



Trigger Warnings: Intellectual Rights and Responsibilities

Banned Books, Censorship Part 1



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Grade Level	9th – 12th Grade	Time Frame	2-3 class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts	Duration	150 minutes
Course	A.P. Language and Composition, A.P. Literature and Composition, American Literature, British Literature, Composition, Creative Writing, World		

Essential Question

How might trigger warnings affect free speech? How should schools balance an obligation to facilitate responsible dialogue on tough topics with an obligation to shield students who might feel uncomfortable?

Summary

Through conversation and close reading, students will begin the study of a controversial work of literature by examining the pros and cons of trigger warnings in our society. Students will choose two published opinion pieces (one from both sides of the free-speech debate) and deconstruct the arguments in each with a graphic organizer. Students will then collaborate with peers to construct a roving paragraph using a claim-evidence-commentary structure and use peer feedback to evaluate their written products. While this lesson is currently aligned only to 9th grade standards, it would be appropriate to teach in grades 9 through 12, adjusting standards as needed.

Snapshot

Engage

Students agree or disagree with a quote about the value of trigger warnings via the Sticky Bars strategy.

Explore

Students choose two opinion pieces (one from both sides of the free-speech debate) from the New York Times's Room for Debate "When Free Speech Disappears From Campus" to read and analyze.

Explain

Students complete a T-chart analyzing the thesis, evidence, and potential counter-arguments posed by each of the two selected opinion pieces.

Extend

Students collaboratively construct one-paragraph arguments (including counter-arguments and rebuttals) for or against trigger warnings using an activity called roving paragraphs.

Evaluate

Students share completed paragraphs and provide feedback for their peers. Finally, students address the essential questions in an exit ticket.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)

- 9.1.S.2:** Follow agreed-upon rules as they engage in collaborative discussions about what they are reading and writing, expressing their own ideas clearly, building on the ideas of others, and respectfully disagreeing when necessary in pairs, diverse groups, and whole-class settings.
- 9.3.W.3:** Compose argumentative essays, reviews, or op-eds that:
 - introduce precise, informed claims
 - include a defensible thesis
 - acknowledge counterclaims or alternate perspectives
 - organize claims, counterclaims, and evidence in a logical sequence
 - provide the most relevant evidence to develop balanced arguments, using credible sources
 - use sentence variety and word choice to create clarity and concision
 - use style and tone that suits the audience and purpose

Attachments

- [Analyzing-Opinion-Handout - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Analyzing-Opinion-Handout.docx](#)
- [Roving-Paragraphs-Sentence-Rubric - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Roving-Paragraphs-Sentence-Rubric.docx](#)
- [Trigger-Warnings-PowerPoint.pptx](#)

Materials

- Student devices with internet access
- Writing materials (blue/black ink pens, highlighters, markers)
- Sticky notes
- Lined paper for roving paragraphs (optional)
- Analyzing Opinion handout (attached)
- Roving Paragraphs Sentence Rubric handout (attached)

Engage

Place labels on the classroom walls (preferably at the front of the room) to designate spaces for a future activity. Label one space AGREE and one space DISAGREE. Upon entering the room, ensure each student has a sticky note to complete the Engage activity.

Project the [quote](#) from Kyla Bender-Baird (**slide 4**), a grad student at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York, on a SmartBoard or similar device. This quote is a note Bender-Baird includes about trigger warnings on her course syllabus. Instruct students to read the quote silently to themselves as you read it aloud.

Teacher's Note

Don't mention the phrase "trigger warnings" to students just yet. It tends to be a loaded term that could adversely influence students' responses to the Bender-Baird quote.

Allow students 2-3 minutes to consider the quote. During this time, you might want to clarify any ambiguous terms, such as paradigm, for students.

Ask students to participate in a [Sticky Bars](#) activity about the quote. On the front of a sticky note, have students write their names and either the word AGREE or DISAGREE, depending on how they feel about the Bender-Baird quote. On the back of the same sticky note, instruct students to list at least three reasons why they agree or disagree with the quote. If students struggle with their reasons, you can always brainstorm as a class or provide examples from which students can choose.

Technology Note

If students have access to devices and Internet in your classroom, you can use the free polling site [Mentimeter](#) to engage students in a digital version of the sticky bars activity. If this is the variation you would like to engage in, be sure to start an account and create your presentation using the agree and disagree options before class begins.

Have students place completed sticky notes in their answer's designated space, either AGREE or DISAGREE. This creates a real-time bar graph of student responses. Student reasoning on the backs of sticky notes also allows you to gauge opinions at the outset of the lesson. For the best visual, ensure students place their answers in columns or rows, creating neat, bar graph-style lines.

Lead students in a brief, whole-class discussion using information shown by the sticky bars. If time permits, you can even have students grab a sticky note from the opposing side to read and consider or share opinions with an [Elbow Partner](#).

