

Rogue Librarians, Episode 23
Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. (Part 1: Why It's Banned)

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Welcome to the Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books.

We are your hosts, Marian. Dorothy. And unfortunately, Alanna could not be here to join us today, so we are fortunate to have a wonderful guest Rogue, and that is Heather, who we've thanked many times before for running our Twitter.

Well, we know the name has changed, but we're gonna continue to call it that, especially since we are now abandoning our Twitter account.

But Heather, we would love for you to join us in saying, we are the Rogue Librarians.

We're glad to have Heather here to discuss this book with us, but we'd also love for you to give us your two cents.

You can send us comments and questions at roguelibrarianspodcast@gmail.com.

We're feeling lonely over there. And we know we're not perfect, so please. It's OK. Let us know.

Heather, not her real name in keeping with our rogue pseudonym protocol, is not a librarian.

But I think that she deserves the title of honorary librarian because she knows as much about books as anyone I have ever met.

Heather is one of the most avid readers I've ever encountered.

I would estimate she reads 100 books a year, maybe, on average.

She has reviewed books at the special request of authors that she knows through the Internet's reading groups.

She just finds them and they love her and they ask her to read their books or they meet at conventions like the mystery book conventions.

I know there's a number of conventions that Heather goes to or did before COVID, maybe.

And she's even gotten cold calls through her Goodreads reviews.

So it's about as legit as it gets.

So she has a blog also and has interviewed authors, including Lee Goldberg, who was a writer on Monk and Anne Cleves, who wrote the book series that the Vera Stanhope and the Shetland, the two British TV series, are based on.

So welcome, Heather.

Thank you all.

I'm glad to be here.

I have to say that this is probably one of my favorite books as a kid, and I've read it at least a dozen times over the years.

And to me, it was a very personal and important book.

And so it's a great one to be jumping in on.

And it also was my first exposure to book banning, because at that young age as a kid, that was when Judy Blume's books were being banned.

And we actually had discussions at home about the ridiculousness of it all.

I remember my father particularly just talking about how absurd the whole thing was.

See, parents that have the right to teach their kids that banning books is ridiculous.

Smart parents.

And that's what they did.

Well, I'm delighted that you were here with us today, and listening to your intro, even I learned some things about you that I didn't know yet.

So thank you so much for being here.

We're going to move into our first segment, which is background.

And today we will be discussing Judy Blume's book, Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.

This is a middle grade novel, which was published for the first time in 1970.

And it was a huge commercial success for Judy Blume.

It was listed as notable for being one of the first middle grade books to discuss a woman's period.

And if that wasn't shocking enough, Margaret was also being raised with no religion.

But more on that when we get into the summary.

A few accolades the book received in 1970, the year it was published.

The New York Times selected *Are You There God?*

It's Me, Margaret, as the outstanding book of the year.

In 2010, so 40 years later, Time Magazine included *Are You There God?*

It's Me, Margaret, in its all-time 100 novels written in English since 1923.

So all-time best.

And then Scholastic, our favorite book fair and book club publishing company from all of our youths, selected the novel for its 100 greatest books for kids, 100 must read books.

And then in 2023, after its 50th anniversary, a film came out entitled *Are You There God?*

It's Me, Margaret, very closely based on the book.

The film starred Abby Ryder Fortson, Rachel McAdams and the fabulous Kathy Bates.

But what I really loved is that the trailer says, for over 50 years, one iconic book has connected generations.

Now the movie.

And I thought that would be a great segue into our summary.

So Heather, I'm going to pass it over to you if you are comfortable giving us a summary.

In this book, the main character, Margaret Simon, Margaret Simon moves with her family to a new place and has to make new friends.

And at a very turbulent time of our lives, 11, 12, the whole preteen thing.

And the book is really an exploration of her internal thoughts and communications, which she uses to talk about those ordinary, normal things that kids of that age talk about, including friends and their behavior and school, and also personal issues.

Like her father being Jewish and her mother being Christian and herself being raised with no religious upbringing, being told she could decide when the time is right, when she's older.

And it's this exploration of her thoughts and conflicts and explorations of all those topics that were affecting her in her life.

Okay, awesome.

So I'm gonna go a little bit into why the book has been banned.

Beginning right from the start in the 70s, it was frequently challenged because of its frank talk about menstruation.

Yeah, and then another main reason, really the only other main reason as far as we could tell, and we did some significant research, is that it raised a lot of eyebrows and concerns about raising a child with no religion.

Obviously, there are people in the world still today who believe that child is not being raised in religion.

That means they're not being raised with values, which, you know.

Not the same thing.

Yeah, and certainly not mutually exclusive.

No, and for anyone who's read this book, it is very clear that Margaret's parents are very kindhearted people who share really lovely values with Margaret.

Margaret is a very nice young lady.

She is raised to appreciate everyone and to consider everyone else's perspectives and to come up with her own conclusions.

