

Free Press Viewpoint

Learning stifled by censored books

Censorship of books is an ongoing battle between the forces of propriety and the forces of free speech. The latest salvo was fired this week when publisher NewSouth Books put out an edition of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" with many terms today considered offensive changed or simply omitted.

The changes included changing the name of a character from "N-word Jim" to "Slave Jim" and "Injun Joe" into just "Joe."

This isn't the first challenge to Twain's book. The American Library Association lists the book as the fifth most frequently challenged book in the 1990s and the 14th in the 2000s. In fact, if you read a list of the most frequently challenged books, you'll find all the classics from "Gone With The Wind," to "A Farewell to Arms."

But this new edition of Twain ignores the fact that there was a reason Twain used this language. "Huckleberry Finn" is not a contemporary book. It's a period piece showing life on the Missouri River in the 1880s, at the time a rustic, unsophisticated area still reeling from the end of the Civil War.

The language isn't used gratuitously. It isn't thrown in to shock. It is used to sell the setting, to create an authentic atmosphere. There are trashy novels out there, but this isn't one of them.

It is Twain's commentary on racism in America, an issue that has not gone away. The issue was front and center in the last presidential election and has been on the tip of every politician's tongue since then.

We must ask ourselves: what is the purpose of reading literature in school? It goes beyond just reading a book. Literature classes teach understanding as well as reading. They teach how to look critically at the book's content, plot, themes, literary devices and the overall meaning of the work. They also look at the author's intent.

Many argue that children need to be protected from offensive material, but censoring language like this doesn't benefit them. Children will see and hear these words whether one old book is censored or not. With the prevalence of rap and hip-hop music — which make copious use of the N-word — it's almost impossible not to.

That's why it's important that children learn about these words in historical context.

Swear words and derogatory terms never begin as such. People mold language to their own use over time, sometimes for the good, sometimes not. Take the word "gay." For centuries gay has meant happy and carefree. Only since the 1920s has it changed to mean homosexual.

What we must do is make sure that the lessons being taught around this and other books that contain "offensive" language are placing the words and ideas in their proper context.

We must make sure children are exposed to many ideas, even offensive ones, so that they understand why they are offensive. We think this will ensure a much more socially sensitive population than trying to rewrite the classics. — *Kevin Bottrell*

