BANNED BOOKS

FYSEM-UA 705
Spring 2020
Tuesday 9:30-12:00
Location TBD

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Office Hours TBA

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

Salam Abdulmunem, *The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi*, Grove Press
Ai Weiwei, *Ai Weiwei's Blog*
James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Vintage
Jean Toomer, *Cane*, Liveright

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK

You can find a schedule of assignments for each essay progression in the left-hand 
menu of our classes page. Below each writing assignment is a link to a Google 
Course Kit Assignment Tool where you can submit your work. Please submit all 
written work as a Google Doc. [You can find more detailed instructions about how to use this tool here.](#)
[You can also find video instructions here.](#)
ASSIGNMENTS

First Essay Assignment: Echoing Silences Due February 11
4 pages, 15% of the final grade
Write a four-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) echoed in our current world. For instance, you might write about *All of Us* in relation to recent war writing or “Nausicaa” and current forms of silencing women’s bodies or voices.

Prewriting Exercise for Essay One

Pitches: Due February 4
The pitch should include the name of the text you want to write about, the current censorship phenomenon that you want to connect it to, your reasoning for bringing these two elements together, and what you think you might get out of them. Pitches should be about two minutes. We will workshop them in class.

Second Essay Assignment and Presentation: Hidden Histories Due March 10
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?

Prewriting Exercises for Essay Two

Research: Due February 18
Bring in an article or book that you found through the NYU Libraries. Be ready to talk about how you want to use it as context in your essay. (We will do some planning exercises in class.)

Draft: Due March 3
Bring in a complete draft of your second essay. Be ready to workshop drafts in class.

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 14
8 pages, 30% of the final grade
Using theories drawn from a theoretical text—such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s “Manifests” or J.M. Coetzee’s “Emerging from Censorship”—or from a text borrowed from a different discipline, 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.

Prewriting Exercises for Essay Three

Pitches: Due March 24
The pitch should include the name of the text you want to write about the theory of
censorship that you want to analyze it through, your reasoning for bringing these two
elements together, and what you think you might get out of them. Pitches should be about
two minutes. We will workshop them in class.

Research: Due March 31
Bring in an article or book that you found through the NYU Libraries. Be ready to talk
about how you want to use it as an argument source in your essay. (We will do some
planning exercises in class.)

Draft: Due April 7
Bring in a complete draft of your third essay. Be ready to workshop drafts in class.

Creative Work: Translating Silence Due May 5
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.

PEER ENGAGEMENT GRADE
5% of the final grade: Your “Peer Engagement” grade is comprised of how fully you participate
in peer reviews, essay workshops, and other opportunities to engage with your peers in class.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1, JANUARY 28
Theories of censorship

WEEK 2 FEBRUARY 4
Reading due: “Penelope” Episode 18 from Ulysses (608-44); Chapter I of Lady Chatterley's
Lover (3-25)
Research due: Be prepared to pitch your idea for the first essay to the class
WEEK 3 FEBRUARY 11
A Street in Bronzeville from The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks (1-27)
“Blood-Burning Moon” (19-49); “Bona and Paul” (95-107) from Cane
Writing Due: Essay 1

WEEK 4 FEBRUARY 18
Reading Due: Lolita Part 1, Chapters 1-1 (9-78)
Research Due: Historical and cultural contexts

WEEK 5 FEBRUARY 25
Reading Due: Reading Due: Lolita Part 2, Chapters 1-18 (145-222)

WEEK 6 MARCH 3
Reading Due: Howl
Writing Due: Essay 2 Draft

WEEK 7 MARCH 10
Reading Due: Slaughterhouse-Five Chapters 1-5 (1-172)
Writing Due: Essay 2

WEEK 8 MARCH 24
Reading Due: Slaughterhouse-Five 6-10 (173-275)
Research Due: Choose a novel or volume and a theoretical text

WEEK 9 MARCH 31
Reading Due: The Satanic Verses Part I “The Angel Gibreel” (1-90)
Research Due: Find a scholarly article using the NYU databases.

WEEK 10 APRIL 7
Reading Due: The Satanic Verses Part V “A City Visible but Unseen” (249-368)
Writing Due: Essay 3 Draft

WEEK 11 APRIL 14
Reading Due: The Bluest Eye Fall and Winter (1-96)
Writing Due: Essay 3

WEEK 12 APRIL 21
Reading Due: The Bluest Eye Spring and Summer (97-206)

WEEK 13 APRIL 28
Reading Due: From Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi 2003 (68-189)

WEEK 14 MAY 5
Reading Due: Entries from Ai Weiwei’s Blog (192-237)
Creative Work Due
DISABILITY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.