Activity 2

**Text 1:** Libraries, the First Amendment and Banned Books The First Amendment of the US Constitution reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a [redress](http://www.usconstitution.net/glossary.html#REDRESS) of grievances.

In defense of this right to freedom of speech and of the press, teachers, librarians, writers, and many others have championed the rights of readers to choose what they read and libraries to circulate books even though some readers find those books offensive. The defenders of the “right to read” believe in the benefits of free and open access to information and are concerned about the harms of censorship. They argue for intellectual freedom—the freedom to access information and express ideas, even if the information and ideas might be considered unorthodox or unpopular. They point to the dangers that exist when restraints are imposed on the availability of information in a free society.

Their opponents argue that books containing offensive materials should not be on the shelves of public libraries or schools. One of their major concerns is that books containing violent, pornographic, disrespectful or treasonous material not get into the hands of young people. Acting on that concern, individuals and groups have called for certain books to be banned or restricted (circulated only to adults). Proponents of banning see their challenges and restrictions as integral to parents’ rights to make choices for their children. Moreover, they argue that a major responsibility of all responsible adults should be protecting children from harm and providing them with strong and positive values. In defense of their position, these concerned individuals point to laws about pornography, ratings on movies, and families’ right to filter the Internet in their homes.

**Text 2: Alan Gribben**, a professor at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama, helped produce the New South Edition of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Mark Twain jokingly defined literary classics as books “which people praise and don’t read.” Ironically, Twain’s two most famous novels are suffering a degree of that very fate owing to a racial slur: the “n-word.” Striving for greater social civility, public school districts are increasingly reluctant to assign either *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which contain a combined 228 repetitions of this abhorred word. Because many colleges do not require American

literature courses, generations of students complete their education without encountering these great works, simply because of a single detestable epithet.

Mark Twain employed the “n-word” in an effort to re-create the dialect of uneducated people during his Southern boyhood. He had no way of predicting that this element would become inflammatory in the 21st century.

Is the “n-word” absolutely essential for capturing the racial atmosphere Twain was depicting? Not really. Substituting the term “slave” keeps readers adequately aware of the deplorable race relations prevalent along the Mississippi River during that time.

Would Mark Twain approve of making this change? No one can be certain, but we do know that he was an unapologetically commercial author, seeking every opportunity to follow up on literary trends and increase his reading audience. For nearly 30 years he had his writings sold door-to-door rather than in bookstores in order to reach the largest possible number of customers. Making this translation of the “n- word” enables all schools to consider these novels for adoption and still preserves Twain’s emphasis on the evils of the slave system.

The New South Edition offers readers a chance to sidestep the “n-word” acrimony that has dominated and distorted public discussions of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* for 40 years. Readers can now focus on deeper messages in these novels: the thrill of adventures that lead to discoveries, the yearning for freedom that makes terrible risks worthwhile, and the price of social conformity that blinds people to immoral practices. The brilliance of Twain’s artistry hardly depends on one universally hated racial insult. Those readers seeking Twain’s original wording can easily purchase the numerous other editions of these books.

**Text 3: Kent Oliver** is an active member of the American Library Association and is the current president of the Freedom to Read Foundation.

Mark Twain’s book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, first published in 1884, is one of America’s literary masterpieces. A recent edition conceived by Alan Gribben, professor of English at Auburn University and Twain scholar, has been edited to remove racially charged words. This edition clearly subverts the intent of the author: depicting life on the Mississippi River in the 1800s. It contributes to a disturbing trend in our society to dumb down controversial ideas, subjects, and language in our literature. An exhaustive list of titles and topics demonstrating this practice may be found at [www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy](http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy).

Because of its language and its surface racism, *Huck Finn* has often been the target of book challenges and bannings. Ironically, the book is highly regarded in part because of its undeniable anti-racism message. Any deviation from the original is a desecration of the author’s work and original intent. Mr. Twain himself was very particular about the words he used and why. According to an oft-used quote by the author, “the difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter – it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” Possibly foreseeing a challenge to his “right words” such as Professor Gribben’s, Twain was famously concerned over copyright laws and desired to control his works, including his autobiography, beyond the grave.

While there is certainly a place for comfortable literature that entertains, the appeal and great impact of *Huck Finn* today lies in the fact it does not always make us feel comfortable – not with late-1800s America or with that of 2011. Its power is in the use of uncomfortable words and an insight into a time period that gives us pause for serious reflection.

The American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Freedom to Read Foundation, along with thousands of librarians and information professionals, support the premise that the most dangerous idea is the suppressed idea. As a society we should be committed to the right of unrestricted access to information and ideas, regardless of the viewpoints of the author or the reader. Without the

commitment we run the risk of rewriting history as well as great literature. Students have heard the words; let them read and understand the ideas that go with them.

