

My favorite trope in films and literature was always revealing a secret chamber by pulling a book on a shelf. There was intrigue there- you're walking through the dark rows of books, trying to figure out which one will turn the shelves into an entrance. Try one, no luck, try another, zilch!, then you pull the next one, and *voila*, you're met with a door. It could be anything, a party, a museum, a portal. Regardless, it's the promise that there's more to a story. That's what libraries are: an assurance that there's something new to learn, to experience, to share. Hidden in plain sight, our libraries are our troves of literary treasure.

I've moved 8 times in my lifetime, and attended 10 schools. I was born in Michigan, lived in New York, and eventually moved to North Carolina. My environment was constantly changing and evolving, so one of the only constants in my life was reading, and by extension, libraries. The hobbies that keep me sane were sparked by afternoon programs, the characters that give me strength were recommended to me by librarians, and my love of stories was a gift from public bookshelves.

My library is basically a second home for me- it's cozy, comforting, and most importantly, safe. I feel safe physically, surrounded by students and adults that watch out for me, forming a habitat of empathy without fear. Further, I feel safe emotionally. Every librarian I have ever met has changed lives just by being someone anyone can rely on. Libraries have impacted my work ethic, my people skills, my interests, by handing safety and kindness to me on a silver platter.

There's a book for everyone, a poem for everyone. Books and poems from centuries ago, books and poems and articles and media that document the innovation of our entire race. That's the value I see in libraries; they're a place where we have a cumulative catalog of all the shared knowledge humanity has ever recorded. They're a bridge from the past to the present, and there's

always more to their histories and stories than we know. The library of Alexandria was built in the third century BC, and despite our knowledge of it being lost, the philosophers, writers, and thinkers that it fostered paved the way for the human connection we can experience today. The Epic of Gilgamesh is public knowledge today because it was once stored in The Royal Library of Ashurbanipal, the oldest library in the world. Libraries are so important to me personally because it's a comprehensive look at everything we, 'we' being a singular, unified group of people, have accomplished. They enable my hope for the future, when I'm going through shelves full of incredible people and wondering when my name will be among them.

More importantly though, where does someone go when their classes aren't enough, and the internet is too much? Where does a student study for their North Carolina finals when they can't focus without quiet? Where does the future governor of NC go to practice their speaking skills? Libraries are an integral part of North Carolina's future because they give every single person a chance. Free resources and a studious space can make a world of difference. What I've noticed about NC compared to every other area I've lived in is community. Even the smallest town has loyal, informed citizens, who can tell you history dating back centuries. New student groups are formed constantly, often meeting at their local library. My library showcases civil rights leaders from North Carolina and celebrates local artists in a designated wing. There's a reference section filled with law documents and motifs of the area, like medals and portraits. Libraries are an ever changing hub of community, they help raise empathetic, capable, and connected citizens. For the sake of keeping that spirit alive within North Carolina, we have to protect our libraries and continue to improve them as the world changes.