

# CENSORSHIP, BEST QUOTES ON

The only valid censorship of ideas is the right of people not to listen

--Tom Smothers

The wonderful thing about libraries and bookstores—even the television or the radio—is that no one is forcing you to read anything, or to go to any particular movie, or to watch something on television or listen to something on the radio. You have free choice.

--Judith Krug

They condemn what they do not understand.

--Cicero

The books that the world calls immoral are the books that show the world its own shame.

--Oscar Wilde

If there had been a censorship of the press in Rome we should have had today neither Horace nor Juvenal, nor the philosophical writings of Cicero.

--Voltaire

To limit the press is to insult a nation; to prohibit reading of certain books is to declare the inhabitants to be either fools or slaves: such a prohibition ought to fill them with disdain.

—Claude Adrien  
Helvétius

Without free speech no search for truth is possible; without free speech progress is checked and the nations no longer march forward toward the nobler life which the future holds for man. Better a thousandfold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech. The abuse dies in a day, but the denial stays the life of the people, and entombs the hope of the race.

--Charles Bradlaugh

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Younis:

I wish you great success in banning the book *Boss* from your local high school. And I offer my support. It is a filthy sex perverted book filled with shocking language and scenes too horrible to mention. Why, it would probably make Harold Robbins blush. I hope that erotic, unspeakable book is banned before the birthrate in your town soars.

By the way—I have another book on the market right now. If there's anything you can do about getting that one banned, too, I'd really appreciate it.

--Mike Royko

And on the subject of burning books: I want to congratulate librarians, not famous for their physical strength or their powerful political connections or their great wealth, who, all over this country, have staunchly resisted anti-democratic bullies who have tried to remove certain books from their shelves, and have refused to reveal to thought police the names of persons who have checked out those titles.

So the America I loved still exists, if not in the White House or the Supreme Court or the Senate or the House of Representatives or the media. The America I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries.

—Kurt Vonnegut

One of the curious things about censorship is that no one seems to want it for himself. We want censorship to protect someone else; the young, the unstable, the suggestible, the stupid. I have never heard of anyone who wanted a film banned because otherwise he might see it and be harmed.

—Edgar Dale

Censorship, in any form, represents a lack of trust in the judgment of the individual. The passage of time provides the best perspective for sorting the wheat from the chaff.

--Bruce E. Fleury

[Censors are] people with secret attractions to various temptations....They are defending themselves under the pretext of defending others, because at heart they fear their own weaknesses.

--Ernest Jones

I am mortified to be told that, in the United States of America, the sale of a book can become a subject of inquiry, and of criminal inquiry too.

--Thomas Jefferson

The ultimate censorship is the flick of the dial.

--Tom Smothers

The sooner we all learn to make a distinction between disapproval and censorship, the better off society will be...Censorship cannot get at the real evil, and it is an evil in itself.

--Granville Hicks

If in other lands the press and books and literature of all kinds are censored, we must redouble our efforts here to keep them free.

--Franklin Delano  
Roosevelt

You have a right to burn books or destroy books if you can prove they can do harm.

--Professor Thomas  
Devine

The burning of an author's books, imprisonment for opinion's sake, has always been the tribute that an ignorant age pays to the genius of its time.

--Joseph Lewis

English teachers and their students must have freedom to read and see and think and discuss and learn if there is any hope of reality entering the classroom. Where censors grant teacher 'limited' freedom as long as students read only 'wholesome' books and 'uplifting' magazines about 'good' Americans and 'happy' things, view only 'suitable' and 'clean' and 'Christian' films, create only 'optimistic' and 'positive' and 'inspirational' media materials, and discuss only 'noncontroversial' and 'safe' topics, there is no possibility of education and the search for truth, only the indoctrination into the community's contemporary mores.

—Kenneth L. Donelson

Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us.

--William O. Douglas

Censorship, like charity, should begin at home; but unlike charity, it should end there.

--Clare Boothe Luce

Books won't stay banned. They won't burn. Ideas won't go to jail. In the long run of history, the censor and the inquisitor have always lost. The only sure weapon against bad ideas is better ideas. The source of better ideas is wisdom. The surest path to wisdom is a liberal education.

--Alfred Whitney  
Griswold

The books worth going to bat for to defend against censorship are those that share some serious, honest thinking about the state of the world young readers live in, and that offer some hopeful approaches to living in it as fully as possible. It's these books, both past and future publications, that I fear will suffer along with those that are out-of-date and in poor taste, if writers and editors aren't able to make the fine distinctions prior to the censor's attack.

--Dorothy Briley

To suppress the freedom of the arts is not only to cut off knowledge of the actual movements of human feeling but also, and more disastrously, contact with the realities of life. For those contacts can be renewed only by the continually new intuition of the artist.

--Joyce Cary

I never heard of anyone who was really literate or who ever really loved books who wanted to suppress any of them. Censors only read a book with great difficulty, moving their lips as they puzzle out each syllable, when somebody tells them that the book is unfit to read.

--Robertson Davies

Censors are necessary, increasingly necessary, if America is to avoid having a vital literature.

--Don Marquis

In some respects the life of a censor is more exhilarating than that of an emperor. The best the emperor can do is to snip off the heads of men and women, who are mere mortals. The censor can decapitate ideas which but for him might have lived forever.

--Heywood Broun

We are willing enough to praise freedom when she is safely tucked away in the past and cannot be a nuisance. In the present, amidst dangers whose outcome we cannot foresee, we get nervous about her, and admit censorship.

--E. M. Forster

Where there is official censorship it is a sign that speech is serious. Where there is none, it is pretty certain that the official spokesmen have all the loud-speakers.

--Paul Goodman

No government ought to be without censors; and where the press is free, no one ever will.