Document for Activity 3:

# A Case: Two versions of “A Raisin in the Sun”

As with works such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Raisin in the Sun* also raises the question of whether or not literary classics should be censored or edited for students because of racially charged language and content. To get you familiar with the context and background of *A Raisin in the Sun*, read the following background information before working on the writing task:

# Background

1. *A Raisin in the Sun* synopsis:

This is the story of a multi-generational, lower-middle class income, black family and their pursuit of the American Dream. The action takes place in their Southside Chicago cramped apartment sometime between the end of World War II and the late 1950s on the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement.

1. Biographical information on playwright Lorraine Hansberry:

The writer of *Raisin*, Lorraine Hansberry, draws from her own childhood experiences of racism as partial basis of the drama. Her family moved to a previously all-white neighborhood in Chicago. After moving, they were threatened and eventually thrown out of their new home by court order.

1. Information on the scene :

Walter Younger - 35- year old Walter Younger has worked hard struggling to provide for his family. Although brimming with vision and big ideas for achieving the financial and societal benefits of the American Dream, he has become increasingly discontented and frustrated at having these goals be just beyond his grasp. At this point in the play, having lost the life insurance money from the death of his father due to a bad business decision, Walter, the “head of the household,” is explaining to his mother, wife, sister, and son his justification for why he has agreed to take payment for ***not*** moving into their newly purchased home in an all-white neighborhood.

Mama – Having lived a life of hardship and struggle and wanting to provide a better life for her children and grandson, Mama (Lena Younger) purchased a house in an all-white, suburban Chicago neighborhood.

Mr. Lindner – a representative of Clybourne Park, the all-white neighborhood of the Youngers’ new home. As one of a group of neighbors, he proposes to purchase the Younger’s house so that they do ***not*** move into the neighborhood. He is called to their apartment by Walter to complete the deal.

Documents for Activity 4:

**Text 1: The Original Version** – excerpt from *A Raisin in the Sun*, Act III.

**Ruth**: What did you call that man for, Walter Lee?

**Walter**: Called him to tell him to come on over to the show. Gonna put on a show for the man. Just

what he wants to see. You see, Mama, the man came here today and he told us that them people out there where you want to move – well they so upset they willing to pay us *not* to move! (*He laughs again*) And – and oh, Mama you would of been proud of the way me and Ruth and Bennie acted. We told him to get out. . . Lord have mercy! We told the man to get out! Oh we was some proud folks this afternoon, yeah. (*He lights a cigarette*) We were still full of that old-time stuff. . .

**Ruth**: (*Coming toward him slowly*) You talking ‘bout taking them people’s money to keep us from moving in that house?

**Walter**: I ain’t just talking ‘bout it baby – I’m telling you that’s what’s going to happen!

**Beneatha**: Oh, God! Where is the bottom! Where is the real honest-to-God bottom so he can’t go any farther!

**Walter**: See – that’s the old stuff. You and that boy that was here today. You all want everybody to

carry a flag and a spear and sing some marching songs, huh? You wanna spend your life looking into things and trying to find the right and the wrong part, huh? Yeah. You know what’s going to happen to that boy someday –he’ll find himself sitting in a dungeon, locked in forever – and the takers will have the key! Forget it, baby! There ain’t no causes – there ain’t nothing but taking in this world, and he who takes most is smartest – and it don’t make a damn bit of difference *how*.

**Mama**: You making something inside me cry, son. Some awful pain inside me.

**Walter**: Don’t cry, Mama. Understand. That white man is going to walk in that door able to write checks for more money than we ever had. It’s important to him and I’m going to help him. . . I’m going to put on the show, Mama.

**Mama**: Son – I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers – but ain’t

nobody in my family never let nobody pay ‘em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn’t fit to walk the earth. We ain’t never been that poor. (*Raising her eyes and looking at him*) We ain’t never been that – dead inside.

**Beneatha**: Well – we are dead now. All the talk about dreams and sunlight that goes on in this house.

It’s all dead now.

**Walter**: What’s the matter with you all! I didn’t make this world! It was give to me this way! Hell, yes, I want some yachts someday! Yes, I want to hang some real pearls ‘round my wife’s neck.

Ain’t she supposed to wear no pearls? Somebody tell me – tell me, who decides which women is suppose to wear pearls in this world. I tell you I am a *man* – and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world!

