

Forbidden books in English

Books have been challenged and even forbidden since people started writing them. A Roman emperor banned the *Odyssey* because it spoke of freedom. The largest library of the ancient world – the one in Alexandria – was burned to the ground. Bonfires were made for books in Nazi Germany.

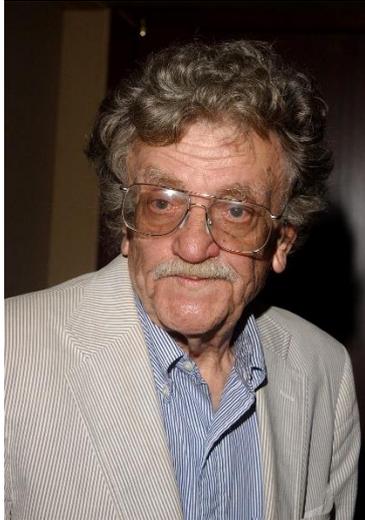
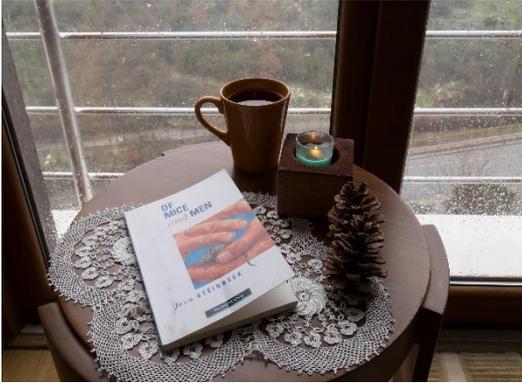
Do you think banning books is a thing of the past? Believe it or not, this still happens today. Below are some of the books that have been banned even in this century.



George Orwell's *Animal Farm* was written during the rise of communism in the Soviet Union. It attacks absolute power in the hands of a few, which leads to corruption. Nevertheless, some people have also seen it as promoting communism. In the Muslim world it has been banned because it mentions alcohol and talking pigs.

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger is both one of the most-assigned books in many schools, and one of the most challenged books of all times. Although it was written for adults, it tells the story of a troubled teenager. Many young people identify with how it talks about teenage anxiety, alienation from the world and a superficial society. Unfortunately, the same things that make it popular have put it on many lists of forbidden literature.

Through a series of diary entries and letters, *The Color Purple* follows the lives of black women living in the US South in the 1930s. Although the novel won Alice Walker a Pulitzer Prize, its violent content has also made it unwelcome in many places. It was an X-rated book as recently as ten years ago.



John Steinbeck's novella *Of Mice and Men* tells the story of two migrant ranch workers, who move from place to place in California, searching for new jobs. While some consider it a literary masterpiece, others have challenged it because of vulgarities, as well as language which is offensive towards African Americans, women, and the developmentally disabled people.

Despite its name, *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut does not directly talk about killing people or animals. Nevertheless, it is set in World War 2 and describes acts of violence, for which it was banned. It incorporates strange events, hallucinations, and time travel to tell an anti-war story that has often been kept off the library shelves. In some parts of the US, only students who have permission from their parents can read it.

Satanic Verses are not a novel about Satan! The story follows two migrants whose fortunes change, and talks about forgiveness, and how powerful jealousy can be. However, many Muslims believe it is insulting to their faith and the Qur'an. Therefore, it has been banned in many countries since it was published 30 years ago. Its author, Salman Rushdie, has even been sentenced to death in some countries.

Questions:

- 1) Does your family own one or more of the books mentioned?
- 2) What are the main reasons for banning these texts?
- 3) Are there books or texts you are not allowed to read? Or, perhaps, music you are warned not to listen to, or TV shows and films you should not see?
- 4) Do you think forbidding art is alright, because not every topic is for every person, or not alright, because each person should decide for themselves? Try to argue both sides.
- 5) Who should decide what children and adults can or cannot read, watch, or listen to?
- 6) Can you find other examples of forbidden art forms?