--Thomas Jefferson

The problem of freedom in America is that of maintaining a competition of ideas, and you do not achieve that by silencing one brand of idea.

--Max Lerner

No woman was ever ruined by a book.

--Jimmy Walker

A censor is a man who knows more than he thinks you ought to .

--Granville Hicks

Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

--John Milton

Wherever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn human beings.

--Heinrich Heine

We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still.

--John Stuart Mill

I wrote *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn* for adults exclusively, and it always distresses me when I find that boys and girls have been allowed access to them. The mind that becomes soiled in youth can never again be washed clean.

--Mark Twain

Literature should not be suppressed merely because it offends the moral code of the censor.

--Justice William O.  
Douglas

Any sort of censorship is extremely dangerous. Nobody is wise enough to be a censor.

--Maxwell E. Perkins

The way to kill germs and maggots is to bring them into the open, where they are recognized for what they are. It is when they are allowed to propagate under stones and in darkness that they grow strong and more harmful.

--Maxwell E. Perkins

There's nothing that can stimulate interest in a book as quickly as when somebody tries to ban it.

--Mike Royko

There's only one person a writer should listen to, pay any attention to. It's not any damn critic. It's the reader.

--William Styron

The public is the only critic whose judgment is worth anything at all...Many wiser and better men than you poo-pooed Shakespeare, even as late as two centuries ago; but that old party has outlived these people.

--Mark Twain

Give me six lines written by the most honorable of men, and I will find an excuse in them to hang him.

--Cardinal Richelieu

If we think we regulate printing, thereby to rectify manners, we must regulate all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightful to man.

--John Milton

Every society has a right to preserve public peace and order, and therefore has a good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have dangerous tendency....No member of a society has a right to teach any doctrine contrary to what the society holds to be true.

--Samuel Johnson

Did you ever hear anyone say, "That work had better be banned because I might read it and it might be very damaging to me?"

--Joseph Henry Jackson

So many new ideas are at first strange and horrible though ultimately valuable that a very heavy responsibility rests upon those who would prevent their dissemination.

--J. B. S. Haldane

Free speech is to a great people what winds are to oceans and malarial regions, which waft away the elements of disease and bring new elements of health; and where free speech is stopped, miasma is bred, and death comes fast.

--Henry Ward Beecher

Thought that is silenced is always rebellious ... Majorities, of course, are often mistaken. This is why the silencing of minorities is always dangerous. Criticism and dissent are the indispensable antidote to major delusions.

--Alan Barth

Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard.

--Felix Frankfurter

Censorship reflects a society's lack of confidence in itself.

--Potter Stewart

It is folly for an eminent man to think of escaping censure, and a weakness to be affected with it. All the illustrious persons of antiquity, and indeed of every age in the world, have passed through this fiery persecution.

--Joseph Addison

Only the suppressed word is dangerous.

--Ludwig Börne

Pontius Pilate was the first great censor, and Jesus Christ the first great victim of censorship.

--Ben Lindsay

There is censorship in this country, all right, make no mistake about that, but also make no mistake about its source....While the government will not censor, apparently the networks will. The irreparable damage to the public is all the same.

--Nicholas Johnson

It is...a scandal beyond irony that thanks to the energetic litigation of 'civil liberties' fanatics, pornographers enjoy expansive First Amendment protection while first graders in a Nativity play are said to violate First Amendment values.

--George Will

Children have a lot more to worry about from the parents who raised them than from the books they read.

--E. L. Doctorow

No matter whose lips that would speak, they must be free and ungagged. The community which dares not protect its humblest and most hated member in the free utterance of his opinions, no matter how false or hateful, is only a gang of slaves. If there is anything in the universe that can't stand discussion, let it crack....Let us always remember that he does not really believe his own opinions, who dares not give free scope to his opponent.

--Wendell Phillips

The nation relies upon public discussion as one of the indispensable means to attain correct solutions to problems of social welfare. Curtailment of free speech limits this open discussion. Our whole history teaches that adjustment of social relations through reason is possible when free speech is maintained.

--Stanley F. Reed

Heretical views arise when the truth is uncertain, and it is only when the truth is uncertain that censorship is invoked.

--Bertrand Russell

Assassination is the extreme form of censorship.

--George Bernard Shaw

It is a common heresy and its graves are to be found all over the earth. It is the heresy that says you can kill an idea by killing a man, defeat a principle by defeating a person, bury truth by burying its vehicle.

--Adlai E. Stevenson

The first principle of a free society is an untrammelled flow of words in an open forum.

--Adlai E. Stevenson



Dictatorships of the right and left live by censorship. The United States is the last citadel of democracy capable of defying the rising tide of totalitarianism. So long as its foundations rest on the Bill of Rights, the citadel will stand.

—Morris L. Ernst &  
Alexander Lindey

Since direct political discussion was prohibited, all literature tended to become a criticism of Russian life, and literary criticism but another form of social criticism....If the censor forbade explicit statement, he was skillfully eluded by indirection—by innocent seeming tales of other lands or times, by complicated parables, animal fables, double meanings, overtones, by investing apparently trivial events with the pent-up energies possessing the writer, so that the reader became compelled to dwell upon them until their hidden meanings became manifest.

--Bertram Wolfe

If the First Amendment means anything, it means that a state has no business telling a man, sitting alone in his own house, what books he may read or what films he may watch.

—Justice Thurgood  
Marshall

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind....If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.

--John Stuart Mill

None of us would trade freedom of expression for the narrowness of the public censor. America is a free market for people who have something to say, and need not fear to say it.

--Hubert H. Humphrey

Censorship always defeats its own purpose, for it creates, in the end, the kind of society that is incapable of exercising real discretion.... In the long run it will create a generation incapable of appreciating the difference between independence of thought and subservience.

