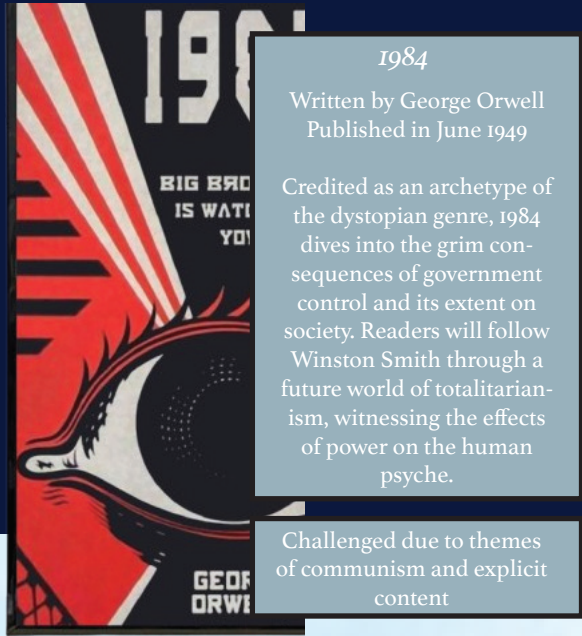


A State of Control and Confusion



Illustration by Nadirah Johnson

Analyzing the lenses in which people view forms of media and its extent on individual opinions

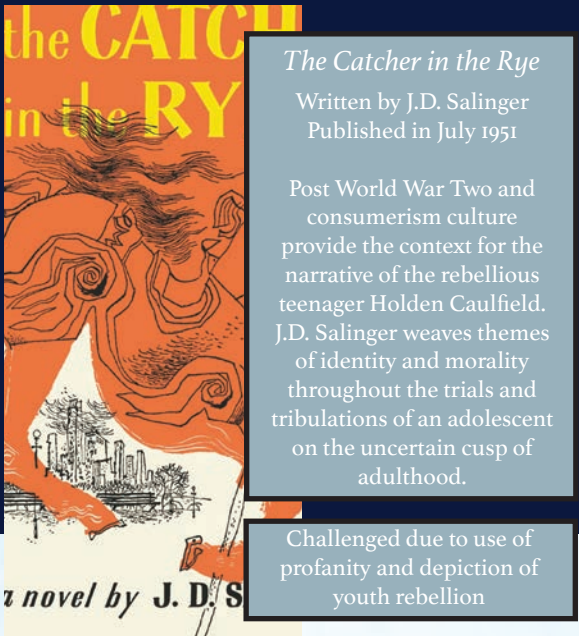


1984

Written by George Orwell
Published in June 1949

Credited as an archetype of the dystopian genre, 1984 dives into the grim consequences of government control and its extent on society. Readers will follow Winston Smith through a future world of totalitarianism, witnessing the effects of power on the human psyche.

Challenged due to themes of communism and explicit content

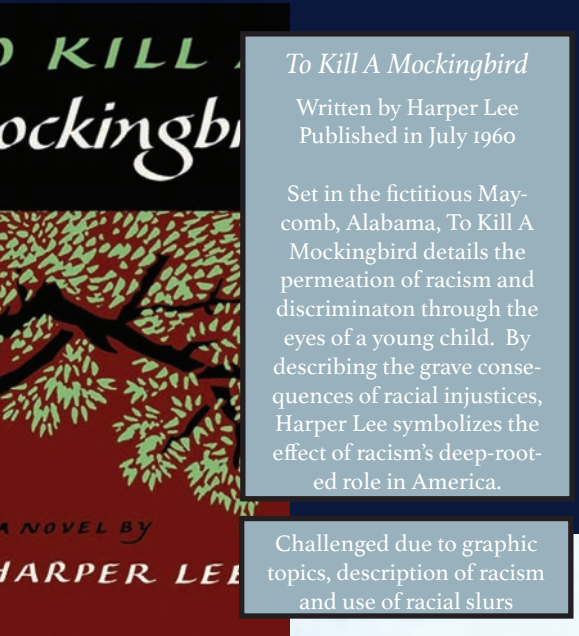


The Catcher in the Rye

Written by J.D. Salinger
Published in July 1951

Post World War Two and consumerism culture provide the context for the narrative of the rebellious teenager Holden Caulfield. J.D. Salinger weaves themes of identity and morality throughout the trials and tribulations of an adolescent on the uncertain cusp of adulthood.

