

Definitions

Book Banning

To “officially or legally prohibit” (OED). “Book banning, a form of censorship, occurs when private individuals, government officials, or organizations remove books from libraries, school reading lists, or bookstore shelves because they object to their content, ideas, or themes” (First Amendment Encyclopedia).

Censorship

“The practice of officially examining books, movies, etc., and suppressing unacceptable parts” (OED). The term comes from the Latin, *censere* (“to give as one’s opinion, to assess”). Roman censors were magistrates who took the census count and served as assessors and inspectors of morals and conduct.



Book Burning

“The ritual destruction by fire of books or other written materials. Usually carried out in a public context, the burning of books represents an element of censorship and usually proceeds from a cultural, religious, or political opposition to the materials in question” (Holocaust Encyclopedia).

“The Wartburg Festival, Thuringia, where antinationalist writings were burned, October 18, 1817” (Courtesy of Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin).

The Jewish Review of Books

LIBRICIDE

“The violent destruction of books and libraries” (Knuth, *Libricide*).

BIBLIOCLASM

The destruction or mutilation of books. “There is a moral judgment, on the part of the perpetrator, concerning what the target represents. In the Oxford English Dictionary, biblioclasm is defined as ‘the breaking of books’ and cited as first appearing in print in 1864 in a text on religious theory” (Knuth, *Book Burning and Leveling Libraries*).

“Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people.”

– Heinrich Heine

Credits

Image by Flickr user Colette Cassinelli

Works cited:

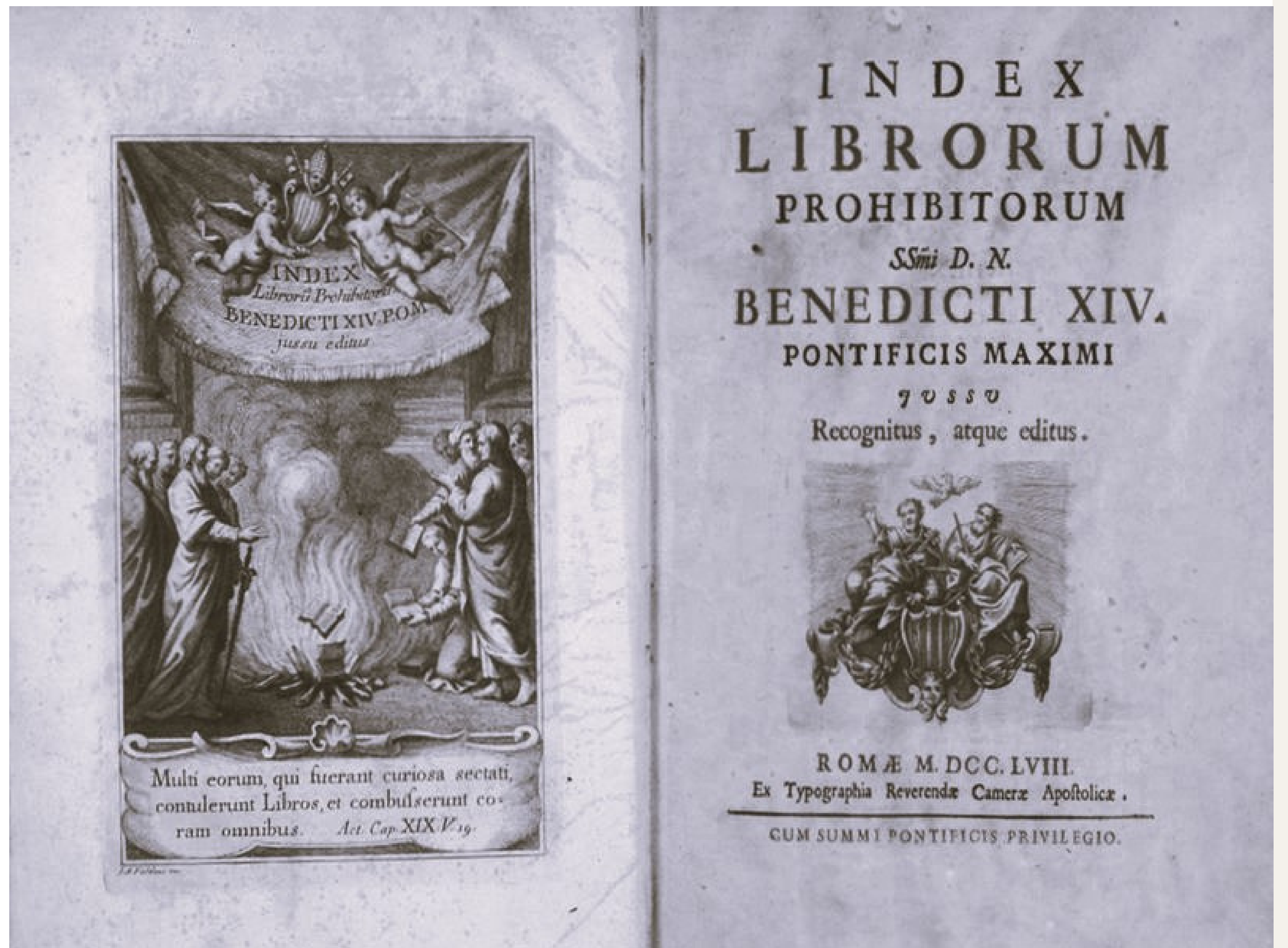
First Amendment Encyclopedia (n.d.) Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee University. <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/>
Holocaust Encyclopedia. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/>
Knuth, R. (2003). *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*. Praeger.
Knuth, R. (2006). *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction*. Praeger.

Censorship: History

In the 20th century, the most iconic image of censorship in the contemporary world is the burning of books in Nazi Germany. It took place at the instigation of the Nazi party in 1933. It was carried out in 70 cities and scandalized the world.

Censorship continued in the communist bloc in more disguised or twisted forms. In fact, in certain countries, claiming that censorship existed could lead to imprisonment. Censorship was exercised in a form of stifling patronage in which the regime's censors, educated people proud of the work they were doing to achieve the triumph of communist ideals, established close personal relationships with the writers whose works they "supervised".

In more recent years, special concern has been raised about children's books and their role in subjecting children to new ideas that some parents find inappropriate or uncomfortable. Books containing LGBT+ themes and characters, racism, and violence are targets for censorship. According to the American Library Association, "the books that received the most challenges to use in libraries and schools dealt with 'racism, Black American history, and diversity in the United States'" (Caldwell-Stone, quoted in Blair). In 2021, 8 of the 10 most challenged books in the United States contained LGBT+ themes.



WHY HAVE BOOKS BEEN CENSORED?

Since the invention of writing, the most powerful and reliable form of transmitting ideas has been books. It is therefore not surprising that they suffer special attention from those in power since the spread of certain ideas can even lead to the collapse of the established regime, something that has been seen repeatedly throughout history.

