

# As Classic Novels Get Revised for Today's Readers, a Debate About Where to Draw the Line

The New York Times

## QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

### LEAD-IN

In pairs or in groups of three students, choose two or three questions from the list of questions below. Discuss them, provide examples, and compare your ideas and opinions:

1. In your opinion, should there be any limits on freedom of expression in literature, and if so, what should those limits be?
2. Do you believe that censorship can protect society, or does it hinder freedom of expression?
3. Can you think of any famous books that have been banned in history? Why were they banned?
4. Consider cases where authors wrote under pseudonyms to avoid censorship. What impact does anonymity have on the freedom of expression in literature?
5. Explore the idea of banned authors as "persona non grata." Can you think of examples where authors faced ostracism due to their work?
6. In your opinion, what are the reasons for altering a book or rewriting it? Do you consider this to be a form of censorship?
7. Discuss the concept of self-censorship. Can authors be influenced to alter their work without external pressure?
8. How do you think advancements in technology, like the internet or AI, have influenced the ability to censor or rewrite literature?

## I / PRE-READING VOCABULARY EXERCISES

### 1/ A BRIEF HISTORY OF CENSORSHIP & REWRITING

Put each of the following words or phrases in its correct place in the text below (PART 1 & 2):

guilty  
banned  
heretical

Bowdlerising  
deemed  
tightly

scholars  
widespread  
range from

recurrent

#### PART ONE

From Ancient Times to the Middle Ages and beyond, the wish to censor and suppress written words or speech has been a [a]..... theme in human history. The control of literary expression has taken various forms, including censorship, autodafé, [b]..... and literary rewriting. Motivations for these actions [c]..... political and religious control to the preservation of societal norms.



From the very beginnings of civilisation, the control of information was [c]..... held by ruling authorities. Greek philosopher Socrates is probably the first famous Western historical figure who was found [d]..... of impiety and brought to trial for his teachings. In ancient China, the burning of books and burying of [e]..... during the Qin Dynasty exemplified the lengths to which rulers would go to control knowledge. Similarly, in ancient Rome, certain works were [f]..... for their perceived threat to societal norms or political stability and rulers like Augustus censored works [g]..... subversive to the state.

During the Middle Ages, the influence of the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in shaping the literary landscape. The church censored works that contradicted its doctrine, branding some as [h]..... *The Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, initiated in the 16th century, listed books considered dangerous to faith and morals, leading to [i]..... bans.

dissenting  
resilient  
potent

abolish  
prevails  
erasing

obscenity  
Totalitarian  
Enlightenment

Inquisition

## PART TWO

The Renaissance marked a period of cultural progress and discoveries but it was not immune to censorship. The Catholic Church continued to suppress works, and political authorities, like the Spanish [j]....., wielded censorship to maintain control. "Autodafés" and the burning of books, a symbolic act of [k]..... ideas, became a [l]..... tool during this era.

During the period of the [m]....., Voltaire's "Candide" faced censorship due to its criticism of religion and authority. Similarly, Diderot's "Encyclopédie" was suppressed by the French government for challenging established norms. However, at approximately the same time in Northern Europe, Sweden became the first country to [n]..... censorship by law, in 1766.

In more recent times, governments have manipulated literature to serve political agendas. [o]..... regimes, such as Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, engaged in extensive book burnings to eliminate [p]..... voices.

The 20th century witnessed bans on books for reasons ranging from [q]..... to challenging social norms. D.H. Lawrence's "Lady Chatterley's Lover", James Joyce's "Ulysses" and Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" faced censorship for their controversial content. Today, countries where censorship still [r]..... include Iran, North Korea, Russia or Turkey.

Throughout history, the suppression of literature has taken many forms. Yet, even in the face of such attempts to control information, literature has proven [s]....., serving as a mirror reflecting the complexities and struggles of societies across time.

## 2/ WORDS IN CONTEXT

**Match the key words with the definitions below. Some definitions are odd-one-outs and do not correspond to any word mentioned in the first list. Then, use the words to fill in the gaps in the sentences below (conjugate the verbs and put the nouns in the plural if need be). You will find these words again in the article to read for the class:**

	WORD OR EXPRESSION		DEFINITION
1	Revered		To evoke or strongly suggest.
2	To strip		A loud, collective expression of disapproval.
3	To grapple with		Interconnected or woven together; closely associated.
4	To conjure		The arrangement of elements in a design or plan.
5	Intertwined		To tackle or deal with something difficult or challenging.
6	Outcry		To remove or take off the covering or outer layer; to bare.
7	Layout		A member of a religious organisation.
			Regarded with deep respect and admiration; honored.
			Weeping silently.
			At the top position, right at the beginning.
			To ignore or disregard.

