**Name:**

**Date:**

**Period:**

**C – Circle 5 words and DEFINE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/20**

**A – Ask 5 questions**

**T – Talk to the text 5 times**

**C – Capture a 5 sentence summary at the end or on another sheet of paper**

**H – Highlight key points**

**Book Burning**

"Book burning" refers to the ritual destruction by fire of books or other written materials. Usually carried out in a public context, the burning of books represents an element of censorship and usually proceeds from a cultural, religious, or political opposition to the materials in question.

Book burning has a long and dark history; and perhaps the most famous of these events, the burning of books under the Nazi regime on May 10, 1933, had a precedent in nineteenth century Germany. In 1817, German student associations (*Burschenschaften*) chose the 300th anniversary of Luther’s 95 Theses to hold a festival at the Wartburg, a castle in Thuringia where Luther had sought sanctuary after his excommunication. The students, demonstrating for a unified country—Germany was then a patchwork of states—burned anti-national and reactionary texts and literature which the students viewed as “Un-German.”

In 1933, Nazi German authorities strove to synchronize professional and cultural organizations with [Nazi ideology](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007457) and policy (*Gleichschaltung*). In keeping with this endeavor, Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, began an effort to bring German arts and [culture](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007519) in line with Nazi goals. The government purged cultural organizations of Jewish and other officials alleged to be politically suspect or who performed or created art works which Nazi ideologues labeled “degenerate.”

In an effort to synchronize the literary community, Goebbels had a strong ally in the National Socialist German Students’ Association (*Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund,* or NSDStB). German university students were among the vanguard of the early Nazi movement, and in the late 1920s, many filled the ranks of various Nazi formations. The ultra-nationalism and antisemitism of middle-class, secular student organizations had been intense and vocal for decades. After [World War I](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007429), many students opposed the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) and found in National Socialism a suitable vehicle for their political discontent and hostility.

On April 6, 1933, the Nazi German Student Association's Main Office for Press and Propaganda proclaimed a nationwide “Action against the Un-German Spirit,” to climax in a literary purge or “cleansing” (*Säuberung)* by fire. Local chapters were to supply the press with releases and commissioned articles, offer blacklists of “un-German” authors, sponsor well-known Nazi figures to speak at public gatherings, and negotiate for radio broadcast time. On April 8 the students’ association also drafted its twelve "theses"—a deliberate evocation of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses: declarations which described the fundamentals of a "pure" national language and culture. Placards publicized the theses, which attacked “Jewish intellectualism,” asserted the need to “purify” the German language and literature, and demanded that universities be centers of German nationalism. The students described the “action” as a response to a worldwide Jewish “smear campaign” against Germany and an affirmation of traditional German values.

In a symbolic act of ominous significance, on May 10, 1933, university students burned upwards of 25,000 volumes of “un-German” books, presaging an era of state censorship and control of culture. On the evening of May 10, in most university towns, right-wing students marched in torchlight parades “against the un-German spirit.” The scripted rituals called for high Nazi officials, professors, university rectors, and university student leaders to address the participants and spectators. At the meeting places, students threw the pillaged and “unwanted” books onto bonfires with great ceremony, band-playing, and so-called “fire oaths.” In Berlin, some 40,000 persons gathered in the Opernplatz to hear Joseph Goebbels deliver a fiery address: “No to decadence and moral corruption!” Goebbels enjoined the crowd. “Yes to decency and morality in family and state! I consign to the flames the writings of Heinrich Mann, Ernst Gläser, Erich Kästner.”

Among the authors whose books student leaders burned that night numbered well-known socialists such as [Bertolt Brecht](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10006080) and August Bebel; the founder of the concept of communism, Karl Marx; critical “bourgeois” writers like the Austrian playwright Arthur Schnitzler, and “corrupting foreign influences,” among them American author Ernest [Hemingway](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10006085). The fires also consumed several writings of the 1929 Nobel Prize-winning German author Thomas Mann, whose support of the Weimar Republic and critique of fascism raised Nazi ire, and the works of international best-selling author Erich Maria [Remarque](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007520), whose unflinching description of war, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Nazi ideologues vilified as "a literary betrayal of the soldiers of the World War." Erich Kästner, Heinrich Mann, and Ernst Gläser, denigrated in Goebbels’ blistering rhetoric, represented early German literary critics of the Nazi regime, although Heinrich Mann had gained fame as the author of *Professor Unrat*, which appeared in German cinemas in 1930 as “The Blue Angel”; and Kästner was primarily known for his literature for children and young adults. Other writers included on the blacklists were American authors Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Helen [Keller](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10006083), whose belief in social justice encouraged her to champion the disabled, pacifism, improved conditions for industrial workers, and women's voting rights.

Not all book burnings took place on May 10, as the German Student Association had planned. Some were postponed a few days because of rain. Others, based on local chapter preference, took place on June 21, the summer solstice, a traditional date for bonfire celebrations in Germany. Nonetheless, in 34 university towns across Germany the May 10th “Action against the Un-German Spirit” was a success, eliciting widespread newspaper coverage. In some cities, notably Berlin, radio broadcasts brought the speeches, songs, and ceremonial chants “live” to countless German listeners. The promotion of "Aryan" culture and the suppression of other forms of artistic production was yet another Nazi effort to "purify" Germany. Naturally Jewish authors numbered among the writers whose works were burned, among them some of the most famous contemporary writers of the day, such as Franz [Werfel](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007049), Max Brod, and Stefan Zweig.

Also among those works burned were the writings of beloved nineteenth-century German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, who wrote in his 1820-1821 play *Almansor* the famous admonition, “*Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen*": "Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people."

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1. Why did the Germans burn books? *Explain using evidence from the text*, as well as background novels from your history classes.

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1. What types of books did the Nazis burn? What made them choose these specific books? What ideas did these books contain that they didn’t want the population to read? *Explain using SPECIFIC* examples from the text.

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1. Books like *To Kill a Mockingbird, The Perks of Being a Wallflower, A Child Called It,* and *Romeo and Juliet,* are on a list called “Books Challenged or Banned in 2012-2013” that is effective in some high schools and middle schools in the country. These books are not taught in these schools because parents or teachers do not approve of their content. **In a detailed paragraph (or two) explain whether or not you think the idea of “banning” books in high school is similar to the idea of burning books. Which is worse? Is it OK to ban books that may have content that is not “acceptable” for young students? *Use specific examples from the article, your knowledge of history, and from some of the books listed in this question.***

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