REASONS FOR CENSORING BOOKS

The reasons that have motivated the withdrawal from circulation of certain works are, first and foremost, the support of approaches that in one way or another threaten the political/religious ideas that sustain the system. It should not be forgotten that until recently both fields have been closely linked, and this close relationship is still maintained in several countries.

With a lesser degree of "dangerousness" for the author, censorship has also been exercised on those books that venture into areas forbidden by culture, morality and decency. In modern times, the banning of LGBT+ books has specifically become a controversial issue.

State Censorship

As for who executes book banning/censorship, given that ultimately and consistently throughout regions and periods, the state has been the main agent of censorship. As the representative and guide of the community, it was considered responsible for the ethical modeling of the community.

Church Censorship

The Catholic Church practiced censorship, in a methodical and prolonged manner, against all those ideas that confronted its faith, whether from a religious, philosophical or scientific point of view.

The instrument it used was the Index librorum prohibitorum, a list of publications considered pernicious to the faith and which Catholics were not allowed to read. It was promoted for the first time at the request of the Council of Trent in 1564, the last edition being that of 1948.

A Doll's House

by Henrik Ibsen

A Doll's House (1879) is a play written by Henrik Ibsen and published in Norway. It premiered in Denmark at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen on December 21st 1879. The story follows Nora Helmer, a middle class housewife in the Victorian era. Throughout the course of the play, she realizes that the men in her life have regarded her as nothing more than a doll that can be made to act in whichever way they desire.

At the conclusion of Ibsen's original version of the play, Nora leaves her Husband and her family in order to find her independence and sense of self that she had been lacking all her life. This ending stirred a lot of commotion in the theater world. Ibsen was urged to change the ending for German and English speaking audiences. This was especially urgent when the German actress who played Nora refused to do the play unless the ending was changed so that Nora would not leave her family. This was because she could not fathom a mother leaving her children behind. Ibsen reluctantly agreed to change the ending, but he later called this censorship a "barbaric outrage".



CENSORED

1879

Original Ending

NORA: That our life together would be a real wedlock.
Goodbye. [She goes out through the hall.]

HELMER: [sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]. Nora! Nora! [Looks round, and rises.] Empty. She is gone. [A hope flashes across his mind.] The most wonderful thing of all—?

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

Altered Ending

NORA: Motherless! [Struggles with herself, lets her travelling bag fall, and says.] Oh, this is a sin against myself, but I cannot leave them. [Half sinks down by the door.]

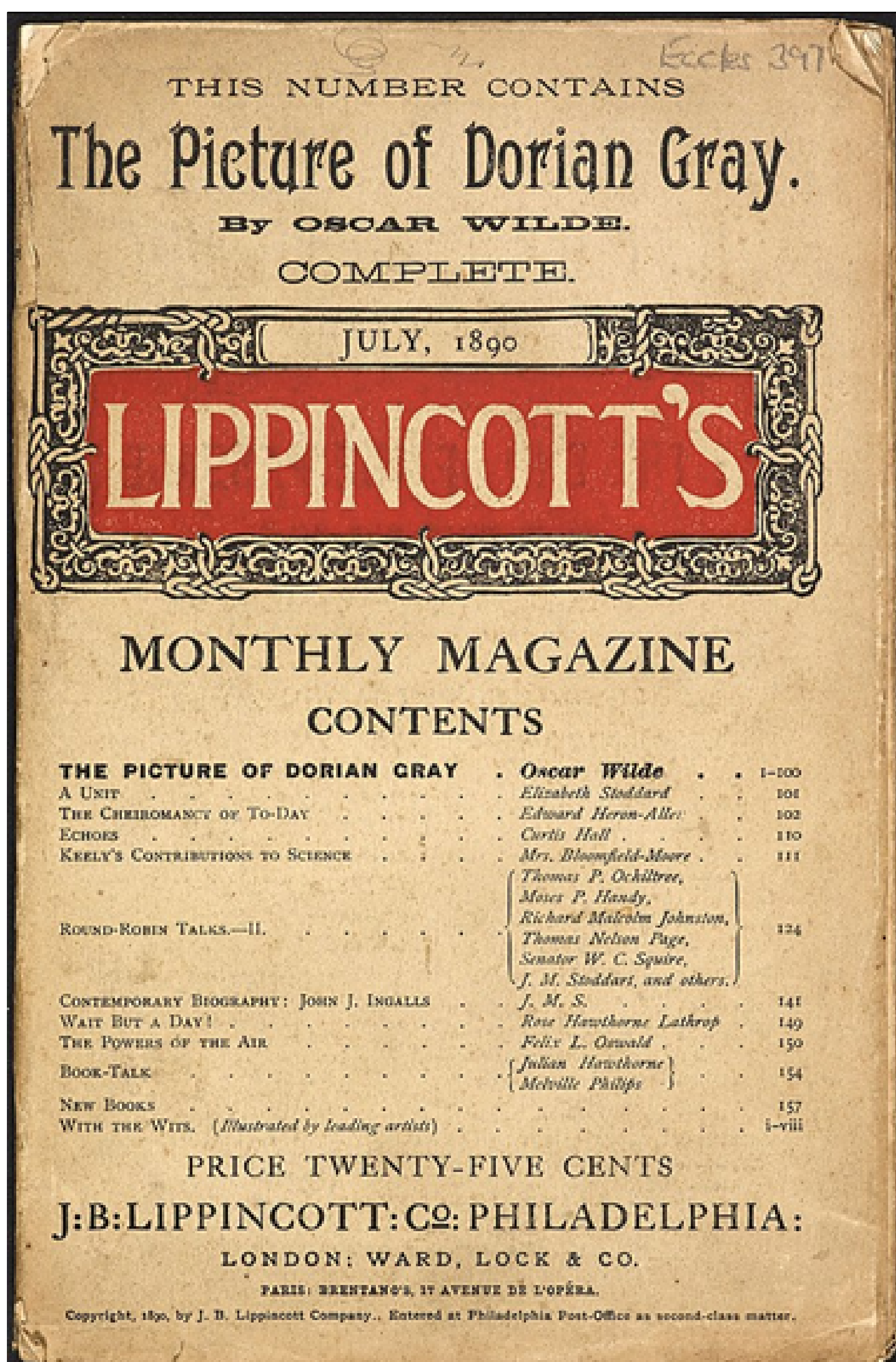
HELMER: [joyfully, but softly] Nora! [The curtain falls.]

The Picture of Dorian Gray

by Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The book follows the life of Dorian Gray, an indulgent man who sells his soul in exchange for eternal youth and beauty. This novel has been censored due to homoerotic themes and accusations of promoting bad morals and decadence.