--Henry Steele  
Commager

Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us.

--William O. Douglas

What you don't know can hurt you.

--G. Pettie

It is our attitude toward free thought and free expression that will determine our fate. There must be no limit on the range of temperate discussion, no limits on thought. No subject must be taboo. No censor must preside at our assemblies.

--William O. Douglas

It is frequently said that speech that is intentionally provocative and therefore invites physical retaliation, can be punished or suppressed. Yet plainly no such general proposition can be sustained. Quite the contrary....The provocative nature of the communication does not make it any the less expression. Indeed, the whole theory of free expression contemplates that expression will in many circumstances be provocative and arouse hostility. The audience, just as the speaker, has an obligation to maintain physical restraint.

--Thomas I. Emerson

Suppression of expression conceals the real problems confronting a society and diverts public attention from the critical issues. It is likely to result in neglect of the grievances which are the actual basis of the unrest, and thus prevent their correction.

--Thomas I. Emerson

Freedom of thought and freedom of speech in our great institutions are absolutely necessary for the preservation of our country. The moment either is restricted, liberty begins to wither and die.

--John Peter Atgeld

When indecent books no longer find a market, when pornographic films can no longer draw an audience, when obscene plays open to empty houses, then the tide will turn. Government can maintain the dikes against obscenity, but only people can turn back the tide.

--Richard M. Nixon

[When D. H. Lawrence died]

A first-class writing man is dead, and I can't help feeling that the yapping of the censors had something to do with driving a flaming spirit out of a frail body.

— Heywood Broun

Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear.

--Harry S. Truman

The general censorship wave that swept Boston in the latter part of 1929 resulted in the memorable wholesale book holocaust. When the wave subsided it was found that something like sixty-eight books by prominent authors had been swept away, among them the following:

*Dark Laughter*, by Sherwood Anderson

*Blue Voyage*, by Conrad Aiken

*What I Believe*, by Bertrand Russell

*Oil*, by Upton Sinclair

*Antic Hay*, by Aldous Huxley

*An American Tragedy*, by Theodore Dreiser

*Elmer Gantry*, by Sinclair Lewis

*The Sun also Rises*, by Ernest Hemingway

—Morris L. Ernst &  
Alexander Lindey

Prior to 1930 customs inspectors exercised complete and unquestioned sway over the moral content of books and pictures sent here from abroad. Some idea of the soundness of their judgment may be gleaned from the fact that they seized as obscene such works as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Pierre Louys' *The Songs of Bilitis* and *The Twilight of the Nymphs*, the *Arabian Nights* (both in the Burton and the Mardrus-Mathers editions), the *Satyricon* of Petronius, Ovid's *Art of Love*,... the complete works of Rabelais, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Balzac's *Droll Stories*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, ... E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*, ... despite the fact that most of these titles were readily available in this country.

—Morris L. Ernst &  
Alexander Lindey

Your honor, this book is a bucket of swill;  
    It portrays a young couple alone on a hill,  
And a woman who lived in a shoe as a house  
    With her brood—but not once does it mention her spouse,  
I submit that this book is obscene, vile and loose  
    And demand its suppression. Its name? ‘Mother Goose.’

--Unknown

The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error....The opinion which it attempted to suppress by authority may possibly be true. Those who desire to suppress it of course deny its truth; but they are not infallible. They have no authority to decide the question for all mankind and exclude every other person from the means of judging. To refuse to hear an opinion, because they are sure it is false, is to assume that their certainty is the same thing as absolute certainty. All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility.

--John Stuart Mill

All censorships exist to prevent any one from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions, and executed by supplanting existing institutions. Consequently the first condition of progress is the removal of censorships. There is the whole case against censorship in a nutshell.

--George Bernard Shaw

If there were any medium that should not be concerned with censorship, it should be TV. You have a dial.

--Burt Reynolds

Censorship is the younger of two ugly sisters; the name of the other is Inquisition.

--Ludwig Borne

The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its shame.

--Oscar Wilde

The dirtiest book of all is an expurgated book.

--Walt Whitman

One good thing about banning books is that it gets kids to read them.

--Dennis Miller

Blessed are the censors, for they shall inhibit the Earth.

--Unknown

I suppose that writers should, in a way, feel flattered by the censorship laws. They show a primitive fear and dread at the fearful magic of print.

--John Mortimer

I dislike censorship. Like an appendix it is useless when inert and dangerous when active.

--Maurice Edelman

No matter whose the lips that would speak, they must be free and ungagged. The community which dares not protect its humblest and most hated member in the free utterance of his opinions, no matter how false or hateful, is only a gang of slaves. If there is anything in the universe that can't stand discussion, let it crack.

--Wendell Phillips

I wonder why murder is considered less immoral than fornication in literature.

--George Moore

I thought the work would be very innocent, and one which might be confided to the reason of any man; not likely to be much read if let alone, but, if persecuted, it will be generally read. Every man in the United States will think it a duty to buy a copy, in vindication of his right to buy, and to read what he pleases.

--Thomas Jefferson

Without an unfettered press, without liberty of speech, all the outward forms and structures of free institutions are a sham, a pretense—the sheerest mockery. If the press is not free; if speech is not independent and untrammelled; if the mind is shackled or made impotent through fear, it makes no difference under what form of government you live you are a subject and not a citizen. Republics are not in and of themselves better than other forms of government except in so far as they carry with them and guarantee to the citizen that liberty of thought and action for which they were established.

--Senator William E.  
Borah

Our civilization cannot afford to let the censor-moron loose. The censor-moron does not really hate anything but the living and growing human consciousness. It is our developing and extending consciousness that he threatens—and our consciousness is its newest, most sensitive activity, its vital growth. To arrest or circumscribe the vital consciousness is to produce morons, and nothing but a moron would do it.