Explore

Students will now look at two opinion [pieces](#) from The New York Times on the topic of free speech as it relates to the college campus. Distribute copies of the **Analyzing Opinion** handout.

Have students participate in a variation of the [Think-Pair-Share](#) activity using the first page of their opinion handout. Ask students to individually review the article titles for side 1 and side 2. Challenge students to generate a topic (e.g., free speech, sensitive material, trigger warnings) for all six articles and determine the position (pro/con) of each side.

Side 1 Scan the article titles below.	Side 2 Scan the article titles below.
Topic: _____	Topic: _____
Position (pro or con): _____	Position (pro or con): _____
1a. "Today's Students Have a New Way of Looking at Free Speech" (McCartney)	1b. "The Problem with Echo Chambers on Campus and Beyond" (Stascavage)
2a. "Millennials Are Creating a More Inclusive and Just World" (Byron)	2b. "The Importance of Protecting Even the Thoughts We Hate" (Volokh)
3a. "Parents Aren't to Blame for 'Oversensitive' College Students" (Kohn)	3b. "Millennials Will Soon Define 'America,' and That's a Problem for Ideas" (Lythcott-Haims)

"Analyzing Opinion Handout" (page 1)

Next, ask students to pair up with a "solemate" (someone wearing the same color shoes) and share.

Finally, come together whole class and ask students to volunteer possible topics and positions. At this point, it may be necessary to correct any misconceptions about the article topic/positions.

Ask students to choose two articles to read independently, one from each side. Alternatively, students can pair up and read their articles together out loud. Have students circle or highlight their article choices in each column. As students read, ask them to use an annotation strategy, such as [CUS and Discuss](#), to track ideas.

Technology Note

If students have access to devices and Internet, it is easiest to post the handout and related articles on a platform such as Google Classroom. However, you can always print a class set of articles and place them inside page dividers. Students can use expo markers to make their annotations then erase once they are finished.

Explain

Depending on your preference and your classroom culture, have students complete the modified T-chart on pages 2-3 of the handout (located under Attachments) either after they finish both articles or as they read. Allow students to work individually, collaborate with a reading partner, or work with two different partners (one for each article).

As students work, move around the room to supervise progress and offer assistance when necessary.

Even if students work independently, encourage collaboration. Ask students to share responses periodically with the whole class and compare their thoughts to other students' ideas. Use this time as an opportunity for students reading the same articles to debate as they record article information on their T-charts.

Allow students 30-45 minutes to complete their T-charts in the handout. Once students have finished, introduce the term trigger warnings to the whole class. Ask students to offer definitions of trigger warnings. Use this time to clear up any misconceptions on what trigger warnings actually are and actually do. Provide examples for students, as well. You can use this portion of the lesson as an exit ticket for the day. Encourage students to go home and find additional examples of trigger warnings in everyday life.

Teacher's Note

See Trigger Warnings PowerPoint (slide 7) located under Attachments for trigger warning summary.

Teacher's Note

Consider modeling the T-chart whole class, especially if students do not already have prior knowledge of the terms used (e.g., claim, counter-argument, MLA citation). Depending on the level of your students, a simple review of the terms may suffice.

Extend

Now students have the chance to elaborate on their own opinions about trigger warnings from the Engage activity. You might first ask students to think back to their comments on the Bender-Baird quote, passing back the sticky notes from earlier if students need the reminder.

Discuss as a whole class the necessity of using trigger warnings in schools, specifically high schools. Ask students to take a position (agree/disagree) on the claim that trigger warnings are beneficial for high-school students/learning.

Students will create a one-paragraph argument using a strategy called roving paragraphs, a collaborative writing activity in which students work with multiple partners to form a coherent paragraph draft that can then be used to develop future writing on a topic. Follow the steps below for the roving-paragraphs extension.

Adaptations

This extension activity can be adapted for almost any skill/content area in the classroom. You can vary the subject matter as well as the length of the paragraph students compose. The steps below will take 45-50 minutes.