The novel had undergone many revisions even before its publication. Oscar Wilde's editor urged him to remove the more obvious references to the romantic involvement of two male characters. Any reference to the main character's multiple female mistresses was also removed. Upon its publication as a serial in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, the *Daily Chronicle* reviled the novel as a "poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odors of moral and spiritual putrefaction". Wilde edited and censored the story even more when it was being prepared to be published in book form. Wilde wanted his work to be published, even if he had to heavily censure his original and true vision. The very first uncensored edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in 2011 by Harvard University Press.



CENSORED

1890

Uncensored Text

Hallward tells Dorian in one passage: "It is quite true I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend. Somehow I have never loved a woman..."

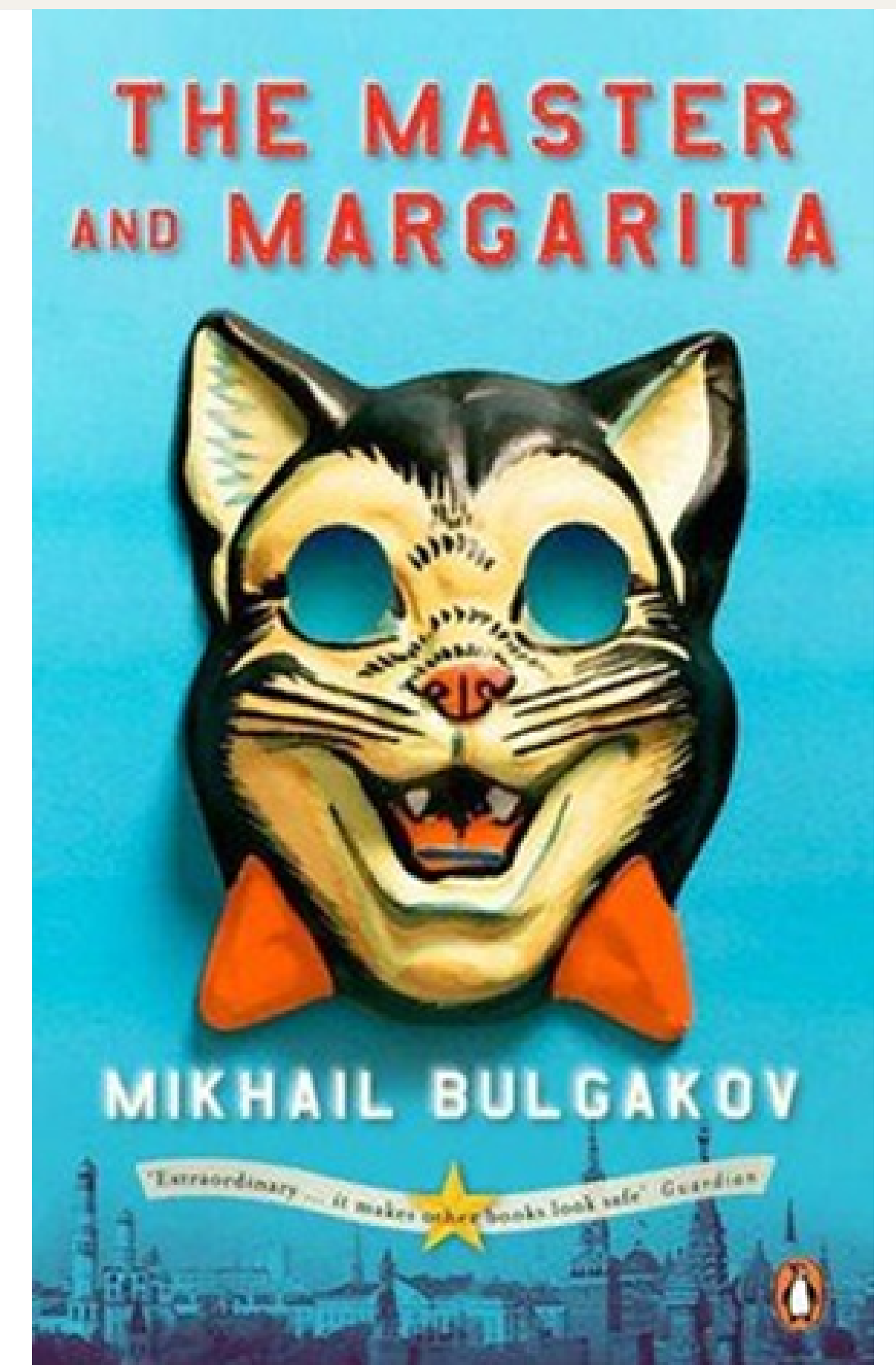
Censored Text

"From the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me."

The Master and Margarita

"Mikhail Bulgakov, Russia, *The Master and Margarita* (1967) In this novel, the Devil visits Stalin's Soviet Union. This novel was a satirical critique of Soviet society, Stalin, and other Soviet officials. Its religious, sexual, and anti-Soviet themes caused it to be censored during its publication. Mikhail Bulgakov began writing his novel in 1928–9, but knew that he would never be able to publish it in his lifetime due to Soviet censorship. That year all of his plays had been banned from performance in the USSR because they criticized Soviet Society and lacked Communist heroes. Bulgakov worked on the manuscript until his death in 1940.

"His surviving wife Elana Bulgakova worked tirelessly to have his work published. While she was eventually successful, it was not without concessions... Many of these cuts included references to a female character's nudity, sexuality, and foul language. It also removed references to the arrests and investigations conducted by the Soviet police. In 1973 the first complete edition of the book was published in the Soviet Union and in Russian, however earlier editions were published in France and in Estonia" (Curtis).



