

Notable Examples of Banned Poems and Poets

- **Ovid's *Ars Amatoria***: This Roman poet was exiled by Emperor Augustus in 8 CE, partly due to this risqué guide to love and seduction. His work was later banned and burned in medieval Europe and even by U.S. customs in 1930.
- **Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal***: Six poems were banned in 1857 for “crude realism offensive to public decency.” The ban wasn’t lifted until 1949.
- **Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass***: Banned in Boston in 1882 for its homoerotic themes and sensual imagery. Whitman was even fired from his government job over it.
- **Allen Ginsberg's *Howl***: Seized by U.S. Customs and led to a landmark obscenity trial in 1957. The judge ruled it had “redeeming social importance,” making it a First Amendment victory.
- **Gwendolyn Brooks' *We Real Cool***: Banned in some schools in the 1970s due to the line “Jazz June,” which was misinterpreted as sexual innuendo.
- **Shel Silverstein's *A Light in the Attic***: Banned in multiple school districts for allegedly promoting disobedience, Satanism, and cannibalism — all from a children’s poetry book.
- **Mahmoud Darwish**: The Palestinian poet’s work was banned in Israeli schools in 2000 and removed from a Saudi book fair in 2014 for “blasphemous passages”.
- **Sappho**: Her lyric poetry, celebrating queer love, was targeted as early as 1073 when Pope Gregory VII ordered her works destroyed.

Curated Reading List of Banned Poems (in English)

Poem / Collection	Poet	Reason for Ban	Notes
<i>Ars Amatoria</i>	Ovid (Roman)	Sexual content, adultery	Banned in Rome, burned in medieval Europe, banned by U.S. Customs in 1930
<i>Les Fleurs du mal</i>	Charles Baudelaire (French)	Erotic realism	Six poems banned in 1857; English translations available
<i>Leaves of Grass</i>	Walt Whitman	Homoeroticism, sensuality	Banned in Boston (1882); Whitman was fired from his job over it
<i>Howl</i>	Allen Ginsberg	Obscenity	Seized by U.S. Customs; landmark trial ruled it had “redeeming social importance”
<i>We Real Cool</i>	Gwendolyn Brooks	Misinterpreted sexual innuendo	Banned in Mississippi and West Virginia schools in the 1970s
<i>A Light in the Attic</i>	Shel Silverstein	Alleged Satanism, disobedience	Banned in multiple school districts; includes poems like

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			“How Not to Have to Dry the Dishes”
<i>Your Revolution</i>	Sarah Jones	Explicit lyrics	FCC attempted to fine radio stations; Jones sued and won
<i>Milk and Honey</i>	Rupi Kaur	Sexual trauma, feminism	Banned in some U.S. schools; widely available in English
<i>Ode to Aphrodite</i>	Sappho (Greek)	Queer themes	Works burned in 1073; English translations still challenged today
<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	Geoffrey Chaucer	Sexual innuendo, anti-Church satire	Targeted by the Comstock Act; translations banned from mail
<i>The Gypsy Ballads</i>	Federico García Lorca (Spanish)	Sexuality, politics	Banned in Spain; English translations available
<i>Human Landscapes from My Country</i>	Nazim Hikmet (Turkish)	Communist views	Banned in Turkey; written in prison, now translated into English
<i>All of Us</i> (war poems)	D. H. Lawrence	Anti-war, anti-imperialism	Censored and edited into near-unreadability
<i>October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard</i>	Lesléa Newman	LGBTQ+ themes	Banned in some schools; seven poems used in a musical oratorio
<i>A Wreath for Emmett Till</i>	Marilyn Nelson	Racial violence	Challenged for graphic content; praised for historical importance
<i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i>	Jacqueline Woodson	Race, identity	Banned despite winning multiple literary awards
<i>Ordinary Hazards</i>	Nikki Grimes	Abuse, trauma	Memoir-in-verse banned in some districts; critically acclaimed
<i>The Poet X</i>	Elizabeth Acevedo	Sexuality, religion	Challenged for being “anti-religion”; won National Book Award

These poems are either ancient, pre-1924, or legally released into the public domain:

Poem / Collection	Source for Full Text
<i>Ars Amatoria</i> – Ovid	Perseus Digital Library or Project Gutenberg
<i>Les Fleurs du mal</i> (selected translations) – Baudelaire	Project Gutenberg

Poem / Collection**Source for Full Text***Leaves of Grass* – Whitman[Bartleby](#), [Project Gutenberg](#)*Ode to Aphrodite* – Sappho[Poetry Foundation](#)*The Canterbury Tales* – Chaucer[Project Gutenberg](#)

For these, full texts may not be freely available, but here's how you can access them:

Poem / Collection**Source / Access Tip***Howl* – Allen Ginsberg

Often available in full from [Poetry Foundation](#), also included in *Howl and Other Poems*

We Real Cool – Gwendolyn Brooks[Poetry Foundation](#)*A Light in the Attic* – Shel Silverstein

Purchase or borrow via [WorldCat](#) or [Open Library](#)

Your Revolution – Sarah Jones

Lyrics posted with permission on her [official site](#); may also be on YouTube

Milk and Honey – Rupi Kaur

Purchase on major book platforms; excerpts may be available on [her site](#) or Instagram

The Gypsy Ballads – Lorca

Published by New Directions; excerpts via [Academia.edu](#) or university archives

Human Landscapes – Nazim Hikmet

Available in selected translated volumes; search local libraries via WorldCat

All of Us – D.H. Lawrence

Selections sometimes online; full version available in published collection by Faber & Faber

October Mourning – Lesléa Newman

Available via Candlewick Press and major retailers

A Wreath for Emmett Till – Marilyn Nelson

Published by Houghton Mifflin; preview available on [Google Books](#)

Brown Girl Dreaming – Jacqueline Woodson

Available from Penguin; excerpts via [Poetry Foundation](#)

Ordinary Hazards – Nikki Grimes

Available via Boyds Mills Press; preview on [Google Books](#)

The Poet X – Elizabeth Acevedo Available via HarperTeen; excerpts on [her site](#)