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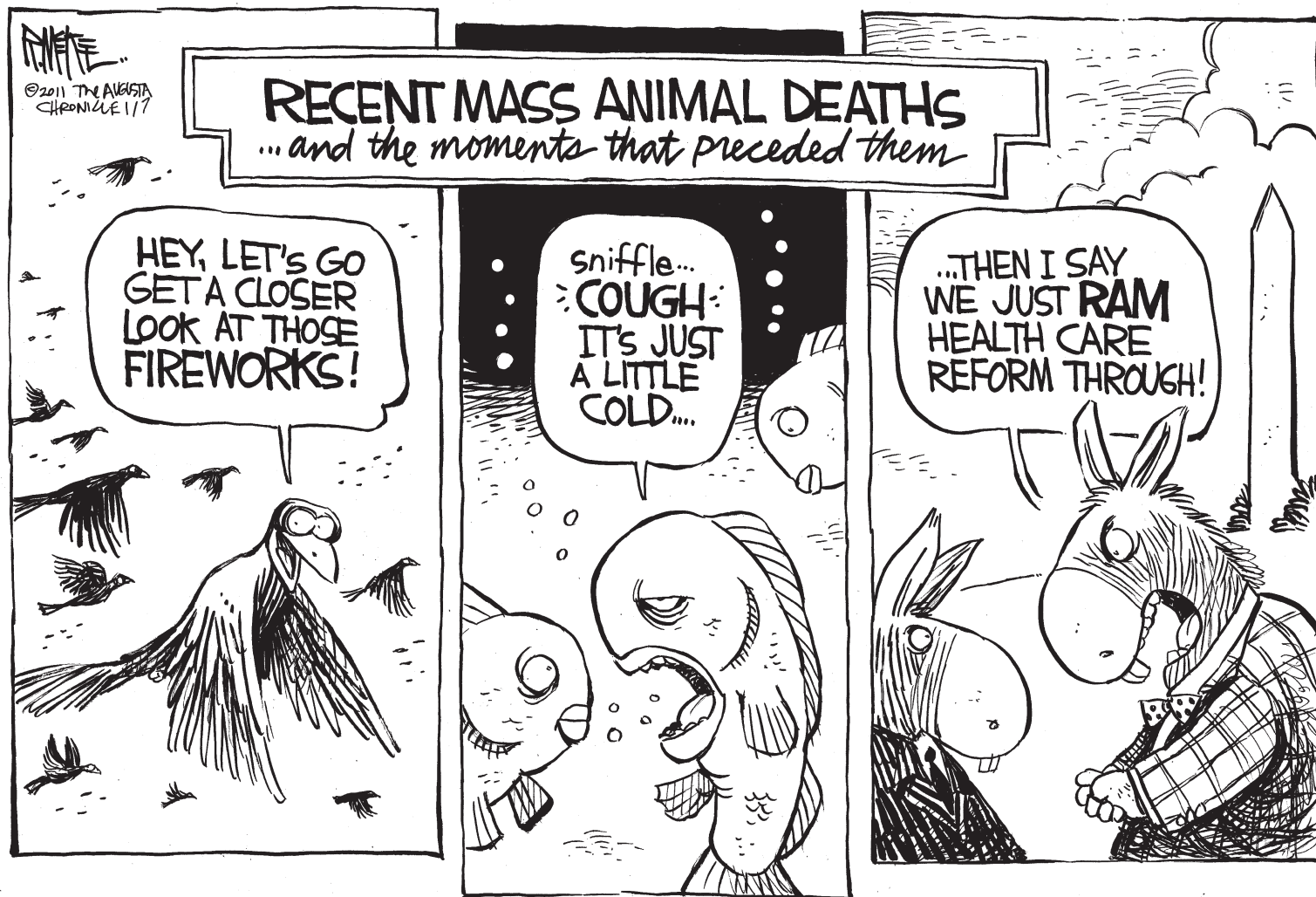
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What about all that other smoke?

The Kansas Indoor Clean Air Act, which became effective July 1, prohibits smoking in most indoor locations across the state. Key word: most.

It includes public places, places of employment, restaurants, bars and areas within 10 feet of any doorway, open window or air intake where smoking is prohibited. Key word: air intake.

It does, however, exclude state-owned casinos. Lots and lots of people in casinos smoke. Would they take up temporary residence in those smokey, noisy places if they couldn't light up? Obviously, state lawmakers thought the Clean Air Act shouldn't apply to casinos.

So lawmakers took full advantage of their power, apparently hoping the state-owned casinos would continue to attract people who enjoy a smoke with their games of chance. This lets the lawmakers enjoy counting their money from casinos filled with people who can smoke in a state where we supposedly have an indoor smoke-free environment.

When a law is enacted by Kansas Legislature, or probably any legislature for that matter, it always pays to read the fine print. However, the Clean Air Act isn't all fine print.

There may be one obvious area included in the law that's being overlooked by several businesses in many towns and cities.

Ask the people who works the drive-through



Vera Sloan

• After Thoughts

windows at Sonic, McDonalds, Taco John's and other areas where people are smoking within 10 feet of an air intake. However, some drive-through restaurants are in compliance with the law, and have put up signs that read, "smoke free area."

But turn your thoughts from the person at the fast-food windows who, in some instances, have protection, to the person at the bank or the clerk at the drive-up prescription window.

Does the law that prohibits smoking within 10 feet of an air intake take away the freedom of a person who surely does and should have the freedom to smoke in his own vehicle if he wants to? A little food for conversation here. So when is smoke free actually not smoke free?

I'm not a smoker. However, I think it could just be that the law could use some tweaking here or there — or maybe just clarification. After all, it seems smokers should have rights, too.

Let's see. How does this sound? (a) You can smoke within 10 feet of an air intake if: the little gizmo that comes out of the bank's drive-through window has a fan attached to it that's designed to blow the smoke back into the smoker's vehicle or, (b) the little gizmo has a water filter that meets EPA standards for particulates in the air that's going in through the air intake, or how about (c) you can smoke in your car if you are depositing money in a drive through that you've won from gambling at a Kansas-owned casino (where you can smoke if you darn well please, because the Legislature prefers to protect smokers' rights rather than nonsmokers' rights in those places); or especially (d) if you are depositing money that will be spent to pay state taxes that will go to help build more casinos. One makes about as much sense as another.