1. To begin, instruct students to write their own claim statements expressing their opinions on the use of trigger warnings in schools (see page 3 of the "Analyzing Opinion Handout" located under Attachments). Remind students that a claim statement **MUST** be arguable. Students may use the provided handout or a separate sheet of paper.
2. Each student will need to find a partner. Ask students to read their claim statements to their partners, then trade papers. Provide students with a [list](#) of transitional words and phrases. Using their partner's claim statement, have each student choose one of the transitional words or phrases on the list and continue their partner's paragraph with an evidence sentence that supports their partner's claim. Model this process, if necessary. It's usually a good idea to have students write their names beside their sentences, too. Students should use the articles they read earlier to find **DIRECT** evidence. If students are able, you can ask them to cite their evidence with an MLA in-text citation.
3. Ask students to return their papers to their original owners, meaning that each student should have their claim-statement paper back. Students should then find a new partner. Ask students to share their claim and evidence sentences then trade papers with the new partner. Students should construct a commentary sentence for their partner. It should connect the claim and evidence together. Model this process, if necessary. If students need help making the connection, ask them to consider how the evidence proves the claim. Remind students to write their names beside their sentences and use a new transitional word or phrase from the provided [list](#).
4. Repeat step 3 as necessary, switching partners each time.
5. Ask students to return their papers to their original owners, meaning each student should have their claim-statement paper back. Students should then find a new partner. Ask students to share their claim, evidence, and commentary sentences then trade papers with the new partner. Students should now write a counter-argument sentence. Model this process, if necessary. Have students consider what someone on the other side of this argument might say. Remind students to write their names beside their sentences and use a new transitional word or phrase from the provided [list](#).
6. Ask students to return their papers to their original owners, meaning each student should have their claim-statement paper back. Students should then find a new partner. Have students share their claim, evidence, commentary, and counter-argument sentences, then trade papers with the new partner. Students should now write a rebuttal sentence. Model this process, if necessary. Have students consider how the person making the claim should respond to the counter-argument. Remind students to write their names beside their sentences and use a new transitional word or phrase from the provided [list](#).
7. Ask students to return their papers to their original owners, meaning each student should receive their claim-statement paper back. Students should then return to their seats. Ask students to read over their claim, evidence, commentary, counter-argument, and rebuttal sentences. Finally, instruct students to write a concluding sentence for their paragraphs. Model this process, if necessary. Remind students that this sentence should restate the claim and sum up their argument. **OPTIONAL:** Have students incorporate a new transitional word or phrase from the provided [list](#) into their concluding sentences.

Teacher's Note

To differentiate this activity, you may need to include sentence stems/starters and examples. See slides 8-15 of the Trigger Warnings PowerPoint for sentence exemplars for each step in this activity.

Below are starters for each sentence in the roving paragraph. Consider using the sentence starters to differentiate for differing-ability learners. You can require students to place the transition words anywhere in the sentences.

- Claim statement: I agree/disagree that trigger warnings are _____.
- Evidence sentence: For instance, _____ argues "_____ " (Surname).
- Commentary sentences: As such, _____. Furthermore, _____.
- Counter-argument sentence: Some _____ might argue, however, _____.
- Rebuttal sentence: Ultimately, trigger warnings _____.
- Concluding sentence: I am for/against the use of trigger warnings in high school, consequently, because _____.

Evaluate

Students can provide peer feedback for roving paragraphs as an evaluation. What students should mainly be assessing here is paragraph fluency and use of transitions. Depending on your classroom needs, you might want to have students look for other criteria as well.

Ask students to trade papers with a partner. This should be someone the student has not worked with yet. Provide students with the **Roving Paragraphs Sentence Rubric** handout to aid peer response.

With a marker or different-colored writing utensil, have students write either PRO or CON at the top of the page, depending on the author's claim. Remind students to write their names, too.

Students should circle AT LEAST TWO words or phrases in the claim that indicate the author's position on the topic.

Using the rubric, have students label each sentence in the paragraph on a 0-4 scale (0 is weakest, 4 is strongest). For each label, students should explain their ratings in 1-2 sentence. So, if students have seven labels, they should also have seven ratings. Model this process, if necessary.

Lastly, have students share each sentence rating and explanation with their partner. As an [Exit Ticket](#), ask students to share whole-class responses to the essential questions.

Resources

- Bender-Baird Engage Quote. Seltzer, S. (2015, May 27). Teaching trigger warnings: What pundits don't understand about the year's most controversial higher-ed debate. Flavorwire. <http://flavorwire.com/520346/teaching-trigger-warnings-what-pundits-dont-understand-about-the-years-most-controversial-higher-ed-debate>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell Ringers and Exit Tickets. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f505d6f2>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Crosscutting Cards. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/b30762a7557ba0b391f207f4c6010158>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). CUS and Discuss. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f5073969>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow Partners. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/cc07ea2d6099763c2dbc9d05b00c4b4>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Mentimeter. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/645>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Sticky Bars. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f505ee0f>
- Odegard Writing & Research Center. (n.d.). Using transitions effectively. <https://depts.washington.edu/owrc/Handouts/Using%20Transitions%20Effectively.pdf>
- The New York Times. (2015, November 12). When a generation becomes less tolerant of free speech. <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/11/02/when-a-generation-becomes-less-tolerant-of-free-speech>
- CEC Template: <https://bgamstuds.wikispaces.com/file/view/CLAIM+EVIDENCE+TEMPLATE.pdf>
- Roving-Paragraphs Info: Seidnitz, J., & Perryman, B. (2011). 7 steps to a language-rich interactive classroom. San Clemente, CA: Canter Press.