

Important happenings related to the concept of intellectual freedom (IF) coincide with the annual back-to-school ramp up. Now is the time to consider how to use the summer hiatus to develop learning opportunities related to these events.

Banned Books Week

First up is Banned Books Week (BBW), which is celebrated at the end of September. The BBW website states that this event was “launched in 1982 in response to a sudden surge in the number of challenges to books in schools, bookstores and libraries.” BBW is supported by various organizations, including the American Library Association and the Freedom to Read Foundation, as a means of bringing “together the entire book community—librarians, booksellers, publishers, journalists, teachers, and readers of all types—in shared support of the freedom to seek and to express ideas, even those some consider unorthodox or unpopular.” It’s an opportunity for conversation, discourse, and many a teachable moment.

While the 2015 BBW theme is pending as this issue of *KQ* goes to press, here are some resources for observing the week:

- **Banned Books Week website** <www.bannedbooksweek.org>: The Banned Books Week website provides updates and information as well as links to the supporting organizations and resources specifically designed for types of participants such as artists, teachers, students, writers, etc.
- **ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom site** <www.ala.org/bbooks/bannedbooksweek>: ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom site offers additional resources celebrating the freedom to read. Ideas and calendars of

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—HELEN ADAMS

events are highlighted as well as ALA’s list of frequently challenged books and a free press kit to help you publicize IF-themed events. The page is also linked to the ALA Store, where you can find promo items, such as tee-shirts, buttons, bookmarks, and posters.

- **Book focused on freedom to read** <www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=10943>: *Banned Books: Challenging Our Freedom to Read* by Robert Doyle is available at the ALA Store and contains lots of ideas for observing BBW.

Banned Websites Awareness Day

As expected in the digital age, the reliance by students and teachers on access to digital resources has increased exponentially. While subscription, fee-based, and membership-based resources are vetted by school librarians, both students and educators have a continuing need to access free and open Web resources that are ever more participatory in nature. Schools have found themselves grappling with the requirements of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) as well as responding to local parental concerns about safety, privacy, and related intellectual freedom issues. In response to input received about rushed and arbitrary filtering reactions by school organizations, AASL established

Banned Websites Awareness Day (BWAD) in 2011. Specifically, BWAD aims “to raise awareness of the overly restrictive blocking of legitimate, educational websites and academically useful social networking tools in schools and school libraries.” The observation is incorporated as a designated day during BBW, and AASL asks school librarians and other educators to promote awareness of how overly restrictive filtering impacts student learning. AASL maintains a website (quoted above) at <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/bwad> where you can access information about the event, a complimentary webinar “How to Be a Ninja Warrior Filter Fighter!” and a link to additional resources you can use when informing your school community. Of particular note is an AASL white paper *Educational Technology in Schools*, which addresses filtering, acceptable- and responsible-use policies, apps, social media, and BYOD policies. *Editor’s note: The URL for this white paper and information about other recommended resources are at the end of this article.*

Voices Carry—Three Perspectives

Wanting to provide more ideas and suggestions, we spoke with Helen Adams for her take on BBW, BWAD, and the general issue of IF and filtering. In addition to being

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—MICHELLE LUHTALA

a former AASL President, Adams is a former chair of AASL's IF Committee, has served on the ALA IF Committee, been a member of the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) Advisory Board, and is a current member of the Board of Directors of the Freedom to Read Foundation. She is also the author of several seminal books related to IF and privacy, especially as they relate to students.

In addition, we tapped into the expertise of Michelle Luhtala, a recipient of AASL's National School Library Program of the Year Award and currently a member of AASL's Board of Directors. Luhtala helped plan and launch BWAD and is the current chair of the BWAD Committee.

Also, aware of the 2014 release of a policy brief from the ALA OITP and the Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) titled "Fencing Out Knowledge: Impacts of the Children's Internet Protection Act 10 Years Later," we checked in with Christopher Harris, then chair of the OITP Advisory Committee

and a current OITP Fellow, for his thoughts on this important report. The study identified an "overreach in the implementation of CIPA—far beyond the requirements and intent of the law—that affects access to information and learning opportunities for both children and adults, and disproportionately impacts those who can benefit most from public internet access—the 60 million Americans without either a home broadband connection or smartphone" (Batch 2014, 5).

Informed from his dual perspective as a school librarian and school administrator, Harris provided another written perspective on the report in his must-read "Fight the Fight, But Pick Filtering Battles Carefully in K-12," which is his reflection on the subject and underscores the fact that as school librarians we must be ever-vigilant and alert to what is happening in this area.

Here are the insights shared by Adams, Luhtala, and Harris on what school librarians can do to develop programs to observe BBW, BWAD,

and deal with filtering issues as well as ensure the development of school communities that value the concepts of intellectual freedom.

KQ: What's your advice to a school librarian (SL) seeking to promote intellectual freedom and observe such events as BBW and BWAD, but who is a little skittish about local politics?

ADAMS: School librarians can turn BBW around, having the observance focus on the patriotic theme of the "freedom to read" vs. just banned books and incorporate all types of books into a display or event. Likewise, on BWAD have students and teachers contribute the URLs of sites that they have been blocked from by the school's filter as a display in the library—this activity helps to personalize and localize the issue, and is something that engages the kids.

KQ: How can an on-the-ground SL help educate a school community about issues like censorship, privacy, and filtering in order to build support and a culture that values



intellectual freedom before the censors come?

