What is appropriate material to teach our students? Who defines what educators are allowed to teach? How does the control of information by government agencies sway the state of education in America today? These are some of the hard-hitting topics addressed by David Dart’s article published by the National Art Education Association (NAEA), “The Art of Culture War: (Un) Popular Culture, Freedom of Expression, and Art Education (2008). This article takes us through a brief history of censorship by organizations such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in popular media, and how that level of control has slowly taken over the field of art education, directly affecting teachers, students, and administration. While this article was written in 2008 and much has changed since then in terms of mainstream technology and how young people get information, Darts gives us a peek into the struggle for control between the U.S. government and public education.

The term “culture wars” was coined in the 1980s by the author James Davison Hunter after he published a book that focused on the “divide in American culture and politics over defining issues like abortion, separation of church and state, censorship, homosexuality, and funding for the arts” (p.104). His book looked at two groups; the orthodox, and the progressive, and how their differing viewpoints began to sneak into the political world. Darts gives the example of an incident from 2004 where the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) was denied it’s request to broadcast Saving Private Ryan on
Veteran’s Day because of its mature content and graphic language. The events that followed, including the famous Superbowl wardrobe malfunction resulted in fines to broadcasting networks and served as a warning of the metaphorical Pandora's box that had been opened. How much control should the government have over what we show our citizens? Is the government afraid of what people will learn from controversial material?

Darts then goes on to explain the greater implications of censorship and government involvement, focusing on its effects on art education and public education practices. Because the funding for schools is controlled by state and federal governments, schools are at the mercy of the government and are essentially forced to take their side on issues like censorship, appropriateness of curriculum, freedom of speech, religion, and other hot button topics. Several examples are given of teachers who were forced out of their positions for what they do in their private lives, showing students content that was deemed inappropriate, and exposing students to artwork in museums that feature nudity. If the entire nation took on the same stance as these districts, a lot more art educators would be out of a job, myself included.

The role of the contemporary art educator had shifted away from the previous practices of Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) where at times, art was made just for students to learn technique. In today’s classroom, students are exposed to historical and contemporary art and explore real-world, relevant issues through the art making process. With the influence of the government’s censorship practices, teachers risk their reputations by allowing students to create work about controversial topics such as abortion or gay rights or showing work of contemporary artists who skirt the line of appropriateness. Darts tells us that, the basis for this thought process stems from Plato's Republic in which
he essentially stated that artists were known for distorting the truth and that people are not able to accurately discern between fiction and reality (p. 107).

The idea that I could be fired for exposing my students to Michelangelo’s statue of *The David* is frightening and I can't help but think about what my students would miss out on if they weren't able to experience great works of art. I am fortunate to have a supportive administration and parent base and thus far, haven’t had any issues with the images I show, trips I take, or lessons I teach. This article is about more than censorship and what we can and cannot teach. It raises questions about how much local, state, and federal government agencies can control in terms of what our students are exposed to. Who is to determine the line between appropriate and inappropriate? What are our kids missing out on when we censor material? In my opinion, rather than censoring students from sensitive information, we should be teaching them to deal with controversial images and information in a mature manner and should be teaching them skills that help them decipher truth from reality. Instead of turning a blind eye to the problems like domestic violence, gay rights, and abortion we should introduce those topics in a safe, controlled environment (like the art room) and allow students to form their own opinions by giving them non-biased information.
**Resources**