INTRODUCTION AND GOALS

What does it mean when we ban a book? What can a book’s absence tell us about a society? In Banned Books we will read and analyze censored literature, but we will also consider meanings that are constituted by erasure. We will confront controversial and offensive writing, consider its worth, and weigh its right to exist through nuanced thinking about cultural context, practical implications, and moral philosophy. Drawing on theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and J.M. Coetzee, we will connect our readings of twentieth-century poetry and novels to the issues of free speech and censorship that we confront in our daily lives. You will have the opportunity to conduct archival research in NYU’s Special Collections in order to restore public consciousness of texts that have been censored, overlooked, or otherwise silenced.

Our in-class experience will blend discussion, guided practice, and brief lectures. We will view, listen to, and consider other forms of art and how their censorship intersects with the censored words that we read. While the texts that we read and discuss have been silenced, it is your responsibility to share your voice, thoughts, and perspectives. Since you will approach each of these texts from a subject position that emerges from a unique place and time, you have the potential to contribute important insights about how artworks that were once viewed as obscene or offensive may be seen differently.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understanding censorship history and theory
- Interpreting writing (and its absence) and images
- Conducting archival and academic research
- Historically contextualizing texts
- Engaging in productive, respectful, and intelligent arguments

RESPECT, SELF-AWARENESS, AND INCLUSIVITY

In this class, you will be required to conceptualize your thinking, writing, and education as a part of something larger than yourself. In this first step in your journey toward public discourse, you will exist in a community here in our classroom. The people sitting around this table hold an abundance of knowledge and experience that is different than your own, and so can allow you to expand your thinking. As such, you should never assume that your experience is generalizable. Please remember that almost every topic that we discuss in this class will be sensitive to some of
us. This may mean that you need to take a moment before you speak: this kind of silence is productive. If you do not yet have the language to articulate your thoughts respectfully, begin by asking questions. Active listening is a part of both respect and participation, so it is important that you actively listen when your classmates speak.

I hope to create a truly inclusive atmosphere where we can discuss controversial texts respectfully. If you feel that you cannot read one of the texts that we plan to discuss because of past trauma or religious beliefs (for example), please let me know in advance, and I will offer you an alternative assignment.

REQUIRED TEXTS
D.H. Lawrence *All of Us* (available on the course site).

ASSIGNMENTS
First Essay Assignment: Echoing Silences **Due February 14**
4 pages, 15% of the final grade
Write a three page essay about how you see the kind(s) of censorship at work in one of the texts that we have read together so far reflected in our current world. For instance, you might write about *All of Us* in relation to recent war writing or “Nausicca” and current forms of silencing women’s bodies or voices.

Second Essay Assignment and Presentation: Hidden Histories **Due March 14**
6 pages, 25% of the final grade
Your assignment is to assess how censorship shaped an artifact that you have examined in the Fales or Tamiment collections. This can be *any* kind of artifact. For example, if you are interested in food studies, you might write about menus that list “freedom toast” or “liberty cabbage.” How did different forms of censorship shape this artifact? What is the cultural or historical significance of this transformation?

10% of the final grade
Now present your findings to the class using visual, video, or audio enhancements. Make your work matter to the audience.
Third Essay Assignment: New Ideas About Banned Books  Due April 18
8 pages, 35% of the final grade
Using theories drawn from Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s “Manifests” or J.M. Coetzee’s “Emerging from Censorship,” show your readers something that they haven’t yet noticed about one of the novels or volumes of poetry that we have read. Refer to at least one academic article that you found through the NYU library databases to show how scholars currently understand this novel or volume and what you are adding to that understanding.

Creative Work: Translating Silence  Due May 10
15% of the final grade
Create a visual, auditory, or theatrical version of one of the books or volumes of poetry that we have read this semester. Pay special attention to the censorship and silencing in or of the text. This work can be digital, like a video or a podcast, or physical like a painting. Your creative work should be accompanied by a brief explanation of no more than one page.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1, JANUARY 31
Reading: All of Us (in class)

WEEK 2 FEBRUARY 7
Reading due: “Nausicaa” Episode 13 from Ulysses (284-313)
Research due: Be prepared to pitch your idea for the first essay to the class

WEEK 3 FEBRUARY 14
Reading Due: A Street in Bronzeville from The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks (1-27)
Writing Due: Essay 1
Meet in NYU Library Special Collections

WEEK 4 FEBRUARY 21
Reading Due: Lolita Part 1 (1-142)
Research Due: Historical and cultural contexts

WEEK 5 FEBRUARY 28
Reading Due: Lolita Part 2 (145-317)

WEEK 6 MARCH 7
Reading Due: Howl (9-29); Slaughterhouse Five Chapters 1-5 (1-172)
Writing Due: Essay 2 draft Chapters 6-10 (173-275)

WEEK 7 MARCH 14
Writing Due: Essay 2
WEEK 8 MARCH 28
Reading Due: The Satanic Verses Chapters I-II (3-130)
Research Due: Choose a novel or volume and a theoretical text

WEEK 9 APRIL 4
Reading Due: The Satanic Verses Chapters III-IV (131-248)
Research Due: Find a scholarly article using the NYU databases.

WEEK 10 APRIL 11
Reading Due: The Satanic Verses Chapters V-VI (210-369)
Writing Due: Essay 3 Draft

WEEK 11 APRIL 18
Reading Due: The Satanic Verses Chapters VII-IX (409-559)
Writing Due: Essay 3

WEEK 12 APRIL 25
Reading Due: The Bluest Eye Autumn and Winter (1-93)

WEEK 13 MAY 3
Reading Due: The Bluest Eye Spring and Summer (97-206)

WEEK 14 MAY 10
Creative Work Due