CENSORED

1967

Censored Text

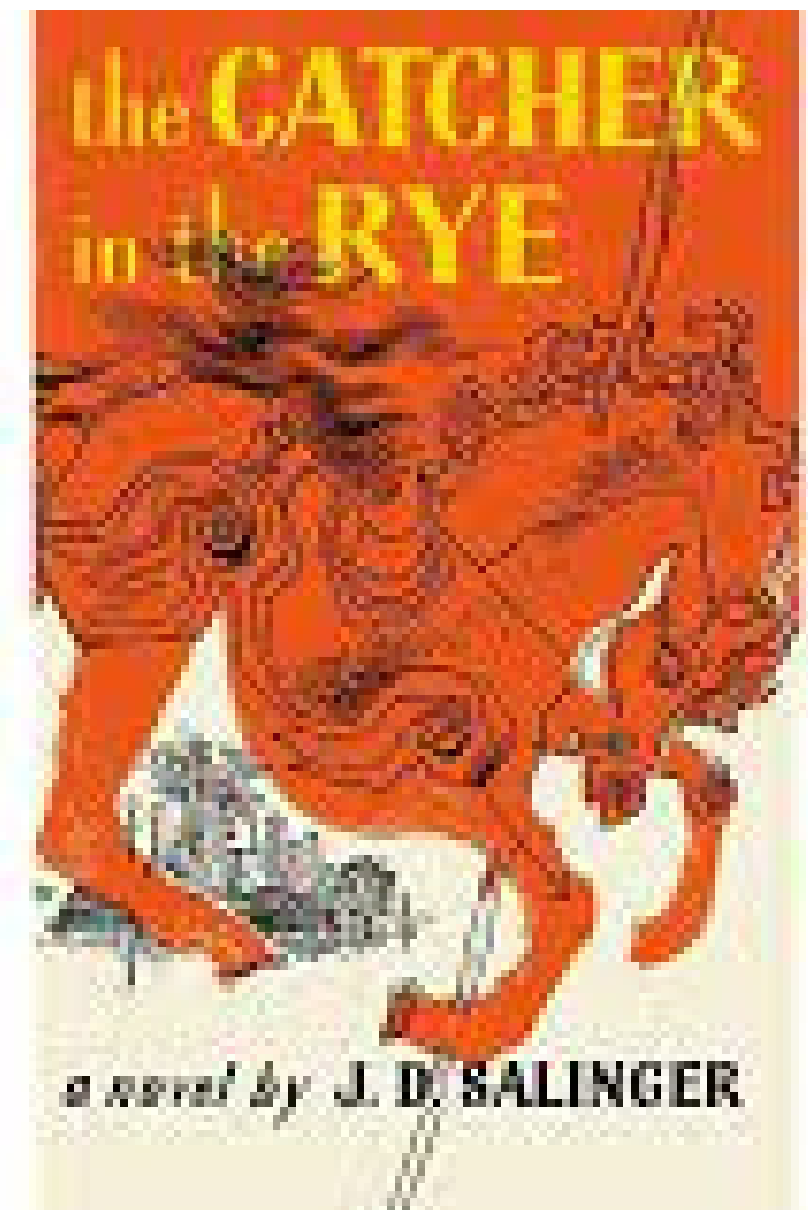
"References to the actions of the secret police in Jerusalem and Moscow were the most likely targets for deletion. References to nudity and Margarita's foul language were cut" (Moss).

Around 12% of the original work was cut from the publication.

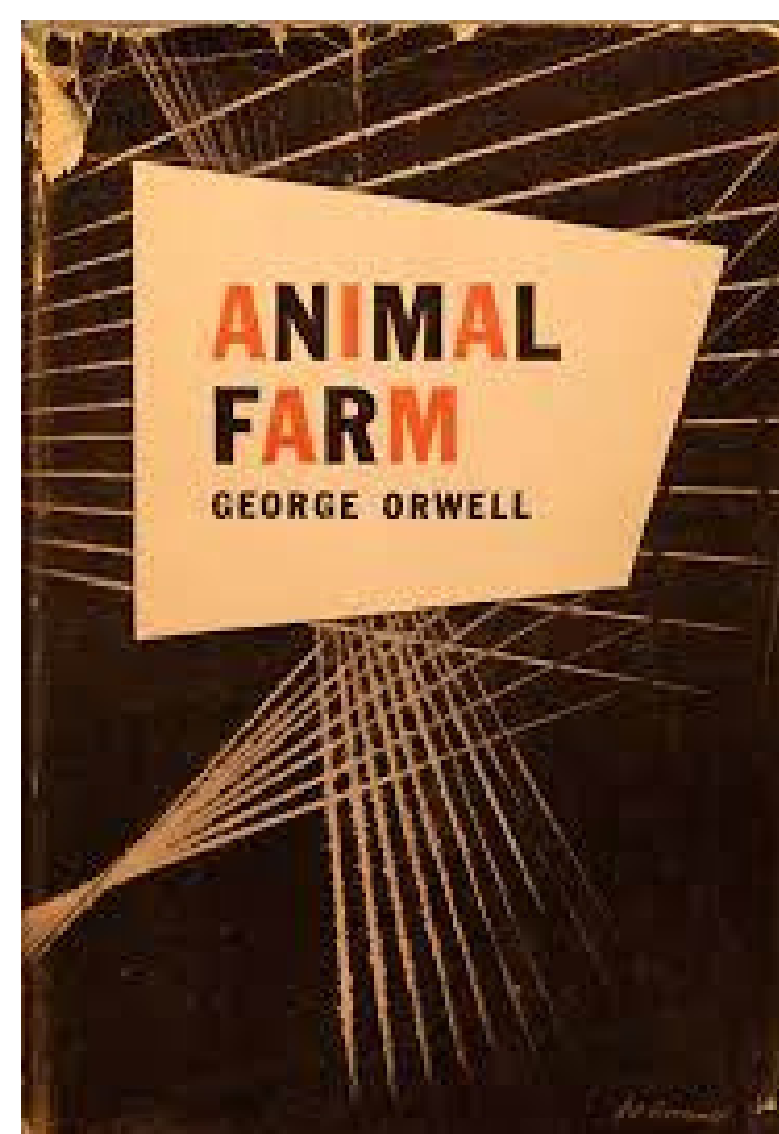


Notable Books

The Catcher in the Rye follows the journey of a teenage boy named Holden who is expelled from an elite private school. This book is common in high school English literature classes, but its place in schools has been challenged at least 9 times since 1986. Sexual content and profanity are the main reasons cited behind its banning. Less common reasons include violence, defamatory statements against God, and immorality.



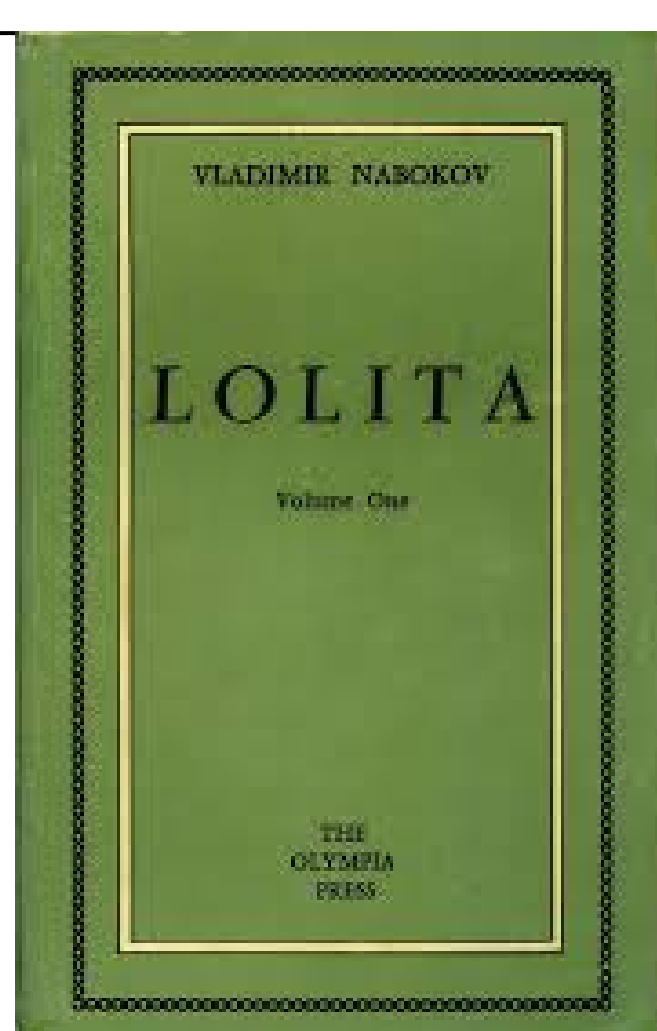
Animal Farm tells the story of farm animals who rebel against their farmer in the hopes of creating a free and equal society for animals. Prohibited in several countries for its criticism of the power elites.