## SENTENCES

- The graphic designer created an innovative [.....] for the book cover, ensuring a visually appealing and reader-friendly presentation.
- The workers [.....] the old wallpaper from the walls, revealing

- the original, untouched surface beneath.
- The team is [.....] with the challenges posed by the complex project, brainstorming solutions to overcome various obstacles.
  - The novel [.....] illusions that left the audience in awe and disbelief.
  - The controversial decision sparked a public [.....], with people expressing their discontent through protests and social media.
  - The [.....] author shared her wisdom and experience with the younger people in the audience, fostering a sense of respect and admiration.
  - The histories of the two families were deeply [.....], with generations of connections and shared experiences.

**Read the article: « As Classic Novels Get Revised... » published in *the New York Times* and written by Alexandra Alter and Elizabeth A. Harris**

## II/ READING COMPREHENSION

### 1/ COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

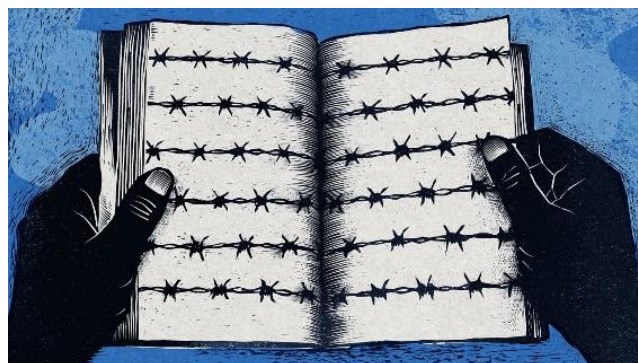
**Answer the following questions in your own words:**

#### OVERALL COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

- What is the central debate discussed in the article?
- Why are literary estates revising classic novels, and what challenges does this pose?
- Considering the pros and cons in the debate over revising literary works, why is «finding the right balance [...] a delicate act" (§4)
- According to critics, what risks are associated with altering a text posthumously?

#### DETAILED COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

- Why are current attempts to remove offensive language drawing intense public scrutiny?
- What specific changes have been made to Agatha Christie's novels and Ian Fleming's "James Bond" books? Provide examples.
- According to James Prichard, why is it important to remove offensive language from Agatha Christie's books?
- What financial and cultural stakes are associated with revising classic novels?
- How did fans of Roald Dahl react to the changes made in his children's books in February?



### III / VOCABULARY

#### 1/ SEMANTIC FIELD

Find in the text as many words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, synonyms, idioms etc) as possible related to the semantic fields of EDITING & CONTROVERSY:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

#### 2/ SYNONYMS

Find in the text a synonym for each of the following words or phrases:

- Cleaned, washed:.....
- Obviously: .....
- Outrage, insult: .....
- Narrow-mindedness, intolerance: .....
- Impertinence: .....
- Prevalent, omnipresent: .....

#### 3/ IDIOM CORNER

Match the first part of the sentences in column 1-8 with the suitable ending in column a-h.

Find out the meaning of the various idioms:

- 1) The confidential project details were shared only with a select few, and everyone involved was reminded to **keep** ...
- 2) The author refused to **toe the** ...
- 3) Despite facing criticism, the journalist declined to **pull**...
- 4) When the sensitive topic arose during the conference, the moderator quickly advised everyone to **put a** ...
- 5) Rather than addressing the internal conflict directly, the team decided to take a passive approach and start **sweeping it** ...
- 6) Recognizing the need for broader accessibility, the author chose to **water** ...
- 7) In an effort to appeal to a wider audience, the editor suggested the writer **sugar**...
- 8) The author decided to **cut to** ...

- a) ... **down** the complex scientific explanations in the book, making it more reader-friendly.
- b) ...**line** of conventional storytelling, opting instead to experiment with a unique narrative structure in the novel.
- c) ... **coat** the harsh realities depicted in the article.
- d) ... **punches** and continued to expose the corruption within the government.
- e) ... **lid on it** and focus on the agenda.
- f) ... **mum** to prevent leaks.
- g) ... **under the rug**.
- h) ... **the bone** in the final draft, removing unnecessary details and leaving only the essential parts of the story.

