

Burn the Books

Growing up I always loved reading dystopian novels. After I read *The Hunger Games* in the fourth grade, and adopted Katniss Everdeen's entire personality by braiding my hair every day and climbing trees in my backyard, I knew it was my favorite genre. However, my passion was truly discovered during the start of my second semester of freshman year, when my English class had just wrapped up the end of *Pride and Prejudice*. While I loved a good romance novel as much as the next person, I knew what book was next on the list, and my classmates and I had never been more excited to attend an English class. It was George Orwell's *1984*, without a doubt the most anticipated book of the year! All of the older grades bragged about how amazing it was to read. Unfortunately, the hype died when we entered our sixth-period English class that day.

My classmates and I walked in and immediately sensed something was up when our teacher, Mrs. Payne, wasn't at her desk finishing up her lunch. We sat for almost 20 minutes taking our guesses of where she could be when, finally, she walked in. Disgust was clearly expressed across her face. Mrs. Payne finally sat down and said, "Class I have some disappointing news. The school board informed me that we will not be able to read *1984* any more. They believe it is vulgar for young minds to read." As I scanned the room, I saw the concern on each of my classmates' faces. This didn't make sense to me because ninth graders all over the country had been reading *1984* for years and years. Suddenly, I was struck with an epiphany:

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I remembered a book we read the year before, *Fahrenheit 451*.

Immediately, I warned everyone in my class about how similar the story was to what was happening to us right now. The government, but in our case the adults on the school board, were trying to control us by taking away one of the most important forms of education: reading! Mrs. Payne rushed out of the room and then stormed down the hallway. We paced the room and bounced ideas back and forth of where she could be. Minutes later she charged back into the room and gasped as she said, "I've just spoken with a member of the school board and insisted they have a meeting with us before anything is final. We have got to get to work right this instant!"

That next week, the entire class worked together to make a presentation for Mrs. Payne to present to the board. After a long debate, we settled on the decision that a google slideshow would be the most beneficial. One group worked on the aesthetics of the slides, another gathered motivating quotes from all kinds of dystopian stories, and finally, Mrs. Payne and I researched what can happen in a world where books are limited by the government. Changing history is a scary thing, and the first start of that is controlling what kids are reading in school. The whole situation gave us a different perspective on education, and that week we learned how to work together and fight for what is important to us.

Before long, it was the day of the meeting, and only an hour before our class started. While we were at lunch, we paced the cafeteria waiting for an answer. Even if it wasn't the answer we wanted, we had learned so much about books, other societies, and everything else the adults wanted to keep from us. The clock struck one o'clock and we made our way to the

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classroom, all in a bundle of nerves. When we opened the door everything was just like usual. Mrs. Payne was finishing up her lunch, probably last night's leftovers, and we all sat in our seats. She took her last bite, cleared her throat, and walked to the front of the class and said, "Good afternoon, class, today we will start our new unit on the book *1984*."

At last, a wave of relief washed over me when I heard those words I had waited on all week. The feeling of success that day felt almost as good as when I read about how Katniss tricked the capital, and she and Peeta became victors! At a young age my classmates and I learned to fight for the freedom of reading, what can be accomplish as a unified force, and the education behind the book ban. After this experience I never took reading for granted again.