(*This last line hangs a good while and Walter begins to move about the room. The word “Man” has penetrated his consciousness; he mumbles it to himself repeatedly between strange agitated pauses as he moves about*)

**Mama**: Baby, how you going to feel on the inside?

**Walter**: Fine!. . . Going to feel fine. . . a man. . .

**Mama**: You won’t have nothing left then, Walter Lee.

**Walter**: (*Coming to her*) I’m going to feel fine, Mama. I’m going to look that son-of-a-bitch in the eyes and say – (*He falters*) – and say, “All right, Mr. Lindner – (*He falters even more*) – that’s *your*

neighborhood out there! You got the right to keep it like you want! You got the right to have it like you want! Just write the check and – the house is yours.” And – and I am going to say – (*His voice almost breaks*)”And you – you people just put the money in my hand and you won’t have to live next to this bunch of stinking niggers!. . .” (*He straightens up and moves away from his mother, walking around the room*) And maybe – maybe I’ll just get down on my black knees. . . (*He does so; Ruth and Bennie and Mama watch him in frozen horror*) “Captain, Mistuh, Bossman – (*Groveling and grinning and wringing his hands in profoundly anguished imitation of the \*slow-witted movie stereotype*) A-hee- hee-hee! Oh, yassuh boss! Yasssssuh! Great white – (*Voice breaking, he forces himself to go on*) – Father, just gi’ussen de money, fo’ God’s sake, and we’s – we’s ain’t gwine come out deh and dirty up yo’ white folks neighborhood. . .” (*He breaks down completely*) And I’ll feel fine! Fine! FINE! (*He gets up and goes into the bedroom*).

(\*Note on “slow-witted movie stereotype” – Many of the first roles for blacks in the movies portrayed them as uneducated, dim-witted, subservient individuals who would scrape and bow before whites.)

**Text 2: The Revised Version** – excerpt from a version of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Act III prepared for high school classes

**Ruth**: What did you call that man for, Walter Lee?

**Walter**: Called him to tell him to come on over to the show. Gonna put on a show for the man. Just

what he wants to see. You see, Mama, the man came here today and he told us that them people out there where you want us to move –well they so upset they willing to pay us not to move out there. (*He laughs again*.) And - and oh, Mama – you would of been proud of the way me and Ruth and Bennie acted. We told him to get out. . . Lord have mercy! We told the man to get out. Oh, we was some proud folks this afternoon, yeah. (*He lights a cigarette*.) We were still full of that old-time stuff. . .

**Ruth**: (*coming toward him slowly*). You talking ‘bout taking them people’s money to keep us from moving in that house?

**Walter**: I ain’t just talking ‘bout it, baby – I’m telling you that’s what‘s going to happen.

**Beneatha**: Oh, God! Where is the bottom! Where is the real honest-to-God bottom so he can’t go any farther!

**Walter**: See – that’s the old stuff. You and that boy that was here today. You all want everybody to

carry a flag and a spear and sing some marching songs, huh? Yeah. You know what’s going to happen to that boy someday – he’ll find himself sitting in a dungeon, locked in forever – and the takers will have the key! Forget it, baby! There ain’t no causes – there ain’t nothing but taking in this world, and he who takes most is smartest – and it don’t make a bit of difference *how*.

**Mama:** You making something inside me cry, son. Some awful pain inside me.

**Walter**: Don’t cry, Mama. Understand. That white man is going to walk in that door able to write

checks for more money than we ever had. It’s important to him and I’m going to help him. . . I’m going to put on the show, Mama.

**Mama**: Son – I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers – but ain’t

nobody in my family never let nobody pay ‘em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn’t fit to walk the earth. We ain’t never been that poor. (*raising her eyes and looking at him*) We ain’t never been that dead inside.

**Beneatha**: Well – we are dead now. All the talk about dreams and sunlight that goes on in this house.

All dead.

**Walter**: What’s the matter with you all! I didn’t make this world! It was given to me this way! Yes, I

want me some yachts someday! Yes, I want to hang some real pearls ‘round my wife’s neck. Ain’t she supposed to wear no pearls? Somebody tell me – tell me, who decides which woman is suppose to wear pearls in this world. I tell you I am a man – and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world!

(*This last line hangs a good while, and Walter begins to move about the room. The word “Man” has penetrated his consciousness; he mumbles it to himself repeatedly between strange agitated pauses as he moves about.*)

**Mama**: Baby, how you going to feel on the inside?

**Walter**: Fine!. . . Going to feel fine. . . a man. . .

**Mama**: You won’t have nothing left then, Walter Lee.

**Walter**: (*coming to her*). I’m going to feel fine, Mama. I’m going to look The Man in the eyes and say –

(*He falters*.) – and say, “All right, Mr. Lindner – (*He falters even more*.) - that’s your neighborhood out there. You got the right to keep it like you want. You got the right to have it like you want. Just write the check and – the house is yours.” And, and I am going to say – (*His voice almost breaks*.) And you – you people just put the money in my hand and you won’t have to live next to this bunch of – (*He straightens up and moves away from his mother, walking around the room*.) Maybe – maybe I’ll just get down on my black knees. . . (*He does so; Ruth and Bennie and Mama watch him in frozen horror*.) Captain, Mistuh, Bossman. (*He starts crying*.) A-hee-hee-hee! (*wringing his hands in profoundly anguished imitation*) Yasssssuh! Great White Father, just gi’ussen de money, fo’ God’s sake, and we’s ain’t gwine come out deh and dirty up yo’ white folks neighborhood. . . (*He breaks down completely, then gets up and goes into the bedroom.*)