

Teacher's Guide for *Free To Speak – Thought Police*

Vocabulary

Abolitionist: A person who advocated for the end of slavery.

Authoritarianism: A form of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms.

Censorship: The suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc., that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security.

Democracy: A form of government in which power is held by the people, typically through elected representatives.

Dissenting opinion: An opinion that disagrees with the majority decision reached by a group or court.

Extremist views: Political or religious views that are considered far outside the mainstream and may advocate for violent or radical actions.

Free speech: The right to express any opinions without censorship or restraint.

Gag rule: A parliamentary rule that prohibits members from discussing or debating a particular topic or issue.

Hate speech: Speech that expresses hatred or encourages violence against a particular group of people based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.

Holocaust: The systematic mass murder of approximately six million Jews and others by the Nazi regime during World War II.

Human rights: The basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, often recognized as inherent and inalienable.

Journalism: The practice of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information.

Newspeak: A fictional language created by George Orwell in his novel *1984*, characterized by its reduction of vocabulary and the elimination of certain words and concepts to limit free thought and expression.

Oppression: The exercise of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner, often leading to the suppression or subjugation of a particular group or individual.

Orwellian: Describes a situation or society characterized by oppressive government control and the manipulation of language to limit free thought and expression, referencing the works of George Orwell.

Propaganda: Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.

Regime: A government, especially an authoritarian one.

Slavery: A system in which people are considered property and are forced to work without pay, typically under harsh conditions.

Stasi: The East German state security service, known for its extensive surveillance and repression of citizens during the Cold War.

Surveillance: The monitoring of behavior, activities, or information for the purpose of gathering intelligence or maintaining control.

Totalitarianism: A political system in which the state has complete control over all aspects of society and individuals' lives.

Critical Thinking Questions

These questions can be used for group discussions or can be responded to in writing. Select the questions that you find most relevant to your curriculum or allow your students to choose those they wish to discuss.

1. Why is it important that we allow people who say things we hate to have the ability to do so? What happens if we only allow the speech we agree with?
2. If you believe free speech should be limited (outside of the limitations as interpreted by the Supreme Court), who should get to decide what is acceptable speech?
3. Do you think that the cultural impact of the Holocaust in Germany makes it more acceptable to censor speech than it would be in the U.S.A.? Explain your reasoning.
4. Should individuals be held accountable for the actions of others who are inspired by their speech? What is the difference between speech that directly calls for actions, say violence, and speech that is simply perceived by someone to warrant action in response? (i.e., What is the difference between someone who says, "Yes, go get them!" and someone who simply speaks about a topic that people are then inflamed about?)
5. How has the rise of online communication affected the prevalence of hate speech? Should online platforms and social media be held accountable for hate speech and extremist views spread on their platforms?
6. How is your perception shaped by Brandenburg's defense by a very diverse team of lawyers? How might their diverse experiences have shaped his defense and the trial?
7. How do we balance the need to protect free speech with the need to protect vulnerable individuals or groups from harm caused by hate speech? Is there a way to protect these individuals without suppressing the rights of others to express ideas that might be considered hateful?
8. When language is suppressed (no, you can't use THAT word), how are people limited in their expressions? What does this allow people in power to do?
9. How does Orwell's concept of "Newspeak" compare to modern-day censorship and propaganda efforts?

10. How does Orwell's depiction of authoritarianism and propaganda in his writing reflect his experiences as a journalist during the Spanish Civil War and World War II?
11. To what extent is Orwell's vision of totalitarianism and government surveillance applicable to contemporary societies? Are there parallels? If so, what are they?
12. Why do people refer to situations as Orwellian without fully understanding the term?
13. How does reducing language limit our ability to think independently and critically?
14. In what ways does North Korea manipulate language to maintain power?
15. Why would the concept of love have been something that the North Korean government wanted to suppress?
16. Can people be oppressed without even knowing it, as Yeonmi Park suggests?
17. How can a lack of free speech limit our understanding of concepts like democracy and human rights?
18. Why is it important for people to voice dissenting opinions and how can fear of retribution affect this?
19. What lessons can be learned from Orwell's critiques of totalitarianism, and how can these be applied to contemporary political situations in North Korea and elsewhere?
20. What does "Who sleeps in democracy, wakes up in dictatorship" mean to you? Why is this a sentiment that remains important today and into the future?
21. When your every move is tracked and recorded, what happens to your ability to lead your life? Does it matter if you are following every law and social expectation? Are we living in a society like that today? Why or why not? Does it matter if the tracking is done by a private company? Why or why not? What if the private company is willing to turn all the data over to the government?
22. How did Orwell's criticism of totalitarianism anticipate the surveillance practices of the Stasi and North Korean government?
23. In what ways can books challenge or threaten a political regime?
24. How can censorship of books and other forms of speech impact a society's core values and beliefs?
25. What are some of the risks and consequences of speaking out against authority, as demonstrated by Lam Wing-kee's story?
26. How can technology, such as the internet and social media, impact freedom of speech and the spread of ideas?
27. What role can governments and international organizations play in protecting freedom of speech and promoting democratic values globally?
28. What pressures can China put on others to make them refuse to acknowledge Taiwan's independence?