A classic of fantasy literature, Alice in Wonderland was banned in China in 1931 for including talking animals as characters whose intelligence resembled that of humans.



The Grapes of Wrath tells the story of American refugees fleeing the Dust bowl. It covers the terrible living conditions and wage exploitation migrant workers faced on American Farms. It has been banned due to obscene language and accusations of being communist propaganda.



Lolita is the story of a man who falls in love with his stepdaughter. Considered a pornographic story and an insult to established morals. It was first published in 1951. This story was banned in France and England, not to mention that his manuscript was rejected a few times.

Banned books - Juvenile

Books intended for early childhood readers are some of the most commonly banned and censored. Often, these reasons include: LGBTQ+ issues / characters, language, inappropriate imagery, depictions or race or religion.

Jacob's New Dress, **by Sarah Hoffman**

"A North Carolina school district has pulled a book called *Jacob's New Dress* from their Grade 1 curriculum after receiving complaints that it taught children to be transgender. The children's book is about a boy named Jacob who loves to play dress-up. He wants to wear a dress to school, but the other kids tease him for wearing 'girl clothes'"

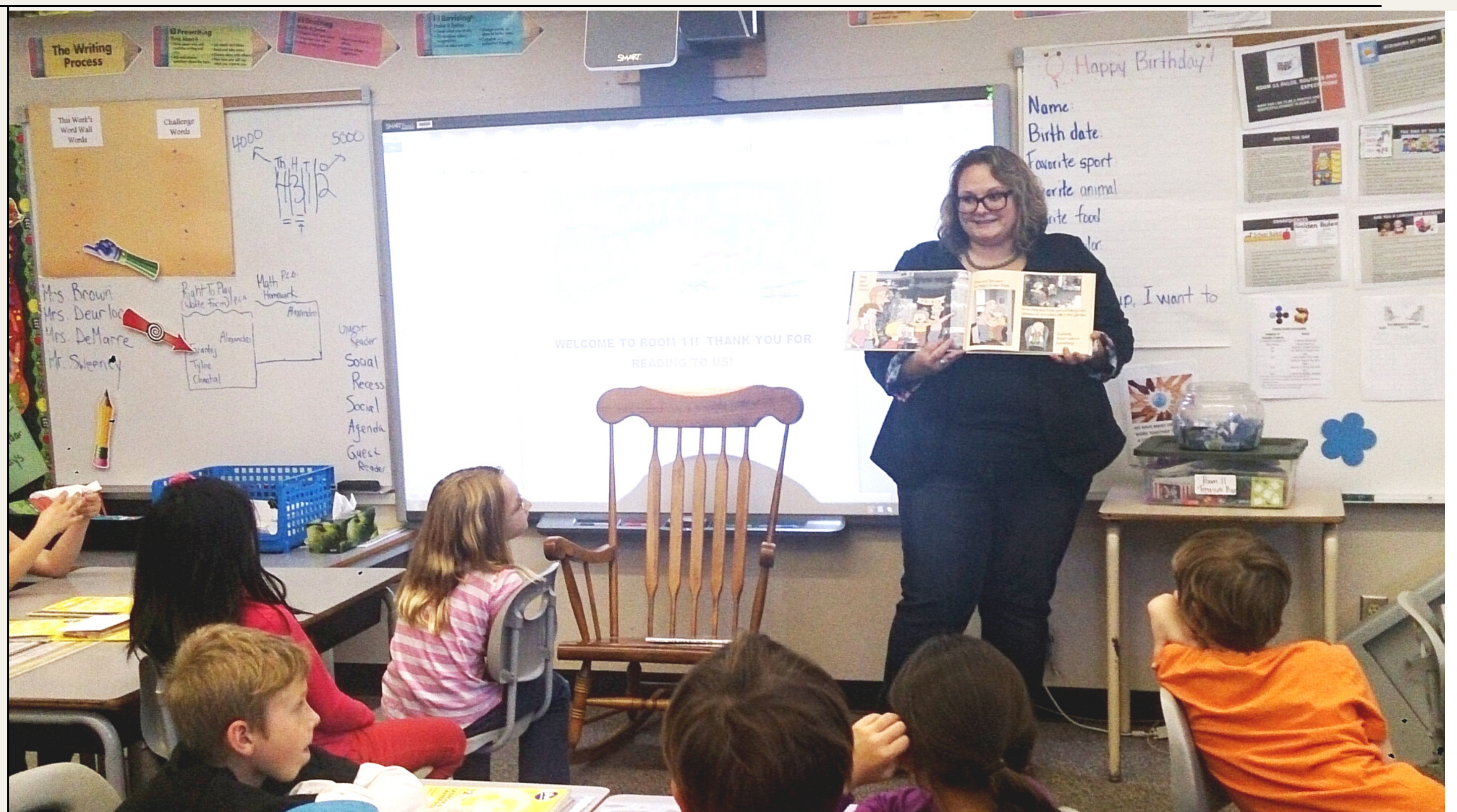
Khoo, I. (2017). "U.S. School District Bans Book About a Boy Who Wears Dresses." *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/u-s-school-district-bans-book-about-boy-who-wears-dresses_n_15685964#:~:text=A%20North%20Carolina%20school%20district,loves%20to%20play%20dress%2Dup.

Draw Me A Star, **by Eric Carle**

One of the illustrations depicts a naked man and a woman

Madeline and the Gypsies, **by Ludwig Bemelmans**

This book was banned because it includes depictions that were interpreted as being racist.



Jacob's New Dress

Photo by Flickr user Edmonton Public Schools

Skippyjon Jones, **by Judith Schachner**

Includes depictions of stereotypical Spanish culture, including "nonsense Spanglish"

Martínez-Roldán, C. (2013). "The Representation of Latinos and the Use of Spanish: A Critical Content Analysis of *Skippyjon Jones*". *Journal of Children's Literature*, 39: 5-14.

