

The Adventures of [REDACTED]

Government censors take on a classic.

The Freedom of Information Act empowers citizens to demand government documents. Curious people have found terrible government abuses and wonderful government successes.



Yet too many elected officials prefer secrecy. They whittle away at the public's right to know, exempting certain types of information from FOIA.

They try to have it both ways. Voters like openness, so politicians keep the documents public. They just render them useless with a black pen.

When an agency releases a document, it can redact it.

That's the practice of blacking out portions, and it's something government officials abuse to great effect.

Rather than demonstrate the power of redaction with a boring government document, we pulled an American classic from the shelf, one that most people read in school and are familiar with.

Below is the second paragraph of Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." If government censors got hold of it, it wouldn't make much sense.

Visit blogs.roanoke.com/roundtable to read the original passage and see what you're missing.

Then think about what else you're missing. What embarrassing facts and criminal acts do elected officials hide with a black pen?

Now the way that the book winds up is this: [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] found the money that the [REDACTED], and it made us rich. We got [REDACTED] apiece — [REDACTED]. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, [REDACTED] took it and [REDACTED] and it fetched us [REDACTED] apiece all the year round — more than a body could tell what to do with. The [REDACTED] took me for [REDACTED], and allowed [REDACTED] would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the [REDACTED] was in all [REDACTED] ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into [REDACTED]

Personal identifying information of a minor.

Ongoing police investigation.

Private financial data from public-private contract.

Adoption records.

Improperly redacted.