--D. H. Lawrence

We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people.

—John F. Kennedy

I have always been among those who believed that the greatest freedom of speech was the greatest safety, because if a man is a fool, the best thing to do is to encourage him to advertise the fact by speaking. It cannot be so easily discovered if you allow him to remain silent and look wise, but if you let him speak, the secret is out and the world knows that he is a fool. So it is by the exposure of folly that it is defeated; not by the seclusion of folly, and in this free air of free speech men get into that sort of communication with one another which constitutes the basis of all common achievement.

--Woodrow Wilson

I am convinced that everything that is worthwhile in the world has been accomplished by the free, inquiring, critical spirit, and that the preservation of this spirit is more important than any social system whatsoever. But the men of ritual and the men of barbarism are capable of shutting up the men of science and of silencing them forever.

—Sinclair Lewis

It is clear that censorship is not a cut and dried issue. There is a danger in thinking it is, for then the debate falters and understanding ends. We must realize that censorship will be with us always. It is a weapon to protect the order of society and the peace of communities. However, it is a two-edged sword and must be handled with care and caution. Of all professions librarianship must ensure that both sides of the debate remain alive. If the censorship side predominates, truth and moral progress suffer; if the anti-censorship side predominates, the drift to selfishness and anarchy presents a clear danger to the cohesion and order of the social system, the destruction of which brings us to barbarism, tyranny, and the loss of all freedom.

—S. D. Neill

When a librarian really believes that a book is harmful, that its content is contrary to the welfare of the community, or that it is destructive of good taste, even if those are his opinions only, he has not only the right, but also the obligation to do what he properly can to keep that book out of the hands of those whom he thinks might be injured by it.

—Jesse Shera

Once you censor Snoop, why not Public Enemy? Censorship is merely putting a band-aid on cancer. What we should be doing is addressing the deterioration of the community that this music stems from.

--The X-Man, Disc  
Jockey

There was one population shut out from the newspaper boom, though: blacks. During slavery, American newspapers ignored blacks, except when they ran wild tales claiming they had poisoned their owners or committed burglaries. (Sections devoted to them were given names like ‘The Proceedings of the Rebellious Negroes.’) By 1827, a group of freed blacks decided to found their own newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*. ‘We wish to plead our own cause,’ they wrote in their first issue. ‘Too long have others spoken for us.’ The black press was born, and soon there were dozens of black papers dotted across the country.

Getting their papers out required seat-of-the-pants ingenuity, even at the turn of the 20th century, because whites were often hostile to this upstart media. When Robert Abbott started the *Chicago Defender* in 1905, he found it hard to distribute in the South. ‘Once they realized it was out there, they tried to censor it—they’d arrest you if they saw you reading it, using vagrancy laws,’ says Clint C. Wilson II, a journalism professor emeritus at Howard University, and shipments of the paper were thrown in the trash.

—Clive Thompson

Religious concerns about the meaning and purpose of human life are accommodated to science in different ways. Catholics and liberal Protestants accept the general picture of human evolution, with God having some role in the process. At the other extreme, fundamentalists vie to substitute their interpretation, called ‘creation science.’

Scientists, having wrested their discipline from ecclesiastical control, resist mixing religious ideas into science classroom content. Most consider ‘creation science’ inherently religious. Yet many believers, fundamentalist or not, see in any science that leaves God out a science that opposes religious belief.

Educators cannot look to the courts for permanent resolution of these impasses. As Edward Larson explained in *Trial and Error* (Oxford 1985), ‘A lasting legal victory on the issue of evolutionary teaching await[s] a verdict of popular opinion on evolu-

tion—while that verdict [is] itself at least partially dependent on the content of public instruction.’ Because of the influence teaching has in swaying public opinion and law, any legal victory is likely to be temporary and subject to challenge.

Since, even-without consensus, education must proceed, the American Scientific Affiliation produced *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy*. This...booklet helps teachers distinguish religious questions from scientific ones, treat students’ religious convictions with respect, and still teach science with integrity and openness. Presented that way, evolutionary science is no threat to believers in divine creation.

—Walter Hearn

It is wonderful that even today, with all the competition of records, of radio, of television, of motion pictures, the book, has kept its precious character.

A book is somehow sacred. A dictator can kill and maim people, can sink to any kind of tyranny and only be hated, but when books are burned the ultimate in tyranny has happened. This we cannot forgive....

People...automatically believe in books. This is strange but it is so. Messages come from behind the controlled and censored areas of the world and they do not ask for radios, for papers and pamphlets. They invariably ask for books. They believe books when they believe nothing else.

—John Steinbeck

If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all—except the censor. We must know all the facts and hear all the alternatives and listen to all the criticisms. Let us welcome controversial books and controversial authors. For the Bill of Rights is the guardian of our security as well as our liberty.

—John F. Kennedy

There’s been an incredible censorship in America and throughout the world, but particularly in America where students aren’t even allowed to critically think about evolution, the issue of origins; they are not allowed to hear other points of view; they are taught incorrectly about science and taught that evolution is fact.

—Ken Ham

When you have strict censorship of the internet, young students cannot receive a full education. Their view of the world is imbalanced. There can be no true discussion of the issues.

—Ai Weiwei

Censorship exists to protect corruption.

--Suzy Kassem



The list of gifted teachers and librarians who find their jobs in jeopardy for defending their students' right to read, to imagine, to question, grows every year.

—Judy Blume

[I]t's not just the books under fire now that worry me. It is the books that will never be written. The books that will never be read. And all due to the fear of censorship. As always, young readers will be the real losers.