29. As the spreading of ideas becomes easier, governments and people in power will be threatened and criticized. How do we make sure that the ability to criticize those in power remains available to the people?
30. How did Lam Wing-kee's arrest and staged confession highlight the Chinese government's attitude towards freedom of speech?
31. Why would any government suppress information that might be used to help their citizens?
32. Do you think that knowing about the possibility of the avalanche would have encouraged a significant number of people to move? Does it matter how many people it might have saved?
33. What role does the media play in communicating early warnings about disasters, and how can governments or other authorities control or suppress information that is disseminated through the media?
34. How can communities learn to live with the risks of natural disasters, and what strategies can they use to prepare and mitigate the potential damage and loss of life?
35. What was the impact of the gag rule on the discussion of slavery in Congress, and how did this affect the progress of the abolitionist movement in the United States?
36. In general, how does suppressing the ability of an elected official to propose legislation or even discuss a subject affect those that they govern?
37. How did Ida B. Wells use journalism to raise awareness about the issue of lynching, and what impact did her reporting have on the public's perception of this practice?
38. Why was the narrative of violence being perpetrated against white women by black men so persuasive? What were the social incentives to believe this instead of women choosing these men as romantic or sexual partners?
39. What role did free speech and the First Amendment play in the civil rights movement, and how did leaders like John Lewis and Ira Glasser utilize this right to advance their cause?

Socratic Seminar

Adapt this model as best suits your situation and time limits.

Topic: The complex relationship between free speech and politics and how these ideas affect our society and culture.

Preparation: Participants will watch the video, ***Free To Speak - Thought Police***, read and review primary documents, then respectfully discuss and debate the ideas surrounding free speech as it applies to politics and societies in general.

Structure: Circle discussion with facilitator asking guiding questions.

Introduction (5 minutes): The facilitator will introduce the topic and provide an overview of the readings and primary sources. Participants will briefly introduce themselves and share their initial thoughts or questions related to the topic.

Round 1 (10 minutes): Guiding question 1: Why is it important that we allow people who say things we hate to have the ability to do so? What happens if we only allow the speech we agree with?

Round 2 (10 minutes): Guiding question 2: Who should decide what is acceptable speech or not? What are the potential societal impacts of forbidding certain things from being said?

Round 3 (10 minutes): Guiding question 3: Should individuals be held accountable for the actions of others who are inspired by their speech? If so, when? What parameters would you place on it?

Round 4 (10 minutes): Guiding question 4: How has the rise of online communication affected the prevalence of hate speech? Should online platforms and social media be held accountable for hate speech and extremist views spread on their platforms?

Round 5 (10 minutes): Guiding question 5: Should hate speech be protected speech, as demonstrated in the Brandenburg case?

Conclusion (10 minutes): The facilitator will summarize the key themes and insights from the seminar and invite participants to share any final thoughts or reflections. Participants will be invited to suggest future topics for discussion and to reflect on their experience in the seminar.

Note: The facilitator should encourage participants to support their arguments and perspectives with evidence from the readings and primary sources, and to engage with and respond to the perspectives of other participants in a respectful and constructive manner. The facilitator should also be prepared to adjust the discussion questions or format as needed to ensure that the conversation remains focused and productive.

Primary Documents

The U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, particularly the First Amendment

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>

Brandenburg v. Ohio

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/395/444/#tab-opinion-1948083>

1984 by George Orwell

<https://www.amazon.com/1984-Signet-Classics-George-Orwell/dp/0451524934>

Orwell on the Future – New Yorker Review June 18, 1949

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1949/06/18/orwell-on-the-future>