Sex is a Funny Word, **by Cory Silverberg**

The book was censored because some "[claimed] that the book would make children 'want to have sex or ask questions about sex'."

Gomez, B. (2018). "Banned Spotlight: Sex is a Funny Word." *Banned Books Week*. Retrieved from <https://bannedbooksweek.org/banned-spotlight-sex-is-a-funny-word/>



Photo by Flickr user Ldorfman

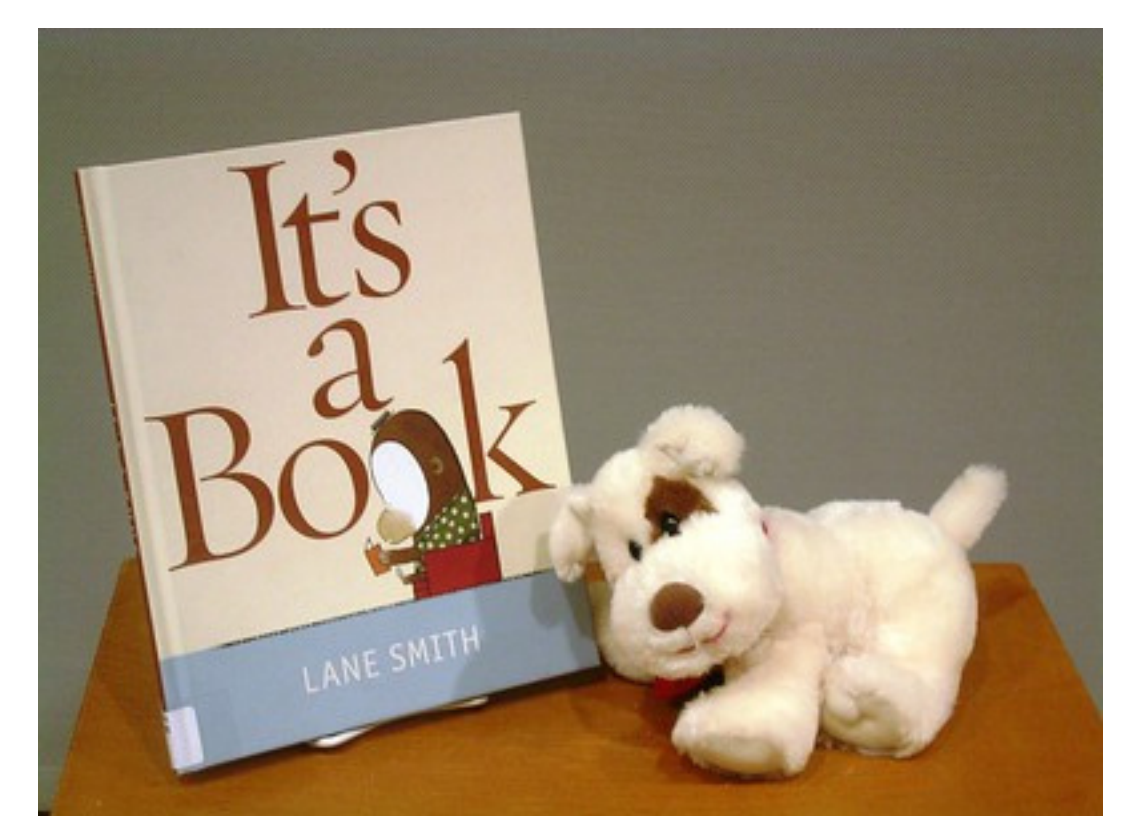


Photo by Flickr user Pesky Librarians

It's a Book, **by Lane Smith**

"Banned in two Massachusetts school districts for the use of the word 'jackass' in reference to the donkey character at the end of the story"

Sandra. (2017). "Banned Books Week!" *Back to Basics Literacy*. Retrieved from <https://www.backtobasicsliteracy.com/blog/banned-books-week>

Banned Books Week

September 18-24, 2022

This week, join the Priddy Library in observing Banned Books Week, recognizing the countless books that have been banned, censored, or burned throughout the centuries, and the authors that religious and political regimes have silenced.



Photo by Flickr user San Jose Public Library

A presentation of the Priddy Library, by:

Irene Munster, Greta Ober-Beauchesne, Ivy Roberts, Stephanie Parker, Daniela Romo-Torres, and James Lepinsky