—Judy Blume

Could the United States government, under great duress in some future conflict or catastrophe, censor or nationalize the social-media industry? Extreme as it may sound, there is ample precedent. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln ordered the censorship of telegrams. Twelve days after Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt formally established the U.S. Office of Censorship—its official motto was 'Silence speeds victory.' Would such control of social media be advisable? Would it even be possible?

—Emerson T. Brooking  
and P. W. Singer

History proves there is no better advertisement for a book than to condemn it for obscenity.

—Holbrook Jackson

Any given censor is a fool. The very fact that he is a censor indicates that.

—Heywood Broun

Young minds - young brains - need stories and ideas like the ones in those [censored and banned] books in order to grow. They need ideas that you disagree with. They need ideas that I disagree with. Or they'll never be able to figure out what ideas they believe in.

—Lev Grossman

Books can be immensely powerful. The ideas in them can change the way people think. Yet it was the Nazis and Stalin's officers who committed terrible crimes, and not *Mein Kampf* or the *Communist Manifesto* - and of course, the Manifesto contained many key ideas that are still relevant and important today, long after Stalin has gone. There is a crucial distinction between the book and its effect - it's crucial because if you talk about a book being harmful rather than its effect you begin to legitimise censorship. Abhorrent ideas need to be challenged by better ones, not banned.

—John Farndon

Don't join the book burners. Don't think you're going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they never existed. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book.

--Dwight D. Eisenhower

Some people wouldn't read a book even if it were banned.

--Laurence J. Peter

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written.

--Oscar Wilde

As good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself.

--John Milton

There is nothing like a banned book to turn a teenager into a devoted reader.

--Malcolm Jones

God forbid that any book should be banned. The practice is as indefensible as infanticide.

—Rebecca West

Every burned book enlightens the world.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

It is wonderful that even today, with all the competition of records, of radio, of television, of motion pictures, the book, has kept its precious character.

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—John Steinbeck

Censors tend to do what only psychotics do: they confuse reality with illusion.

—David Cronenberg

Right now I think censorship is necessary; the things they're doing and saying in films right now just shouldn't be allowed. There's no dignity anymore and I think that's very important.

—Mae West

I am against censorship and believe that no films or books should be burned or banned, but film school study is one thing and a general release is another. Any new Disney film immediately becomes part of the consciousness of almost every child in America, and I would not want to be a black child going to school in the weeks after *Song of the South* (1946) was first seen by my classmates.

—Roger Ebert

The important task of literature is to free man, not to censor him, and that is why Puritanism was the most destructive and evil force which ever oppressed people and their literature: it created hypocrisy, perversion, fears, sterility.

—Anaïs Nin

We do not fear censorship for we have no wish to offend with improprieties or obscenities, but we do demand, as a right, the liberty to show the dark side of wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue—the same liberty that is conceded to the art of the written word, that art to which we owe the *Bible* and the works of Shakespeare.

--D. W. Griffith

To admit authorities, however heavily furred and gowned, into our libraries and let them tell us how to read, what to read, what value to place upon what we read, is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breath of those sanctuaries. Everywhere else we may be bound by laws and conventions—there we have none.

—Virginia Woolf

Where they burn books, at the end they also burn people.

—Heinrich Heine

Woe to that nation whose literature is cut short by the intrusion of force. This is not merely interference with freedom of the press but the sealing up of a nation's heart, the excision of its memory.

—Aleksandr  
Solzhenitsyn

Let children read whatever they want and then talk about it with them. If parents and kids can talk together, we won't have as much censorship because we won't have as much fear.

--Judy Blume

Why is contemporary China short of works that speak directly? Because we writers cannot speak directly, or rather we can only speak in an indirect way.

Why does contemporary China lack good works that critique our current situation? Because our current situation may not be critiqued. We have not only lost the right to criticise, but the courage to do so.

Why is modern China lacking in great writers? Because all the great writers are castrated while still in the nursery.

—Murong Xuecun

Children deprived of words become school dropouts; dropouts deprived of hope behave delinquently. Amateur censors blame delinquency on reading immoral books and magazines, when in fact, the inability to read anything is the basic trouble.

—Peter S. Jennison

You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.

--Ray Bradbury

Young journalists in China...had decided that there was no point in even trying to report on their society's challenges. 'Being a journalist has no meaning any more,' a person identified as 'a thirtysomething editor from one of China's leading news organisations'....'My greatest feeling is that in recent years the industry's freedoms have reached their lowest ebb in history.'

—James Fallows

Any American poet under a certain age, a fairly advanced age...has inherited a situation in which no one looks at him and in which, consequently, everyone complains that he is invisible: for that corner into which no one looks is always dark. And people who have inherited the custom of not reading poets justify it by referring to the obscurity of the poems they have never read—since most people decide that poets are obscure very much as legislators decide that books are pornographic: by glancing at a few fragments someone has strung together to disgust them.

--Randall Jarrell

Thanks to television, for the first time the young are seeing history made before it is censored by their elders.

--Margaret Mead

Science exists, moreover, only as a journey toward truth. Stifle dissent and you end that journey.

--John Charles Polanyi

Virtually every magazine, newspaper, TV station and cable channel is owned by a big corporation, and they've squashed stories that they don't want the public to know about.

—Tom Scholz

If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.

—George Orwell

The crime of book purging is that it involves a rejection of the word. For the word is never absolute truth, but only man's frail and human effort to approach the truth. To reject the word is to reject the human search.

--Max Lerner

I want all the books on the shelves. I want the books with dinosaur words like nigger that show the skeletons in our national closet. I want books with the word cunt as well as the word kike. Words don't scare me. Suppressing them does.

—E. L. Konigsburg

Words are just words; a book never harmed anyone by itself.

