**POINT/COUNTERPOINT**

Huck Finn gets sent down the river

**Point:** Curriculum should be sensitive to students' feelings

Marissa Maseda

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Imagine one lone African American student sitting in a classroom filled with mostly white students, reading The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Think about what it must feel like to read about how his race was treated by the ancestors of those in the room with him. How do you think those other students are looking, thinking and feeling about him? By simply reading a harmless book, certain friction or tension can be created in a classroom. The self-esteem problems that are introduced with the teaching of such a book is like a time bomb waiting to explode. The anger and hatred that builds in these classroom situations is not necessary. Schools are supposed to be sanctuaries where all students can receive an education without being humiliated day after day. Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn repeatedly shows the cruelty and harshness that African Americans faced through dialogue by using the "N" word over 200 times. By reading this book, impressions can be made that such racist actions are all right or allowed. To keep these impressions, which we have fought so hard to put behind us, from being passed down from generation to generation, Twain's book should be put on an optional reading list for high school students rather than a mandatory one. It is time to move on, stop drudging up these horrors and truly put things in the past. English classes can survive without such controversy being reintroduced to students year after year. The use of the "N" word brings up vulgar images of the past. It is considered an ugly word that can be taken as highly offensive. Many people have died at the use of this word. As a society that is supposedly passed such vulgarities, why do we insist on reminding today's African Americans of the hardships their ancestors went through? The "N" word has been used throughout generations, starting back before medieval times. Despite the fact that when this word became a racial slur is unknown, in today's society it is a word that hurts and creates anger. When used by whites, this word conveys a striking image of blacks as lower, second-class citizens. Organizations throughout the country are trying to eliminate Twain's book from public school curriculum, along with other controversial books such as To Kill A Mockingbird and The Cay. Critics believe that these books promote a negative image of black people through the character's crude "black" dialect. Members of the African American Parent Coalition (AAPC) successfully challenged the teaching of The Cay in a San Jose middle school and To Kill A Mockingbird at Harbor High School in Santa Cruz. These books have either been taken off the mandatory reading list or have been moved to a higher grade level. School officials in California, Connecticut, Virginia, Texas and Washington D.C. have stated that if such controversial books are to be taught, that supplemental texts by black abolitionists, like Fredrick Douglas, should be assigned as well. Although The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a highly acclaimed novel, it is not the only choice out there. There are many books, written all throughout history, just as prestigious as Huck Finn. With all these choices, why force a student to read something that he feels uncomfortable reading? New curriculum does not have to only be acclaimed white authors such as Mark Twain, but should also include minority and women authors like Maya Angelou. Public schools are continually becoming more and more culturally diverse and yet this diversity is not being accommodated in high school reading lists. A list of the most commonly taught books in schools released by the College Board consists entirely of white male authors. The Department for Public Instruction has a policy stating that instructional material should provide a multicultural view and should not reflect inappropriate portrayals of a culture. Schools are not recycling centers for old and outdated beliefs. As times change, schools need to try out new material and update curriculum so that it it reflective of current beliefs. Rather than openly listen and discuss the concerns of parents, educators often seem to dismiss them as uninformed masses. To decrease conflicts between educators and parents, parents and students need to be involved in the curriculum process along with administrators and teachers. The more parents are involved in their children's education, the better their education will be.

**Counterpoint:** Curriculum needs to recognize, not ignore, racism

Stephen Shepherd

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The scars of slavery and segregation still pain Americans today, and no one knows better than the African-American community that racism is remains present and unresolved. It is for just this reason, however, that East Side Union High School District's decision to ban the uncensored Huckleberry Finn was counterproductive. By banning the book, the district has merely voted to do what the Israelis know they cannot: stick their heads in the sand, and ignore the problem. The mistake is two-fold. When East Side Union removed Huckleberry Finn from their required reading lists, they were tearing a hole in the curriculum that will not be easily replaced. Huckleberry Finn is the story of a boy who sees slavery and other atrocieties of the rural south, and is forced to reconcile his conscience by renouncing all ties to the south. Worse, the East Side Union is guilty of censorship. In addition to removing Mark Twain's novel from the required reading list, the district decided to use a censored version of the novel on its optional list. Admittedly, the censorship is minor -- the infamous "n-word" is deleted throughout the novel -- however, it is not only a dishonest alteration of Twain's craft, it is also an unfair attempt to enforce the tastes of a few upon all students in the district. It is easy to sympathize with the rational behind the district's decision. Clearly, the School Board and the parents who supported it had only the student's best intersets at heart. As all involved in the educational community know, it is difficult to deal with some issues in the classroom. Issues of sexuality, race, politics, and religion frequently come up in literature, whether the source is Shakespeare, Twain or the King James Bible. When they do, many students often feel uncomfortable, and on extremely sensitive issues, may feel under direct attack. All the same, we cannot let ourselves shy away from the uncomfortable purely because it hurts. Ignoring the problem of racism won't make it go away; it needs to be confronted and dealt with in a responsible and informed manner. Without the historical and literary background, it is practically imposible to find a solution. Another literary figure, Ray Bradbury, commented on this issue in his novel Farenheit 451. "Now let's take up the minorities in the civilization, shall we? The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that! Authors, full of evil thoughts, lock up your typewriters... Colored people didn't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag." Bradbury recognized the danger of carrying political correctness to far. He warned us not to stick our heads in the sand, to confuse self-confidence with self-blinding. It's time we recognized that in our schools and our communities. No one is arguing that the issues raised by Huckleberry Finn don't hurt us, as Americans, especially as African-Americans. However, the solution isn't the close our eyes, stick our heads in the sand, and pretend racism has never existed. It has, it does, and we need to face it -- not to hide.