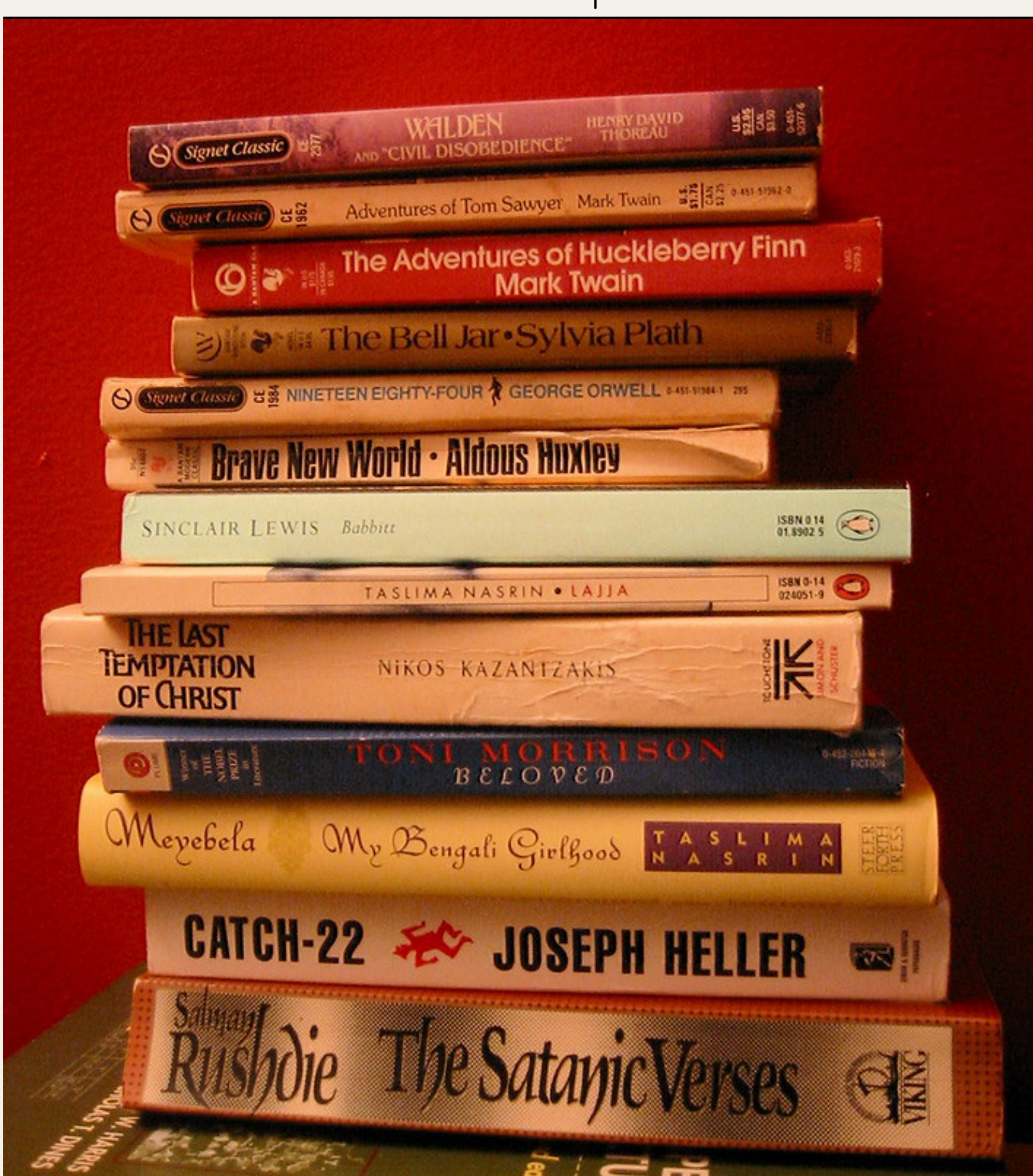


Photo by Flickr user Anirvan

This Exhibit Includes:

- Chronologies
- Book burning throughout history
- Censored books from around the world
- History of book censorship
- Banned juvenile books
- Display of books from the Priddy Library collection that have been banned in select locations.

<http://www.bannedbooksweek.org>
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks>

A Brief Timeline of Banned Books

1532

Machiavelli's famous work *The Prince* started a feud with the Pope, who ended up banning the book completely and placing it on the Index Librorum Prohibitum.

1559

First issue of Index Librorum Prohibitum was published under the supervision of Pope Paul IV. This index represented works that the Roman Catholic church found blasphemous and heretical.



1601

Shakespeare's *Richard II* was censored and banned for "threatening authority" and creating "the specific model for Essex's 1601 rebellion" and a "general assault on the ideology of political order" (eNotes.com)



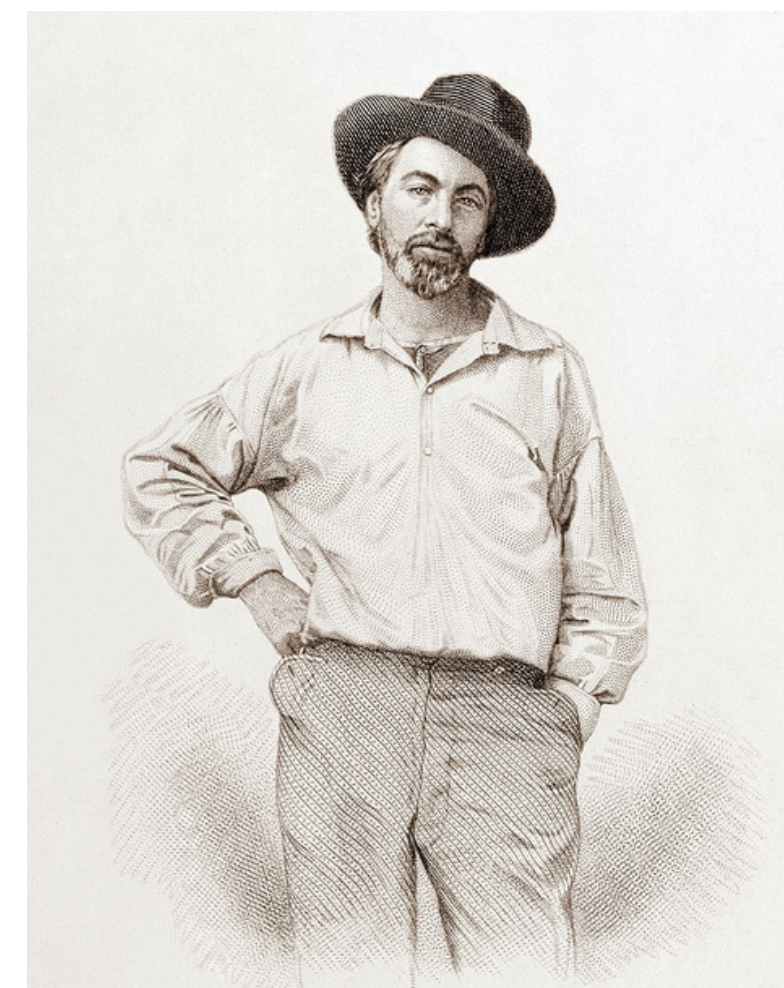
1774

Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* caused an epidemic of people committing suicide after the book was published. Sociologists have called this phenomenon "the Werther effect."



1789

Marquis de Sade's works *Justine* and *The 120 Days of Sodom* were considered so obscene by French society that he was imprisoned for writing graphic depictions of aristocratic sex. The latter novel received a cruel banning treatment to the point where the book was outright unpublished and unprinted for centuries.



