doing something with candy, eating gummy krabby patties from *SpongeBob*. Up until that point, I wasn't aware of the show's existence, as my family did not have cable; the only things I watched were PBS kids, various kid's movies, and *Bear in the Big Blue House* on VHS.

When I finally got around to being able to watch it, I quickly realized why it was so popular. The characters were lovable, especially the main crew: *SpongeBob*, Patrick, Sandy, and Mr. Krabs. We might not have liked *Squidward* as children, but I think we can all agree that we understand him more now, and might even empathize with his stress and frustration. And of course, we all loved to hate *Plankton*, who only wanted to make his place in the world by stealing the *Krabby Patty's* secret formula.

One of the things I appreciate about *SpongeBob* is that it brought on various special guest voice actors, from various *Saturday Night Live* actors, to stars like Mark Hamill, Johnny Depp, and even David Bowie (just to name a few). *SpongeBob's* producers knew how to keep the show fresh, and occasionally gave parents something to enjoy as well.

As an adult, I look back on some of the jokes I laughed at as a kid and now I realize how non-child friendly some of them were. For instance, when a whole section of a stadium of fish gets instantly deep-fried and subsequently sold off as food. They were making a joke about cannibalism and us kids thought nothing of it.

SpongeBob had such a hold on me because – at least in the first few seasons leading up to the *SpongeBob SquarePants* movie – the writing was very clever, especially for children's cartoons. The humor made sense, and there were great plot twists, as well as interesting character relations.

The movie was certainly a milestone in cartoon history, in which *SpongeBob* and Patrick embark on a mission to retrieve King Neptune's crown before he executes Mr. Krabs. The movie also incorporated many live action sequences, including some featuring our beloved Patchy the Pirate. Looking back on it, it was a pretty dumb movie, but then again, it wasn't written to be intellectually strenuous or appeal to academy award judges; but for a children's movie, it was pretty great. Looking back, it was actually a turning point for the show, as it marked the climax of a brilliant cartoon series that would eventually fall away from the quality it once had, due to a change in writing leadership.

Although the show isn't what it used to be, it is still enjoyable for little kids to watch. It's

not terrible— it's just not as good as when the late Stephen Hillenburg oversaw writing the episodes. The legacy of the show will still live on for a long time, and as long as the episodes are still available for viewing, it will be enjoyed by the generations to come. †

Group-work in the Classroom

BY PEYTON BARRETT

There is the old saying that two heads are better than one. In the classroom, this is an important concept to consider as teachers work to stimulate students' brains. Having students work together in groups has so many beneficial aspects, and it is important for teachers to give students the time to collaborate with their peers.

Working on a project together forces the students to contribute to the work and share their thoughts. Each student acts as both the teacher and the student because each gets to share their knowledge. When students are put into groups, they are able to gain the insights and knowledge from others, and this can be beneficial in so many ways. Advantages include, opportunities for students to learn to communicate, work together, and students gaining more expertise from one another.

Hearing material from one's peers can sometimes be more beneficial and reinforcing than hearing it repeated from a teacher. English language learners (ELLs), in particular, benefit greatly from this, as they have the opportunity to learn from hearing others' use of language. ELLs are faced with the task of trying to process content, an unfamiliar language, and cultural context all at the same time. Small group work is beneficial, as it can encourage them to be more confident and supported in their own language skills while also studying how their peers use it.

Group discussions among students can stimulate more in-depth thinking. They can gain knowledge from their peers that they didn't have before, and the struggling students can get assistance from the stronger, more advanced student. If a student often finds themselves lost in lessons, it is a good idea to put them with others that will help, not to do the work for them, but to simply guide them. Teachers need to get to know their students on a personal level and develop a relationship with them so that they can know how to best help them and who to pair them up with. Knowing how to establish group work so that is actually beneficial is part of being a good teacher. If it is done properly, students can learn more from group work than from just sitting and learning from a teacher. †