--Rob May

This is slavery, not to speak one's thought.

—Euripides

In 1885 Concord, Massachusetts, home town of Thoreau, banned *Huckleberry Finn* as 'trash suitable only for the slums.' In 1929 Russia blacklisted Sherlock Holmes for his 'disgraceful occultism and spiritualism.' In 1931 China banned *Alice in Wonderland* on the ground that 'animals should not use human language' and that it was 'disastrous to put animals and human beings on the same level.'

—Bennett Cerf

## AMERICA'S MOST SURPRISING BANNED BOOKS

### 1. 1961: Tarzan series, Edgar Rice Burroughs

Edgar Rice Burroughs' classic series about a man living in the jungle was pulled from the shelves of a public library in the appropriately named town of Tarzana, California. Authorities thought the adventure stories unsuitable for youngsters, since there was no evidence that Tarzan and Jane had married before they started cohabiting in the treetops. Ralph Rothmund, who ran Burroughs' estate, protested that the couple had taken marital vows in the jungle with Jane's father serving as minister. 'The father may not have been an ordained minister,' said Rothmund, 'but after all, things were primitive in those days in the jungle.'

### 2. Mid-1960s: *Where the Wild Things Are*, Maurice Sendak

Author Maurice Sendak had a hard time getting his classic children's book *Where the Wild Things Are* published, as many editors feared that troublemaker Max's imaginary adventure into a fantasy land was too dark and frightening. When the book was finally published in 1963, the book was banned because adults found it problematic that Max was punished by being sent to bed without dinner, and they also bristled at the book's supernatural themes. A 1969 column in *Ladies Home Journal* deemed the book 'psychologically damaging for 3-and 4-year-olds.'

### 3. Mid-1960s: *Harriet the Spy*, Louise Fitzhugh

*Harriet the Spy* was banned from shelves because the titular character spies. Some schools blocked Louise Fitzhugh's book from shelves when it came out in the 1960s because of concerns that the 11-year-old child's penchant for peeping on her neighbors, jotting down her brutally honest observations, and being generally disagreeable could negatively influence kids by setting a bad example. Early critics argued that Harriet 'didn't spy, but rather gossiped, slandered, and hurt other people without feeling sorry about her actions.'

### 4. 1969: The Dictionary

You might assume the dictionary is the least likely place a teen would search for illicit content, but school administrators in Alaska believed otherwise. Both *American Heritage* and Merriam Webster have been banned in various libraries and schools. In 1987, for example, the Anchorage School Board banned the *American Heritage Dictionary* for its 'objectionable' entries—particularly slang words, including 'bed,' 'knocker,' and 'balls.'

5. 1977: *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, William Steig

William Steig's *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, about an unassuming donkey transformed into a rock after finding a magic pebble, portrays a sweet-natured character wishing for the impossible. But the anthropomorphic animals in the award-winning children's book did not sit well with all audiences. In 1977, police associations in 12 states urged the libraries to remove the book, because it portrays police as pigs.

6. 1983: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Anne Frank

*Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank, chronicles the tragic experience of a Jewish family in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands, where the 13-year-old and her family hid until they were caught and sent to concentration camps in August 1944. The book has been challenged numerous times for sexually explicit passages, and, in 1983, the *Alabama State Textbook Committee* called for rejecting the book because it was 'a real downer.'

7. 1989: *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss

Beloved children's author Dr. Seuss took a stand for the environment in 1971 with *The Lorax*, which describes the destruction of an imagined forest of woolly Truffula trees. The narrator chops down the trees to use their foliage to knit clothing. While some readers may have been offended by the book's use of the word 'stupid,' it was the logging industry that was insulted by the anti-deforesting plot line.

8. 1990: *Little Red Riding Hood*, Trina Schart Hyman

When kids read *Little Red Riding Hood*, they take away the message that they shouldn't talk to strangers—especially those with big, shiny teeth. But when school officials in Culver City, California, looked at an illustrated version of the tale by Trina Schart Hyman, they saw a different message: Alcohol is yummy. They were outraged that young Ms. Hood is pictured with a bottle of wine in her basket, which granny later glugs down. 'Showing the grandmother who has consumed half a bottle of wine with a red nose is not a lesson we want to teach,' said an official.

9. 1992: *Hansel and Gretel*, The Brothers Grimm

The Brothers Grimm infamously pushed children's fairy tales to the limits—sometimes landing the 19th-century authors on the banned list. *Hansel and Gretel*, the tale of two siblings who get into trouble for eating sweets reserved for a witch, has been rejected before, but, in 1992, it was challenged again, this time by two self-proclaimed witches who said the tale gives witches a bad name.

10. 1993: *The Giver*, Lois Lowry

Since Lois Lowry's *The Giver* was published in 1993, it's been 'one of the most controversial books in American schools,' Slate reports. The dystopian young adult novel, about a 12-year-old boy's discovery of the truths behind the seemingly perfect society in which he resides, is most commonly banned for being 'unsuited to age group,' for 'violence,' or for being 'sexually explicit' because of the tough themes it grapples with, including euthanasia and drug use.

11. Mid-1990s: *Where's Waldo?*, Martin Hanford

*Where's Waldo?* rose to popularity in the mid-1990s, challenging young readers to find the lanky, bespectacled Waldo in various crowded scenes. The problem wasn't the perpetually lost protagonist; it was a sunbathing woman suffering a wardrobe malfunction the size of a pinhead in a corner of one of Martin Hanford's drawings. The exposed breast got the book banned in Michigan and New York.

