

Assignment for Freedom Fighters Assemble Episode 5

Censored? What should I do next?

Learning objectives:

The class will hear Ben Shapiro, now a Northwestern University journalism and legal studies major, talk about his work on *The Spoke* at Conestoga High School that helped earn him the Pennsylvania Student Journalist of the Year and national runner-up.

Shapiro discusses with Cathy Kuhlmeier and John Tinker the challenges he faced during an extended censorship battle, and how he navigated these situations with his administration and *The Spoke* staff members.

Materials needed:

Access to computers to hear the podcast and read the SPLC's ["Know Your Rights"](#) and [Law Library](#) pages.

Warm-up/prep:

Listen to the 33-minute conversation about Ben's experience with censorship on his high school newspaper staff.

Activity 1:

Discuss as a class or in smaller groups, using the following questions as prompts:

- What was the principal's rationale when censoring the map story?
- What was Ben's reaction compared to *The Spoke* staff's reactions?
- With whom do you agree?
- Ben discussed the self-censorship that threatens a publication staff when they know censorship may occur. What did that look like at Conestoga? How can you recognize it at your school?
- Do you think there is a relationship between prior restraint and self-censorship? Explain your reasoning.
- What might you say to your staff to help them recognize and avoid self-censorship?

Activity 2:

Every student publication should be prepared to face censorship should it occur. Use the notetaking template to brainstorm ideas for what you might include in your staff manual. Listen for the real-life examples Ben discusses in the podcast episode. Because each state offers different protections for the student press, explore the rights you have in YOUR state. A good place to find info about YOUR state is [the SPLC's "Know Your Rights"](#) and [Law Library](#) pages. Using these notes, add or update a censorship policy in your staff manual. Be prepared to revise as laws change.

Possible final activity:

Using what you learned in Activity 1 and/or Activity 2, design a training presentation that you can give your staff at the beginning of the school year. Focus on strategies to combat self-censorship should it occur.