**Lesson 1: Lecture Notes**

**The History of Book Burning**

1. Introductory prompts:
   1. *When do you think people first started burning books?* (China, 3rd century BCE, is the first known incident. It has continued in many societies up until the present day.)
   2. *What motivates book burning?* (Can be for moral, political or religious objections to the ideas contained in the book.)

(2) Today, book burning is usually **ceremonial**

- Book burners normally aren’t trying to destroy *every* copy of a book, as in *Fahrenheit 451*. Rather, they are expressing their objections to the material in a ritualized manner.

- **However**, there have been instances throughout history in which irreplaceable material has been destroyed

- Destruction of the Library of Alexandria

- Burning of books and burying scholars under China’s Quin Dynasty

- Book burnings by the Nazi regime.

(3) General History: Book Burning Through the Ages

- Give out ‘**Book Burning through the Ages’** handout (Leave a few minutes for students to look it over)

- Have students read several of the incidents out loud

- Ask: *What kinds of books do people tend to burn?*

*-* Generally: Books that go against a belief system, be it religious, philosophical or political.

Specifically: ‘Incorrect’ versions or unsanctioned translations of religious texts; ‘heretical’ texts’; holy texts of another religion; books that go against the beliefs of a new political regime; books that challenge the existing regime; books that are considered lewd, immoral, or inappropriate;

- *Generally, what kinds of people burn books?*

- Conquerors, governments or heads of state, religious leaders/ the Church, revolutionary leaders, or anyone who adheres strongly to a certain ideal/philosophy/belief system.

- *Why were these books burned?*

- They challenged ‘appropriate’ beliefs, threatened people in power, promoted ‘undesirable’ ideas, etc.

(4) Specific History: Nazi book burning

- (Show a picture:http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2b/1933-may-10-berlin-book-burning.JPG)

- On May 10, 1933 in Berlin… “The Burning of the Books”

- S.A. and Nazi youth groups burned almost 20 000 books

- These were books from an early **sexology** research centre, and books from the Humbolt University.

Ask: *Can you think of any authors that the Nazis might want to censor? What political ideals did the Nazis promote? What were the most interested in suppressing?*

* They burnedtexts by **Heinrich Heine*,* Thomas Mann, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Karl Marx, Franz Kafka, Jack London, Emile Zola, and H.G. Wells—**to name a few.
* Many authors were Jewish, Marxists or Bolsheviks

- The goal of this ‘event’ was to rid Germany of any book that contained “unGerman ideas” and, therefore, was unfit to read.

- Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propaganda Minister, stated, “**The future German man will not just be a man of books, but a man of character”** (qtd in “May 10, 1933”).

- Reactions to the event varied.

- The Nazis were pleased by the success of the burning.  Goebbels called it ‘a strong, great and symbolic action’ and stated that ‘spirits are awakening, oh, century; it is a joy to live!”

- Goebbels did, however, instruct all German newspapers to minimize the event.

- Countries around the world, including America and even China and Japan, were shocked by the occurrence.

- There were protests all over America, and some news media called it a ‘bibliocaust’—i.e. a holocaust of books.

**Follow-up Discussion**

(1) Why do you certain populations have allowed book burning in the past (and today)?

*-Political pressure, fear, mob mentality (the need to conform), patriotism, genuine dislike of the material, etc.*

(2) We tend to equate book burning with oppression. But is there ever any justification for banning certain books (or movies, or art)? If so, what would your criteria be?

(3) Have you ever read or seen anything so offensive that you wished it would be censored? How did it make you feel?

(4) Why do you think fire is used to destroy books? What is its symbolic significance?

*- Powerful destruction, purification, cleanliness, death and rebirth, spectacle, source of heat, etc.*

**Lesson 1 Review Questions:**

**Censorship and Book Burning**

(1) Describe one instance in which you have observed or experienced censorship. Did you agree with it? Why or why not?

(2) Do you think that certain members of society deserve to be sheltered from ‘offensive’ or ‘inappropriate’ ideas? Explain.

(3) Examine your ‘Book Burning Through the Ages’ handout. Generally, who tends to burn books, and what kinds of books are burned?

(4) Were you surprised by any of the burned books that appeared on the handout? If so, why?

(5) How does book burning in *Fahrenheit 451* relate to historical book burning?

(6) What is the symbolic significance of **fire** as a tool for the destruction of books?

**Book Burning Through the Ages**

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| **Approximate Date** | **Book(s) Burned** | **Book burner(s)** |
| 213 BCE | Chinese Philosophy books | Emperor Qin Shi Huang |
| ? | Sorcery scrolls | Early converts to Christianity (at Ephesus) |
| 292 | Egyptian alchemical books | Emperor Diocletian |
| 408 | The Sibylline Books | Flavius Stilcho |
| 392 and 640 | The Alexandria libraries | Theodosius I (392)  Unknown (640) |
| 650 | Qur’anic texts (competing versions) | The 3rd Caliph, Uthman |
| 1085 | Competing prayer books (at Toledo) | Followers of the King of Castile |
| 13th century | ‘Heretical’ Cathar texts | The Catholic church |
| 1233 | Maimonides philosophy | Unknown-- Burnt at Montpellier, Southern France |
| 1410 | John Wycliffe’s books (Jan Hus’ teaching) | Illiterate Prague archbishop Zbyněk Zajic z Házmburka |
| 1480s | Non-Catholic books, especially Jewish and Arabic texts. | Tomas Torqumanda |
| 1497 | Decameron, Ovid, and other ‘lewd’ books (in Florence) | Girolamo Savonarola |
| 1499 or 1500 | Over a million Arabic and Hebrew books (at Andalucia) | Cisneros, Archbishop of Granada |
| 1525 & 1526 | William Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament | British authorities |
| 1624 | Martin Luther’s German translation of the Bible | Ordered by the Pope |
| 1760 | Anti-Wilhelm Tell tract (arguing that Wilhelm Tell was a myth) | Simon Uriel Freudenberger |
| 1842 | Religious libraries and royalist books (during the French revolution) | Robespierre |
| 1842 | Early Braille books (at Paris) | Armand Dufau, director of Paris’s School for the Blind |
| 1918 | Anti-Communist books, religious works and books in favour of Czarist history | The Bolsheviks |
| 1930-1940 | Jewish, anti-Nazi and ‘degenerate’ books | The Nazi regime |
| 1948 | 2000 comic books (at Binghamton, New York) | Burned by children, overseen by their priests, teachers and parents |
| 1953 | Communist and ‘fellow traveler’ books | Senator McCarthy |
| 1965 | Library of writer Pramoedya Anata Toer (Indonesia) | Suharto Regime |
| 1981 | Jaffna library | Sinhalese police officers |
| 1988 | *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie | Certain Muslims, who considered it blasphemous. |
| 1990s | Books ‘contrary to the teachings of God’ at Grade Cache, Alberta | The Full Gospel Assembly |
| 000s | Harry Potter books (at various American cities) | Churches |