Challenged due to use of profanity and depiction of youth rebellion



To Kill A Mockingbird

Written by Harper Lee
Published in July 1960

Set in the fictitious Maycomb, Alabama, To Kill A Mockingbird details the permeation of racism and discriminaton through the eyes of a young child. By describing the grave consequences of racial injustices, Harper Lee symbolizes the effect of racism's deep-rooted role in America.

Challenged due to graphic topics, description of racism and use of racial slurs

WHEN PROTECTING CLASHES WITH SILENCING

What role does banned literature play in English classrooms at Millard North?

KATELYN JUDD
Co-Front Page Editor

Through the Millard North English Department, students have been able to stand in a courtroom with Atticus Finch, attend lavish parties thrown by Jay Gatsby, scheme and sabotage with Holden Caulfield, and experience unrequited love with Romeo and Juliet.

Classics that are taught at MN, like “To Kill a Mockingbird”, “Fahrenheit 451”, “The Catcher in the Rye”, and “Romeo and Juliet”, are only a slim number of the books that have been nationally challenged and considered a banned book at a point in history.

A banned book is a novel that has, at some point, been challenged by a group of individuals in a society for themes they may deem inappropriate. In a school setting, this can cause books to be removed from curriculums, classrooms, and library shelves.

Mostly, the grounds on which a book is banned or challenged can be related to controversial societal issues, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. To understand why these issues are handled the way they are in these novels, it is necessary to understand the environment where they were developed and examine how they differ from today.

“It’s easy to look at things from 50 years ago and think about how foolish they were. But we need to be mindful that 50 years from now, there will be many things that we do that will be looked down upon [like how it was then],” English teacher Barry Glynn said.

One of the main arguments for banning a book, especially in an educational setting, is for the safety and protection of exposure for children in classrooms. Where this gets tricky is deciding what is considered appropriate and inappropriate.

“I don’t think anything should be banned for adults, but young people should be protected from seeing or having to worry about things before they need to,” Glynn said. “It’s done to protect innocence.”

English teacher Allycia Gutierrez acknowledges that there needs to be a balance between protecting and allowing students a chance to learn.

“I recognize that there is rhetoric out there that is harmful to society, but I also agree that books cannot exist without context and you can’t read a book without knowing the benefits and problems that it has,” Gutierrez said.

Furthermore, it is important to consider if students should be involved in advocating for their education, and how it can manifest if their safety and well-being are a concern with these books. Gutierrez is aware it isn’t as simple as it sounds.

“[Banning a book] is just trying to keep kids safe, but it’s an unrealistic goal. Ultimately, you’re going to grow up and be confronted with many ideas, but if you are in a safe environment, such as a school where you can ask questions and get feedback, you would be in a better place [than if you were on your own],” Gutierrez said.

If a family expresses disapproval, the process for

objecting to a novel in Millard has two different pathways, depending on the intended goal. One form is intended to oppose a book being taught to their children, and the other is to object to a book for all students.

English teacher Taylor Van Vliet admits that a parent’s role should only extend to their own children, and can be harmful if applied to all.

“Parents have a right to monitor their own child’s education,” Van Vliet said. “But objecting for your own student is different than removing a book for all students.”

Though the information remains confidential, according to MPS English Curriculum Facilitator Jan Dahlgard, four books have been challenged here at Millard North in the previous seven years, although nothing has appeared to have gone through removal.

The main counterargument is that the banning of books infringes on the First Amendment right of Free Speech and can silence authors and readers.

“[Banned books] are the cornerstones of our society and literature. They are expressions of the human experience and it’s important for students to be aware of,” Gutierrez said. “I haven’t encountered a book that I teach that isn’t somehow still relevant in 2025.”

Authors of these novels are trying to share a critique of society they find pertinent, which can be displayed through different works of fiction and nonfiction.

“Authors are trying to portray real-life situations and real-life perspectives. Life isn’t always pretty and easy to read,” Van Vliet said.

