

Banned Books of the Past

Since ancient times books have been the subject of censorship. Usually these books were condemned to be burnt, in order to destroy them and the ideas they contained completely. While books are not often burnt today, we do remove them from school and library shelves or refuse to carry them in bookstores.

At some points in time so many books were banned or burnt it would be impossible to fit all of them into this whole issue, let alone just two pages. So, this brief historical outline will highlight some better known books that have been censored, banned or burned and why this happened.



900 BCE to 500 CE

Ancient Greece and Rome: Books that criticize or go against the religion, morals or politics of the time are publicly burnt

300 CE

The rise of Christianity: Books that depict the Gods of the Greek and Roman people are banned and burnt

640 CE

The library of Alexandria's collection of 200,000 volumes is burnt under the orders of Caliph Omar who captured the city.

1100-1700

Books against current rulers, religions, and political decisions are burnt.

Fiction books were not generally written during this time period, so most banned and burned books are what we would consider non-fiction today.

1525

English versions of The Bible are burned by the English Church because they believe The Bible should be available only in Latin

1559

The Index Librorum Prohibitorum is first created. This is a list of books that Catholics are told not to read.

1640

Books on the subject of divorce are burned

1726

Gulliver's travels by Jonathan Swift was denounced as "obscene and wicked" because it satirized the political scene of England at the time

1788

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is banned from performance because of his depiction of royalty



Books are so scandalous these days!

Oh! I so agree.



Ugh! What a horrid piece of writing!



I don't care if I never see another book!

Man! Some books are a real downer.



1800 *Adam Bede* by George Eliot is removed from the shelves in many circulating libraries because it is considered "lewd"

George Eliot was actually the pseudonym for a woman writer, which may be another reason this book was banned.

1800 *Tess D'Urbervilles* by was banned from circulating libraries because the main character gives birth to a child without being married

1830 Copies of *The Book of Mormon* are banned and destroyed in the U.S.

1850 The U.S. and Russia ban *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne because it depicts "bad morals"

1885 *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain is banned in the U.S. It continues to be one of the most challenged books even today because of racial issues.

1915 Many of D.H. Lawrence's books were banned. *Lady Chatterly's Lover* is still unavailable in many countries today as it considered sexually explicit.

1933 A nation-wide book burning occurred in Nazi Germany on May 10, 1933. Most books were by Jewish authors

1955 *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov is seized by customs at British points of entry.

1960 *Dr. Doolittle* is cleaned of racial references which are used by a parrot in the story

The trial of Penguin Books on the grounds of publishing an obscene book, the aforementioned *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, occurs in England.

1978 *Gone with the Wind* and *Silas Marner* are challenged in California high schools

1983 The Diary of Anne Frank is challenged because it is "a real downer" and contains some sexuality.

Many of the books shown in this timeline are discussed on the website of the Kenneth Spencer Research library. For more information, visit their website at: <http://spencer.lib.ku.edu/exhibits/bannedbooks/bannedbooks.html>.