

Name:	Class:

## **Burning a Book**

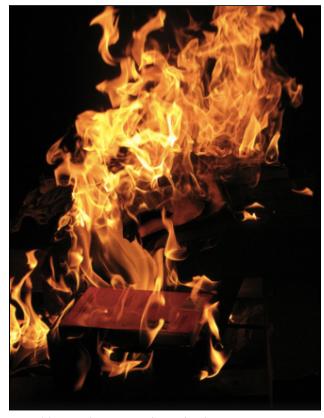
By William Stafford 1986

William Stafford (1914-1993) was an American poet. In 1970, he was named Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, a position now known as Poet Laureate. In this poem, the speaker describes book burning, a common method of censorship in which people set fire to books they object to on political, cultural, or religious grounds. In a 1991 interview, Stafford once said that he wrote this poem after purposefully burning a book that he found "attractive, shallow, [and] misleading..." "Why should I keep it around?" he thought. As you read, identify the main idea of each stanza.

- [1] Protecting each other, right in the center a few pages glow a long time.

  The cover goes first, then outer leaves curling away, then spine and a scattering.
- [5] Truth, brittle and faint, burns easily, its fire as hot as the fire lies make—flame doesn't care. You can usually find a few charred words in the ashes.
  - And some books ought to burn, trying for character
- [10] but just faking it. More disturbing than book ashes are whole libraries that no one got around to writing—desolate<sup>2</sup> towns, miles of unthought in cities, and the terrorized countryside where wild dogs
- [15] own anything that moves. If a book isn't written, no one needs to burn it—ignorance can dance in the absence of fire.

So I've burned books. And there are many I haven't even written, and nobody has.



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- 1. Charred (adjective): blackened or discolored from burning
- 2. **Desolate** (adjective): deserted; in a state of dreary emptiness