1881

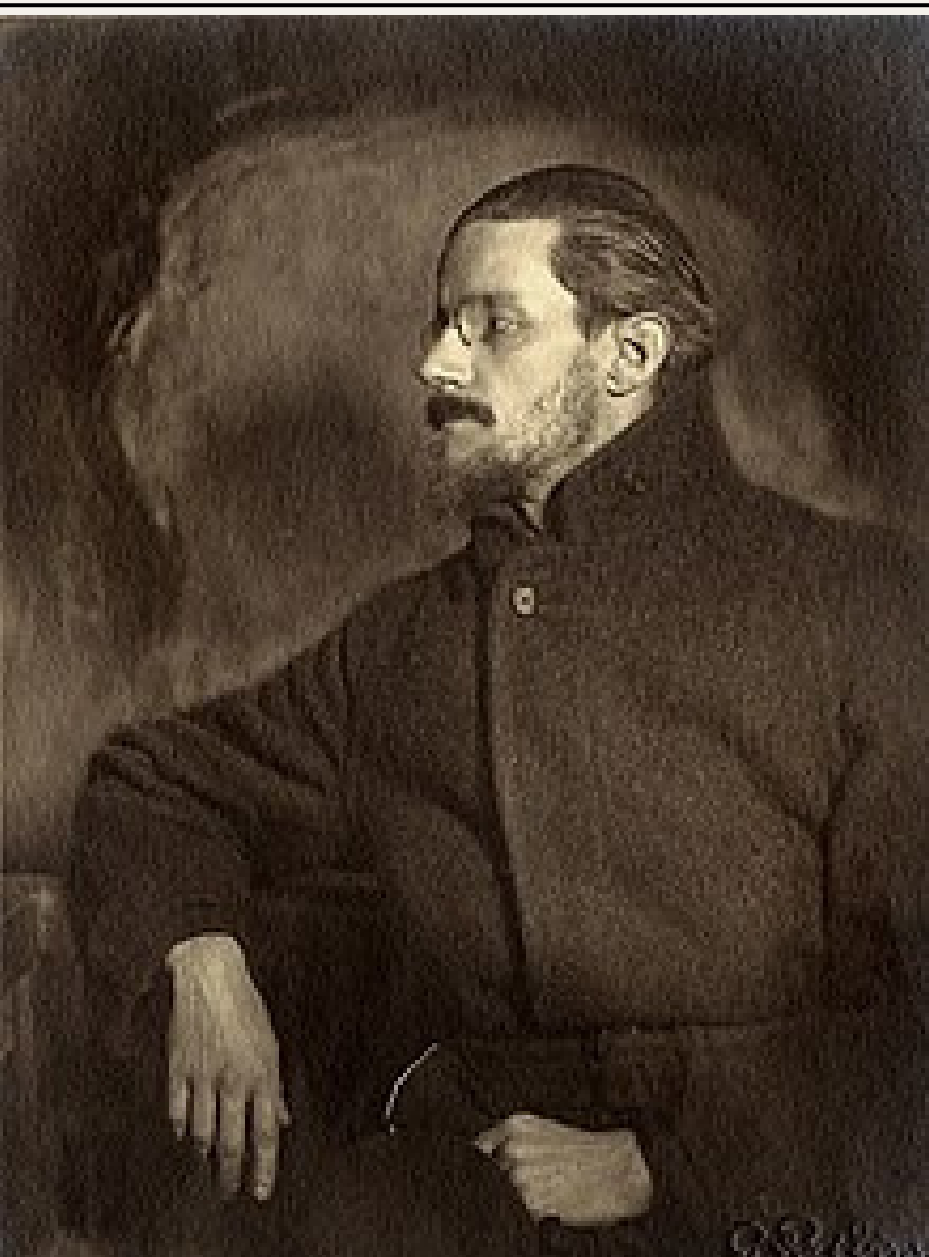
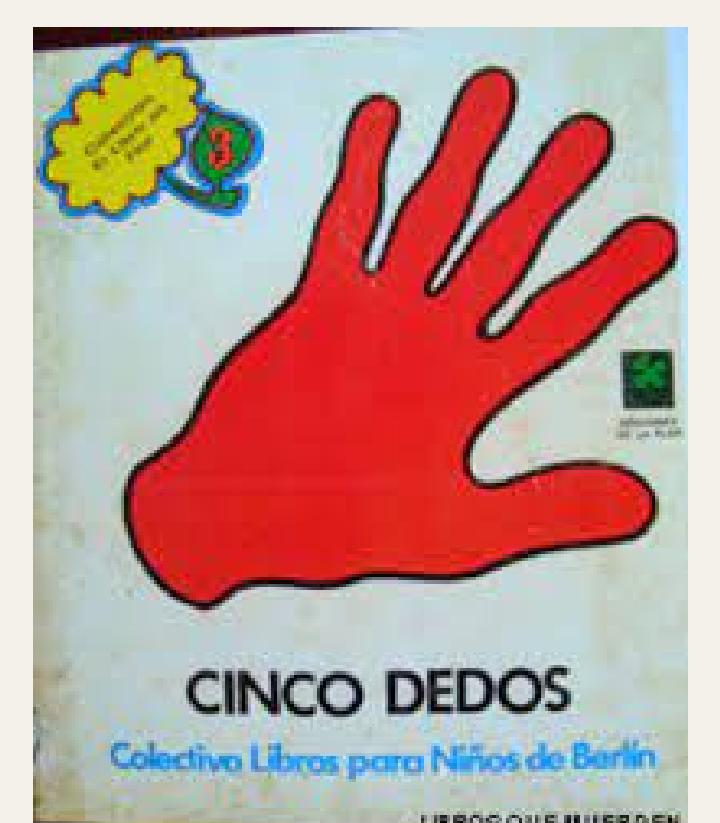
Walt Whitman's famous poetry book *Leaves of Grass* was banned in Boston because of its homoerotic themes and overtly sexual language.

1922

James Joyce's *Ulysses* was investigated and prosecuted for its supposed obscenity. It was briefly banned in the United States after an investigation by New York State.

1975

Argentine children's book *Cinco Dedos* was banned because of some vague anti-military sentiments, despite the fact that this was not the author's intention.



Book Burning Throughout History

Egypt, 640 AD

In Egypt, 640 AD, the Library of Alexandria was burned. It is said that the library was destroyed when Omar the Caliph told his commander to destroy the manuscripts housed in the library.



Knuth, R., English, J. (2003). *Libricide: the regime-sponsored destruction of books and libraries in the twentieth century*. United Kingdom: Praeger. Pg. 55–56

Spain, 1478

During the Spanish Inquisition, both people and books were condemned and burned. People deemed heretical by the church were, occasionally, sent to be burned alongside their books. Other books that were burnt during the Inquisition were Lutheran books.

Bosmajian, H. A. (2006). *Burning books*. United Kingdom: McFarland.

Mexico, 1562

Spanish Priests in Mexico burned Mayan codices. The hieroglyphic texts were burned by the missionaries, citing that that contained pagan beliefs.

Foster, L. V. (2005). *Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Germany, 1933

In Germany, 1933, books written by Jewish authors, Communist authors, and others considered “un-German” were burned in a large bonfire by students in Nazi uniforms. Other similar incidents occurred across the country.

Ovenden, R. (2020). *Burning the Books: A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge*. United States: Harvard University Press.



Chile, 1973

Under the Pinochet regime, books considered “subversive” to the nation were burned, and books were also taken from universities to be burned.

Bosmajian, H. A. (2006). *Burning books*. United Kingdom: McFarland.

Sri Lanka, 1981

The library in Jaffna was burned down during anti-Tamil riots, causing the loss of thousands of books and rare palm leaf manuscripts. The destruction of these materials led many Tamils to believe that the Sinhalese-Buddhist state was trying to erase their culture.

DeVotta, N. (2009). *The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka*. *Asian Survey*, 49(6), 1021–1051.



Bosnia, 1992

By 1993, 1,000 mosques had been destroyed by Serbian forces in Bosnia. Among them were the Emperor’s Mosque and the Podgraska Mosque, which housed rare manuscripts and historical documents.

Knuth, R., English, J. (2003). *Libricide: the regime-sponsored destruction of books and libraries in the twentieth century*. United Kingdom: Praeger. Pg. 124

Mali, 2013

The Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research in Timbuktu, was burned by Islamic militants in 2013, as they fled the city. The Institute housed 30,000 manuscripts, and many were lost in the fire, but many were also saved.

News of the Week. (2013). *Science*, 339(6120), 632–634. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23365892>