



0. FREE EXPRESSION IN BOOKS - Story Preface

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**2. FREE EXPRESSION IN BOOKS**

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One way that governments try to prevent the spread of knowledge is to prevent education. Slaves were not allowed to become educated, for example, during America's years of chattel slavery. Another way that governments can prevent the spread of knowledge (or freedom of expression in books) is to ban books with which government officials disagree.

The subject of this story is freedom of thought expressed in writing.

Books (and their precursors) represent the best method people have to preserve and share their thoughts and ideas. As a result, the destruction (or banning) of books represents some of the most flagrant abuses of free expression in recorded history.

If we examine how frequently books were destroyed—especially by burning—in the centuries before the American Republic, we can understand why protecting freedom of expression was a first precept in creating the legal foundations of American society. (The linked painting, "St. Dominic and the Albigenses," was created by Pedro Berruguete in 1480 and is now owned by the Prado Museum in Madrid.)

Written thoughts on clay tablets, animal skins (scrolls) and papyrus were early forms of "books." For thousands of years before the printing press, scholars wrote and scribes copied "books" by hand. Sometimes it took a year or more to write, or copy, one manuscript. Often these works were beautifully illuminated with stunning pictures and brightly colored letters.

When writers expressed new (or controversial) ideas, their books were often censored. Sometimes the banning took place immediately, but that was not always so.

When Nicolaus Copernicus, for example, published *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres* in 1543, the Catholic Church did not censor or ban his book. His thesis—that the Earth orbited the Sun (not the other way around)—was controversial, but his book was not banned until the 5th of March, 1616 (when Galileo relied on it as support for his own heliocentric ideas).

Using our world of cyber evidence, we can actually examine some of the significant writings which scribes sought to protect from certain destruction by conquering enemies or dictating governments. Along the way, we can think about writing itself—as a profession, as a way to communicate and as a method to reveal those deep thoughts which otherwise live only in our minds.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/FREE-EXPRESSION-IN-BOOKS-Book-Burning-and-Censorship)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

## Media Stream



### Burning Books: Medieval Painting

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

PD

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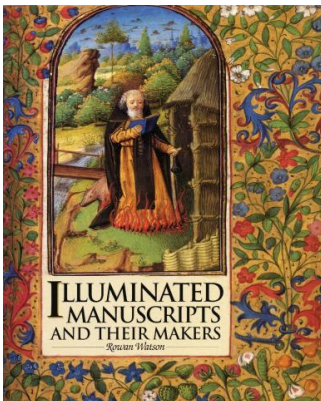


### Pedro Berruguete

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Illuminated Manuscripts and Their Makers - by Rowan Watson

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### Exploded View of Illumination Work

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