For someone who has an intense dislike for negativity, this doesn't really sound like me. I'm just desperately needing a few laughs today! But seriously, I wonder what the legislators were thinking about when they put the "within 10 feet of" into the law. Go figure! (And take a very deep breath and enjoy the pure clean air in western Kansas).

Vera Sloan thinks life should be fun, and enjoys all the parts of it she sees as Society Editor.

Adults need vaccines, too

If you think vaccines are just for kids, think again.

Grown-ups like you and I need to be immunized too. Adults like us need the protection that only vaccines can give to keep us on the go — and out of the hospital — as we enjoy the many blessings of life in the Sunflower State.

But results of a large national survey released last month show that most adults aren't getting the vaccines they need. Foregoing the full range of doctor-recommended vaccines, these adults are making themselves — and those around them — vulnerable to serious infections.

Throughout America, we are doing better this year than ever before in seeing that children receive all the vaccines they should. More than 90 percent of preschool children now receive most of the vaccines that pediatricians recommend, and many of the leading infectious killers of children have virtually disappeared as a result.

But the picture is not so rosy for adults. Nowadays, more than 95 percent of the 50,000 Americans who die each year from vaccine-preventable diseases are over 18. Hundreds of thousands of other adults are hospitalized every year, at a cost well over \$10 billion, not including the value of time lost from work.

What a terrible waste! Influenza, which can be prevented with an annual dose of vaccine, causes the single largest burden — more than 200,000 hospitalizations in a moderately severe season. Uptake of influenza vaccine is improving, but routine flu immunization still isn't happening for a third of persons over 65 years of age or nearly two-thirds of high-risk, younger adults who have underlying chronic diseases.

But adults today need more vaccines than a yearly flu shot. Consider these sobering facts:



Jason Eberhart-Phillips

• Kansas Health Officer

Unimmunized adults now account for nearly half of the million-plus whooping cough cases occurring each year in the United States. Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, has become epidemic in many states and threatens to erupt in Kansas this winter. While adults rarely die from whooping cough, they are often responsible for exposing babies to pertussis bacteria. Infants too young to be fully immunized themselves are at high risk of death from exposure to pertussis, as was the case for a two-month-old Kansas child who died from the disease last year.

About 41,000 adults suffer each year from invasive pneumococcal disease, the leading cause of community-acquired pneumonia. Nearly one in eight of these adults will die from the disease, but only about two-thirds of adults over 65 years of age have gotten themselves protected by receiving a single, one-time dose of pneumococcal vaccine.

More than 6 million women are infected each year with human papillomavirus (HPV), the major cause of cervical cancer. Approximately 70 percent of these cancers are preventable with the HPV vaccine, given in three doses to women under age 26. But fewer than one in five have gotten the shots.

More than 1 million older Americans suffer each year from shingles, a painful rash that results from the reactivation of the chickenpox virus acquired earlier in life. Often a case of shingles will trigger a post-herpetic neural-

gia, a debilitating pain syndrome that lasts for months or years. The vaccine against shingles is recommended for persons over 60 years of age, but barely half of adults know about the vaccine, and just 10 percent of eligible Americans have received it.

What can be done to improve vaccination rates among adults?

Clearly, doctors and other health care providers need to play an active role in promoting adult immunization, committing whenever possible to make vaccines easily available for their patients. One recent survey found that 87 percent of adults would accept vaccination if their doctor recommended it, while only 41 percent said they would ask to get a vaccine if their doctor did not.

Another need is for greater public awareness. Fully 40 percent of adults in another recent survey believed that because they had received vaccines during childhood they did not need them again. A third of the respondents said they weren't too concerned about catching the diseases that vaccines prevent, and an almost equal number said they had read or heard that adult vaccines are not safe.

Make no mistake about it: Immunization is an important part of a healthy adult lifestyle. The diseases that vaccines prevent in adults are serious and sometimes deadly. And the vaccines approved for use in adults have all been proven to be safe and effective for the whole population, excluding those few with valid medical contraindications.

Is today the day you will see your health care provider to get the vaccines you need?

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