BEYOND THE BAN

Society is developing a realization regarding the recent surge of censorship in the media, particularly with the TikTok ban

TEJA SRIDHER

Co-Opinions Editor

In today’s ever-evolving world, the daily life of a high school student is a combination of gaining educational insight while continuing to foster relationships both online and in person. However, with the rise in technology, teenagers in particular have been more prone than ever to intertwine themselves in the loop of social media.

Whether checking how many followers you have, falling victim to the endless page of TikToks, or keeping up with the latest trends, we as a collective society have found ourselves stuck in a digital era controlled by fake news, privacy threats, and especially, data breaches.

TikTok, an app that has almost 1.9 billion users, according to Statistica, has recently been the spark of controversy due to its temporary ban on January 19th, 2025.

As mentioned by CBS News, TikTok’s parent company, ByteDance, was supposedly posing a threat to national security by being involved in various data breaches.

This ban enraged many since some people think of TikTok simply as a platform that helps content creators share their views and lifestyles with the world. This poses the question in our modern society regarding the censorship of media, and if there are any ethical dilemmas associated with this.

AP Government and Politics teacher, Douglas Drum-

mond, believes that there are a few potential concerns that may have driven the calls for a TikTok ban.

“[In terms of freedom of speech], A TikTok ban raises First Amendment concerns, as it would restrict the ability of millions of Americans to express themselves and access information on the platform,” Drummond said.

The banning of TikTok poses several aspects to consider such as the restricted freedom of speech, the safety of national security, and the relevance of data privacy in our digital world.

Social Studies teacher Terry Meyer also has a few concerns when it comes to these issues.

“I think the primary concern is who controls the algorithm. If a foreign company, who must comply with the laws of their country, controls the algorithm that decides what people see [and thus believe], that could then be used against the US,” Meyer said. “I don’t see this as a limit of speech since there are numerous other platforms where one’s ideas could be expressed. It does seem to me to be a matter of national security.”

Generations X, Z, and Alpha have had strong reactions to this ban. However, this change would significantly impact those of younger generations, as they have been growing up in the digital age.

“A TikTok ban would represent a significant shift in the online lives of younger generations. It would disrupt their social interactions, creative expression, and access to information. It would also have economic consequences for content creators and businesses,” Drum-

mond said. “It is important to remember that younger generations are very adaptable, and would likely find other ways to communicate, and find entertainment. However, a ban would still cause a large disruption.”

Many content creators have worked hard to build their platforms over the years, and this ban may result in a few ethical dilemmas.

“The ethical dilemmas presented by the ban must be weighed out by considering the common good. Is TikTok a threat to national security? If so, this would outweigh any individual concern based on the enjoyment of an app for entertainment,” Meyer said. “If TikTok is not a threat, then there should be no reason to ban it. However, there should be conversations about the good of social media, in general, specifically about the algorithms that direct engagement.”

While there are several pros and cons to having the popular app banned, we have to consider who is truly being impacted as a result of this. Some pros could include avoiding potential security risks, while cons could include how the careers of many creators would be affected significantly.

All in all, the debate over government censorship of foreign social media platforms such as TikTok is far from easily solvable. Platforms such as TikTok help the public voice their opinions and spread awareness about topics they feel are crucial to be heard. At the end of the day, we as users need to remain vigilant while continuing to have these types of open conversations, ultimately allowing us to help shape the future of technology.

18th Century

1740
First antiliteracy law was passed in the colony of South Carolina in order to prevent enslaved people from learning how to write.

1775
Isiah Thomas, publisher of *The Massachusetts Spy*, had to relocate his printing press from Boston to Worcester in order to avoid the paper’s destruction by the British.

19th Century

1829
David Walker, a prominent abolitionist, wrote *Walker’s Appeal*, which prompted enslaved people to rebel against slave owners. Many Southern states sought to ban this leaflet, prompting an influx of smuggled copies to the region.

1873
The insitution of the Comstock laws, which prohibited the U.S. Post Office from delivering materials deemed indecent, affected many newspapers pertaining to women’s health, such as Margaret Sanger’s *The Woman Rebel*.

20th Century

1918
During World War Two, many books were prohibited due to encouraging pacifism or promoting socialism. Examples include *World Peace* by Leon Trotsky and *The Last Weapon* by Theodora Wilson.