12. 1996: *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare

School authorities in Merrimack, New Hampshire, found nothing amusing about Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, in which a girl washes ashore after a shipwreck, disguises herself as a page, and falls in love with her male master. That jolly cross-dressing and fake-same-sex romance was deemed in violation of the district's 'prohibition of alternative lifestyle instruction,' and copies of the play were pulled from schools.

13. 1999: *James and the Giant Peach*, Roald Dahl

Roald Dahl's fantastical novel about a boy escaping his miserable life with his aunts by entering a magical, house-sized peach has repeatedly been banned because it contains the word 'ass.' Other schools bristled at the fact that *James and the Giant Peach* mentions snuff, tobacco, and whiskey. In Wisconsin in 1999, the book was banned because of concerns the spider licking its lips could be interpreted as sexual.



14. 2006: *Charlotte's Web*, E.B. White

Even arachnophobes love *Charlotte's Web*, a heartwarming tale about the friendship between a pig named Wilbur and a wordy barn spider called Charlotte. But a parents group in Kansas decided that any book featuring two talking animals must be the work of the devil, and so had E. B. White's 1952 work barred from classrooms. The group's central complaint was that humans are the highest level of God's creation, as shown by, they said, the fact we're 'the only creatures that can communicate vocally. Showing lower life forms with human abilities is sacrilegious and disrespectful to God.'

15. 2007: Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling

While pretty much every child was devouring the final book in the Harry Potter series in 2007, one school was pulling all seven Potter books from its library shelves. The pastor of St. Joseph School in Wakefield, Massachusetts, deemed their sorcery-heavy storylines inappropriate for a Catholic school. Parents said the pastor thought most children were 'strong enough to resist the temptation,' but his job was to 'protect the weak and the strong.'

16. 2010: *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, Bill Martin

The children's picture book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* made a surprise appearance on the banned books list in January 2010 thanks to the Texas Board of Education. Author Bill Martin Jr. happens to have the same name as an obscure Marxist theorist, and no one 'bothered' to see if they were the same person.

17. 2010: *What's Happening To My Body?*, Lynda Madaras

*What's Happening To My Body?*, a classic guide to those awkward puberty years, was deemed inappropriate and banned by 21 school libraries in Texas. The father who brought the complaint in December 2010 was shocked that the book would be available to his 8-year-old. The ALA says the book has been one of the top banned and challenged titles by parents in the last decade.

—*The Week Magazine*  
Staff

Censorship had become such a menacing problem in England in the 17th century that John Milton was moved to write his famous plea for liberty of the press, 'Areopagitica.' 'As good almost kill a man as kill a good book,' was his cry, which has echoed through the centuries.

—Bennett Cerf

Two full years after *Forever Amber* had been published, the State of Massachusetts suddenly decided to brand the book obscene, and vendors of same liable to criminal action. Happily, the attempt proved futile, but it did boost the sale to two million, and provided Attorney General George Rowell, spearheading the prosecution, with the opportunity to present this absorbing statistical analysis of the book:

70 references to sexual intercourse

39 illegitimate pregnancies

7 abortions

10 descriptions of women dressing, undressing, or bathing in the presence of men

5 references to incest, 10 to the badger game

13 ridiculing marriage

49 'miscellaneous objectionable passages'

Mr. Rowell concluded his indictment by declaring, 'The references to women's bosoms and other parts of their anatomy were so numerous I did not even attempt to count them.'

In short, the prosecution provided a perfect capsule formula for a foolproof best-seller.

—Bennett Cerf

Censoring books that deal with difficult, adolescent issues does not protect anybody. Quite the opposite. It leaves kids in the darkness and makes them vulnerable. Censorship is the child of fear and the father of ignorance. Our children cannot afford to have the truth of the world withheld from them.

--Laurie Halse Anderson

There are worse crimes than burning books. One of them is not reading them.

—Joseph Brodsky

It was a shocking thing to say and I knew it was a shocking thing to say. But no one has the right to live without being shocked. No one has the right to spend their life without being offended. Nobody has to read this book. Nobody has to pick it up. Nobody has to open it. And if you open it and read it, you don't have to like it. And if you read it and you dislike it, you don't have to remain silent about it. You can write to me, you can complain about it, you can write to the publisher, you can write to the papers, you can write your own book. You can do all those things, but there your rights stop. No one has the right to stop me writing this book. No one has the right to stop it being published, or sold, or bought, or read.

--Philip Pullman

If you're burning a Harry Potter book you need some serious counseling, you don't get it, you're missing the whole point.

—Michael Berryman

Any book worth banning is a book worth reading.

--Isaac Asimov

A censor is an expert in cutting remarks. A censor is a man who knows more than he thinks you ought to.

--Laurence J. Peter

I hate it when people apologize for what they read. Some bestsellers aren't exactly literary. So what? They're fun and rip-roaring. Who instituted the book police and why do we have to answer them? Grrrrr!

--Jennifer Donnelly

The worst thing about censorship is xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

—Internet Meme

I don't think there is such a thing as a bad book for children. Every now and again it becomes fashionable among some adults to point at a subset of children's books, a genre, perhaps, or an author, and to declare them bad books, books that children should be stopped from reading. I've seen it happen over and over; Enid Blyton was declared a bad author, so was RL Stine, so were dozens of others. Comics have been decried as fostering illiteracy.

It's tosh. It's snobbery and it's foolishness. There are no bad authors for children, that children like and want to read and seek out, because every child is different. They can find the stories they need to, and they bring themselves to stories. A hackneyed, worn-out idea isn't hackneyed and worn out to them. This is the first time the child has encountered it. Do not discourage children from reading because you feel they are reading the wrong thing. Fiction you do not like is a route to other books you may prefer. And not everyone has the same taste as you.

—Neil Gaiman

Open your newspaper—any day of the week—and you will find a report from somewhere in the world of someone being imprisoned, tortured or executed because his opinions or religion are unacceptable to his government.