ADAMS: Considering BBW or BWAD as a single observance isn't enough. Everyone should use an advocacy plan for IF and think of a monthly activity to keep it on the forefront. I suggest creating an IF calendar for the year with a specific target area of focus for each month. For example, in August meet with the principal and administrative team to review your collection development policy and ask for five minutes at the first faculty meeting to remind everyone of the reconsideration process. I provide additional monthly ideas on page 221 of my 2013 book *Protecting Intellectual Freedom and Privacy in Your School Library*, or you can access a similar calendar I provided as part of the Intellectual Freedom @ Your Library column in *School Library Monthly*.

KQ: What are the plans for BWAD 2015, and how can AASL members assist or participate?

LUHTALA: Planning is still in progress, but we have a goal to

get a major spokesperson to help us increase awareness of the observation. We may continue with a previous theme inspired by remarks made by Keith Krueger, the executive director of CoSN (Consortium for School Networking), "Let the kids be the filter." This accurately states the main thrust of BWAD activities, and members can focus on helping students learn to be thoughtful and responsible users of digital resources rather than over-regulating access and making students more vulnerable to problems down the road because they have not had the opportunity to learn how to regulate themselves.

KQ: What are some of the best ideas you have seen for observing BWAD?

LUHTALA: Crowd-sourcing BWAD so that it is an experience that is inclusive of many voices, but especially student voices. The best thing is anything that empowers kids and allows them the opportunity to articulate what they can and cannot do because of restrictive filtering. This increases

their buy-in on the learning process and also their understanding and level of commitment to crowd-sourcing as a means of learning. Thoughtful, responsible, and skillful use of social media is the ultimate 21st-century skill, and we have an obligation to provide opportunities for kids to learn more about what they are passionate about as well as how to navigate safely in turbulent waters. So by crowd-sourcing BWAD beyond our local landscape and getting many voices in the conversation we are modeling the value of something we often deny our kids.

KQ: In *Fencing Out Knowledge* what are the big takeaway recommendations for dealing with overly restrictive filtering in schools?

HARRIS: The first thing to realize about CIPA is that the law doesn't say what most people in school technology departments think it says. The actual text of CIPA requires filtering, but only for three specific types of images. The law is silent on anything text-based.

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—CHRISTOPHER HARRIS

The three types of images that must be filtered are those deemed obscene, child pornography, or those deemed harmful to minors. The third type, which is the most ambiguous, is further defined in the law as "sexually explicit images that are constitutionally protected for viewing by adults but lack artistic, literary, political, or scientific value for minors aged 17 and under." There is nothing in CIPA that says schools must block social media; nothing about blocking image sites; nothing about blocking online word processors simply because they might be used to upload an image.

The other big takeaway is that educational groups like the National School Boards Association and CoSN actively support a more balanced approach to filtering that emphasizes educating students on responsible use as opposed to blocking sites. Sharing documents like the CoSN's *Making Progress* report with school administrators can help swing the conversation towards educational use as opposed to just blocking.

KQ: How can SLs in situations with overly restricted access engage their school administrators, as well as IT personnel, in meaningful

conversations to address the issue of over-filtering?

HARRIS: The best way to engage with administrators around the issue of filtering is to acknowledge the concerns and then to shift the discussion to a student-focused review of educational impact and use scenarios. Advertising from companies trying to sell filters to schools is becoming increasingly militarized; the filtering companies talk about neutralizing threats and protecting networks from rogue attacks. These "threats" are our students—our customers—without whom there is no purpose to even having a school network. We need to stop talking about neutralizing threats and start talking about helping children learn to use the Internet responsibly.

KQ: What's the most pressing intellectual freedom issue confronting SLs today?

ADAMS: It's hard to pick just one, especially given the landscape where there are more and more organized censorship attempts from various pressure groups. But, first and foremost, I am concerned that there are fewer SLs to educate school communities and defend the students'

rights to read and privacy. Within that context is the variable that where there still is a school librarian, job security issues may lead to cautious selection or self-censorship.

Restrictive filtering and privacy as it relates to technology are other areas of concern. I recommend school librarians become familiar with the K–12 School Service Provider Pledge to Safeguard Student Privacy at http://studentprivacypledge.org/?page_id=45, as well as consider the implications of cloud computing and ensuring privacy in use of e-books.

LUHTALA: One ongoing challenge, especially with the participatory nature of learning, regards the revision of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) as it relates to the online collection of personal information from children under thirteen. The rules spell out what a website operator must include in a privacy policy, when and how to seek verifiable consent from a parent, and what responsibilities an operator has to protect children's privacy and safety online. How does a school organization reconcile that with app-driven learning with tablets where you may have student privacy impacted by geo location, photo access, video access, etc.?



How do you negotiate and teach participatory skills? I find that the higher the level of filtering the further away we move from meeting the learning need.

HARRIS: A critical issue that keeps bubbling up is anonymous messaging. Apps like Yik Yak and After School make use of mobile networking and mesh communication (phones connecting directly to each other as opposed to going through a central server) to provide untraceable and, increasingly, unblockable communication platforms. These have been used for bullying and revenge porn (sharing explicit images after a break-up). It was great to hear that some schools and school librarians were working with students on a more proactive approach. Students got together and pledged to avoid the apps and to not engage in bullying.

Wrap-Up and Focus on the Future

Finally, a visit to AASL's Intellectual Freedom page <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/if> should be on everyone's summer to-do list so you can return to school refreshed in your knowledge of

this foundational issue of our profession. Download the brochure on intellectual freedom specifically related to school libraries; it contains numerous links to additional resources about IF. As for the future, as Harris noted, "Being proactive and finding the non-technical solutions by working with students on responsibility, accountability, and other issues of ethical use are the key areas for school librarians moving forward."



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Recommended Resources:

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