1986
A group of students and their parents challenged a series of books at El Camino High School. Some of the novels include Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* and Chales Ponce’s *The Game of Wizards*. Complaints were focused around the promotion of witchcraft and themes of reincarnation

21st Century

2006
The children’s book *And Tango Makes Three*, written by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, was named the American Library Association’s most banned book of the year, as it features a same-sex family.

2021
A function at Roosevelt Alexander Elementary School in Katy, Texas that would feature Jerry Craft, author of Newberry Medal winning graphic novel *New Kid*, was called off, as Craft’s novel was said to be teaching critical race theory.

THE ROLE OF CENSORSHIP IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Source: American Libraries Magazine

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

The effects of misinformation in media and how to evaluate sources

GRACE EVERT
Staff Writer

Have you heard about the monumental unicorn sighting in Scotland last month? The unicorn, characterized by its ivory color and famous spiraled horn, is said to be one of just under ten still existing in the wild. Since the sighting, the unicorn has been declared an official species and given a scientific name. Or was it? How do you know what you read in a newspaper is true?

Turns out that not everything you see in the media, both physical and online, is always accurate. There are copious amounts of partial truths and inaccurate facts. Freedom of speech, while having numerous benefits, also presents drawbacks.

According to an article by Iowa State University, freedom of speech is defined as the right to “articulate opinions and ideas without interference, retaliation or punishment from the government.” Therefore, through free speech rights, everyone is able to say as they wish and express their belief. However, the rise of social media has completely changed the game when it comes to free speech and misinformation.

“If people are able to say anything that they want to say, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the information they are saying is true,” Digital Media and English teacher Monica Kauffman said. “With the spread of fake news, many people believe what they hear without looking deeper into it. Social media has contributed to

the spread of misinformation.”

According to Statistica, 67% of Americans have come across fake news on social media. Even worse, 10% of U.S. adults have knowingly shared fake news.

Social media’s accessibility ensures that anyone can voice their opinions or make false claims. Because there are so many perspectives on social media, people are often inclined to select sources that align with their values and believe that information as fact.

An article by King’s College London stated, “the spread of fake news via social media stems in part from the absence of fact-checking and proof-reading, which other media platforms, such as newspapers, often have to go through.”

Because of this new age of information, it is important to learn how to fact-check information to ensure that you are well-informed.

“It takes time to verify the accuracy of what is being said. One of the things I focus on is media awareness. I want students to be aware of what is out there and what is being said. I also want them to become critical thinkers and learn how to verify information,” Kauffman said.

In Kauffman’s Digital Media class, students analyze many different aspects of the media, such as sitcoms, documentaries, movies, and articles. The class covers topics like the history of media, news, social media, and the effects of media on men and women.

“I always tell students that they need to look at a story from multiple sources to see what they all have in common. The common aspects are usually what the story is,” Kauffman said. “I also have them look at the source and see what they can find out about the source. I typically tell them if they hear something, they need to look it up to find out what else is being said.”

An article by Stevenson University recommends three steps to verify credibility. First, check the author’s credentials and experience on the topic. Second, compare the information with other sources on the topic. Third, ensure your source is up to date and relevant. Even if you have historically found a source to be reliable, it is still important to recognize any bias your source may have.

“One of the tools I use with students is to look at the media bias chart. I have them choose three different news sources (one that leans left, one that leans right, and one that falls in the neutral category) and look at one topic that is discussed in each of the different media sources. Then, they analyze the similarities and differences from each source and draw conclusions,” Kauffman said.

As the media continues to involve and shape society, verifying information will become increasingly important. The next time you hear about unicorn sightings in Scotland, take a few minutes to consider the source before sharing.

What is the structure?

Designed for U.S. news consumption only, the chart is divided on a spectrum of political biases, with the most neutral sources located in the center. How does the chart measure bias?

Through a combination of blind surveys to the American public, editorial reviews, and independent reviews, the AllSides Media Bias Chart seeks to gage the relative bias of prominent U.S. news sources.



Why is it important to check for bias?

- Allows for active engagement in varied perspectives
- Able to see complex, multi-facted issues with a more open mindset
- The AllSides: Media Bias Chart provides the public with a simple, data supported method to challenge preexisting beliefs
- Awareness of bias illustrates the power opinions have on everyday actions