—Peter Benenson

It is very, very easy not to be offended by a book. You just have to shut it.

—Salman Rushdie

Books are dynamic and vital, capable of changing the whole direction of events; sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. Throughout history, there is ample evidence that books are not inanimate, peaceful articles belonging to the cloistered shades and academic quiet of monasteries, universities, and other retreats from an evil, materialistic world.

The incidence of book burnings, banishment and murder of writers, and the suppression of ideas and opposition by dictators down through the ages to the present, bear mute testimony to the power—the explosive forces pent up in books.

—Archie L. Lejeune

Too many adults wish to ‘protect’ teenagers when they should be stimulating them to read of life as it is lived.

—Margaret A. Edwards

Blaming the library for exposure to pornography is like blaming the lake if your child walks up to it alone, falls in and then drowns.

—David Sawyer

Censors don’t want children exposed to ideas different from their own. If every individual with an agenda had his/her way, the shelves in the school library would be close to empty.

—Judy Blume

Censorship is alive, well, and thriving in many of America’s schools and libraries. How can we reinforce the fundamental tenet that censorship is just plain unAmerican, that it erodes the freedoms the Constitution guarantees, and that it is inimical to our democratic Republic? When censors are not convinced by either our arguments or the record of our history as a free people then how can we frustrate and deter their efforts without shutting off their right to free speech.

—Kevin Mattson

...a strategy that has been deployed by illiberal political leaders around the world. Rather than shutting down dissenting voices, these leaders have learned to harness the democratizing power of social media for their own purposes—jamming the signals, sowing confusion. They no long need to silence the dissident shouting in the streets; they can use a megaphone to drown him out. Scholars have a name for this: censorship through noise.

—McKay Coppins

We must each students about their First Amendment rights rather than restrict their use of particular books and materials. As educators, we must encourage students to express their own opinions while respecting the views of others.

—Pat R. Scales

We have still to insure...that all that can be thought and known is kept plainly, honestly, and easily available to the ordinary men and women who are the substance of mankind.

—H. G. Wells

The same forces that took over public spaces to erect monuments to the Confederacy and its white supremacist tenets also kept a tight grip on the history taught to Southern pupils. The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) spent decades shaping and reshaping textbooks to put a strong emphasis on Lost Cause views of the Civil War and Reconstruction, which glorified the white supremacist foundations of the Confederacy and was used to justify segregation and authoritarian Jim Crow governance. ‘With all the attention they received in terms of reference to the monuments, I think their most lasting impact was in controlling and censoring textbooks,’ said Kevin Levin, a historian who has written on the Civil War in American memory. ‘That’s often overlooked.’

—Brian Lyman

Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the tooth fairy—are part of American culture. But when it comes to teaching history, it’s time to come clean. We’ve been lying to our kids for a long time. In the U.S., this idea that we’re going to censor things until we think kids are ready—that’s a part of the problem, because eventually you have to unlearn all the things that were partial truths or full-out lies.

—Corey Winchester

As adults we choose our own reading material. Depending on our moods and needs we might read the newspaper, a blockbuster novel, an academic article, a women’s magazine, a comic, a children’s book, or the latest book that just about everyone is reading. No one chastises us for our choice. No one says, ‘That’s too short for you to read.’ No one says, ‘That’s too easy for you, put it back.’ No one says ‘You couldn’t read that if you tried—it’s much too difficult.’

Yet if we take a peek into classrooms, libraries, and bookshops we will notice that children’s choices are often mocked, censored, and denied as valid by idiotic, interfering teachers, librarians, and parents. Choice is a personal matter that changes with experience, changes with mood, and changes with need. We should let it be.

—Mem Fox

That if you take a law like evolution and you make it a crime to teach it in the public schools, tomorrow you can make it a crime to teach it in the private schools? And tomorrow you may make it a crime to read about it. And soon you may ban books and newspapers. And then you may turn Catholic against Protestant, and Protestant against Protestant, and try to foist your own religion upon the mind of man. If you can do one, you can do the other. Because fanaticism and ignorance is forever busy, and needs feeding. And soon, your Honor, with banners flying and with drums beating we'll be marching backward, BACKWARD, through the glorious ages of that Sixteenth Century when bigots burned the man who dared bring enlightenment and intelligence to the human mind

—Henry Drummond

We are in a time when authors' reputations are overturned, their works removed from reading lists, their achievements devalued because of their blindness on questions we now see with different eyes.

—Drew Gilpin Faust  
(2020)

I want all the books on the shelves. I want the books with dinosaur words like nigger that show the skeletons in our national closet. I want books with the word cunt as well as the word kike. Words don't scare me. Suppressing them does.

—E. L. Konigsburg

I am of course confident that I will fulfill my tasks as a writer in all circumstances—from my grave even more successfully and more irrefutably than in my lifetime. No one can bar the road to truth, and to advance its cause I am prepared to accept even death. But may it be that repeated lessons will finally teach us not to stop the writer's pen during his lifetime? At no time has this ennobled our history.

—Alexandr Solzhenitsyn

My own prescription for making poetry popular in the schools would be to ban it—with possession treated as a serious misdemeanor, and dealing as a felony.

—Clive James

Numerous teachers...are questioning the central focus on Shakespeare in the English curriculum noting that 'with plenty of misogyny, racism, homophobia, classism, anti-Semitism, and misogynoir,' his work is problematic and outdated. Teachers' new approaches include studying Shakespeare alongside contemporary literature, using Shakespeare as an opportunity to analyze global perspectives, adding authors 'to enrich study of Shakespeare,' and some are replacing Shakespeare entirely.

—Caroline M. Kisiel  
(2021)