

## COPLAC “A Burning Idea” Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourself— tell us your name, job title, and a little about yourself. *I will attach a resume. ☺*
2. How long have you been an educator? How long have you worked in Gwinnett County?  
*I've been teaching for 20 years – 16 in Gwinnett county.*
3. What are your opinions on book censorship, both as an individual and as an educator? Do you feel like your experiences in education have shaped your relationship with censorship? *I haven't had too much experience with this issue – personally. There are some plays I'd love teach, but even I know that they are a little much for a high school audience – no matter how mature. I find the teachers who are most concerned about a piece of literature tend to project that onto the work and it leaves them open for scrutiny – and even complaint. I always frame difficult content with a white flag of, “let's be mature about this and understand why we are looking at this literature for its technical/artistic merits.” So far, that's worked.*
4. Have you ever used “controversial” books in the classroom? *I currently teach several – A Streetcar Named Desire – and any number of short stories by Flannery O'Connor or Jhumpa Lahiri. Streetcar deals with topics such as homosexuality, suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, rape, toxic masculinity. And it tends to be my students favorite – once I had a reluctant football player AP student who confessed to reading it in one sitting and he'd never done that EVER. Ultimately, I tell my students that we judge*

*ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions, but it's up to us to read to uncover the intentions of people we find troublesome.*

5. How do you think such content could/does aid student engagement with and/or comprehension of a topic? *Another novel – Heart of Darkness – is very problematic when it comes to its depictions of race relations and its obvious prejudice toward Africans during the worst (?!) of Belgium's colonization/genocide of the Congo area of Africa. We have extensive discussions about if/why this novel should be taught and how – thankfully – it is taught differently now than in the past.*
6. How do you choose which materials to use in your classroom? *I try to balance the traditional canon with works that are more representative of the students in my classroom. This year a student was nearly brought to tears reading a short story written by an Indian/American writer because it was the first time she ever read something in school that she didn't feel like an outsider looking in. What role does parental/student concern play in this decision-making process, if any? None.*
7. Have you ever dealt with parental concern over assigned readings? If so, please describe that experience. If not, how might you respond to a parent's claim that a particular book is inappropriate? *Once, I had a parent object to EVERY outside reading novel I had suggested for a project; so I suggested The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (as a mild inside joke as it is one of the most objected to novels in the canon) and they were, like, okay.*

*I actually have once acted as someone on the other side of this debate; my sister called me one day asking me if I thought East of Eden should be on a MIDDLE SCHOOL summer reading list; I nearly lost it... that novel – while it has its remarkable merits – also depicts same sex generational violence – simply inappropriate for that age level. I found the passage and my sister emailed it to the principal and it was promptly taken off.*