

# What qualifies as free speech in our schools?

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With classes getting ready to start back up, it is important to know what material has been deemed unacceptable in a school setting. Let's take a back-to-school quiz and see if you can pick out the statement below which is so offensive that a school district said it was "a grave mistake" to let a high school student utter this quote.

## Quiz #1

- A. "Those who can win a war can rarely make good peace and those who could make good peace would never have won the war."
- B. "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."
- C. "I am a soldier, I fight where I am told, and I win where I fight."
- D. "Strength lies not in defense, but in attack."
- E. "The best defense is a good offense."

Maybe that was too easy. It's obvious which quote is so terrible that a school claimed, "We failed miserably" when we let a student express this thought.

Alright, look at the next set of statements and see if you can identify which one caused the same district to "offer our sincerest apologies for the pain that this situation has caused to members of our community."

## Quiz #2

- A. "Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception."
- B. "The great masses of people will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one."
- C. "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies."
- D. "If tyranny and oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy."
- E. "What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is brought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?"

Perhaps you did better on this quiz than I did. I'm still trying to figure out which quotes "caused hurt and pain" to the students. Maybe it will help if we know the context in which the statements were made.

Like numerous schools, the seniors at Northport (N.Y.) High School (NHS) are allowed to put a quote underneath their yearbook picture. This past spring, two seniors picked quotes which were deemed unacceptable by the school. Unfortunately, it was only after the yearbook was printed and distributed that the school realized the quotes were dangerous.

The district launched an investigation into how something this egregious could happen in its yearbook. Likewise, the district immediately instituted a committee to make sure statements like these would never appear in the yearbook again.

The school is considering compiling a list of people they deem controversial and prohibit students from using quotes from those figures. Another solution offered by the school is to eliminate student comments from the yearbook altogether.

Well, clearly the school is going to clamp down on this type of speech in the future, but what about the harm of the current yearbook. For those who cannot accept the yearbook in its current form, the school provides two options:

- 1) Students may bring their yearbooks back to school where staff members will place labels over the quotes; or,
- 2) The publishing company will replace the two pages where the quotes appeared, and promises the changes will be undetectable. District administrators suggest that all students take advantage of one of these corrective measures, at no charge, of course.

(Those of you taking this quiz at home, please do not try to cover this quiz with your own marker or sticker.

Censorship is a job for trained professionals.)

The official yearbook, which will be housed in the school archives, will not contain the quotes in question, and the yearbook sponsor who let this abomination slip by, has been required to issue a written public apology.

So, which quotes were clear and present dangers? I personally was not able to identify the offending statements without the answer key. The egregious quotes were both made by Adolf Hitler.

Now that you know who the author was, can you identify the revolting statements in the above quizzes? Do you now find some quotes repugnant and others not? And if you were not offended by the quote the first time you read it, why does the statement turn unpleasant when you know who said it?

I still believe my history teachers were correct when they taught me what a horrible person Hitler was and condemned the terrible way he suppressed opposing views. I'm just glad I didn't attend a school which brought in a specialist to remove any reference to Hitler from the history books or I may have never known how terrible he was.

Finally, could all of the quotes be from Hitler, or none of them? Would you find the statements okay if someone else had said them? Here are the authors of our quiz quotes:

### **Quiz #1**

- A) Winston Churchill
- B) George Washington
- C) George Patton
- D) Adolf Hitler
- E) Brandon's former basketball coach

### **Quiz #2**

- A) The Bible, (Psalm 12:2, NIV)
- B) Adolf Hitler
- C) Winston Churchill
- D) James Madison
- E) Mahatma Gandhi.