And it turns out that Margaret, as she's in that adolescent, preteen stage and is starting to become more aware of the world as one does in that stage of development, she's observing the impact of religion on her friends and her family.

She wants to have a connection with God.

In fact, she secretly prays to God, thus the title of the book.

She often says exactly that, Are You There God?

It's Me, Margaret.

So she definitely has a belief in God that is prevalent in the book.

And she starts to really seek out friends of different religions and asks to go to their places of worship so that she can hope to find the God that she talks to in these places.

And she, you know, so you read about that.

But at the same time, she knows, especially because of her family's two-religion situation with her mom and her dad being different religions, she knows that religion also causes a lot of problems in her family.

And as we all know, she'll soon discover that religion causes problems in the whole world.

But it is and was and continues to be, I believe, a big issue about this book and why it's banned.

And the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of the 1990s ranked the book at number 60.

It ranked 99 on the 100 most frequently challenged books of the 2000s.

It dropped off of the ALA list for 2010 through 2020 in terms of the highest ranking.

But Judy Blume continued to be one of the most challenged authors, as she has many books that are challenged on a regular basis.

And this one was amongst them.

Back in the 80s, conservative warrior Phyllis Schlafly and Jerry Falwell made Margaret and other Blume books a target of their ire.

This is from a Politico article by Joanna Weiss, which we will be referencing a number of times.

Excellent article, written in 2023 when the movie came out.

Right, so we've got Jerry Falwell and Phyllis Schlafly.

They were both very prominent members of what was called the moral majority.

And that they were sort of the ones that were driving a lot of book bannings, book challenges back in the 80s.

And they had a pamphlet entitled How to Rid Your Schools and Libraries of Judy Blume Books.

So she was definitely a target.

Yeah, and I just, you know, I want to jump in here.

I had the immense pleasure of meeting Judy Blume at a library convention at one point.

This is probably maybe 10, 15 years ago.

And I mean, it was like meeting my biggest role model.

I remember seeing her, she was in the aisle right next to me because she'd been autographing some of her books.

And I ran up to her.

She was, you know, standing there.

And I just said, Judy Blume.

And she turned to me with a beautiful smile.

And I said, can I just hug you, please?

And I said, you made my childhood livable.

And your books meant more to me than anything else that I read or learned about or talked about, you know, in that time period.

And she was so gracious.

And of course she let me hug her and hugged me back.

And I remember asking her what it must have felt like to have her books banned.

And, you know, she teared up a little bit.

She actually told me that, you know, how excruciating that has been for her.

Of course, you know, fast forward to today where she's very active using her voice to, you know, try to prevent the pervasive book banning that's going on.

But, you know, it hurts people.

And I saw that so vividly and I'll never forget that exchange.

Moving on, we're gonna jump into our next segment now, which is historical context.

As we mentioned, *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret*, was really one of the first fictional books, let alone middle grade books, to talk openly about menstruation.

And I think this is still very significant 53 years later, going on 54, because this is a topic that is still taboo, even today.

It's not only taboo, but it's heavily taxed.

There is something called the pink tax, which is an unfair tax put on feminine hygiene products that women need to deal with their periods.

I think that the pink tax also, I know there's the real tax, but they just charge more for products that are for women.

For sure.

And I was really happy to hear that the state of Kentucky, which is one of 21 states that continue to charge tax on feminine hygiene products, is introducing a bill in their legislature that will remove all taxes on feminine hygiene products.

And it's ridiculous the amount of extra money that people have to pay.

And they're talking about, you know, it's a financial burden, but if you're a person who is in a low income family, which Kentucky is like the number two state in the country, with as far as poverty is concerned, and if you're a female who's already going through all these body changes in your adolescence, and you have to choose or your family has to choose between buying food or buying feminine hygiene products, imagine what that would feel like.

And so it's a very important legislation.

I found an article that was written by Rachel Epstein on a website in 2021 that indicated that women in the United States are estimated to spend an additional \$150 million per year on menstrual products.

And that's just women.

And women these days are actually starting to menstruate, many of them earlier.

I had a cousin who started menstruating in fourth grade.

Women's bodies are changing.

But yes, there are 21 states that are still not tax-free.

And I was going to list them all out, but in the essence of time, I think we'll simply put those in the show notes.

Also, you can go to periodlaw.org to find the article listing the 21 states that still do not have tax-free menstrual products.

Heather, did you have anything?

Yeah, there also have been a lot of legislative things trying to get free feminine products in schools.

And I mean, I don't have anything to cite right now, but I know that that's been an ongoing recent legislative thing that people seem to be blocking everywhere, where it seems like common sense to make it available because obviously half the students are probably menstruating.

Yeah.

Right.

We have them where I work in the clinic.

You can go get one.

You'll get one if you need it.

But that is not the easiest way to get a hold of something that you need right away.

But for sure.

But I just, that just occurred to me now as we were having the discussion, but back to, you know.

Historical context.

Exactly.

You know, generations of girls talk about having a real connection to this book and I'm one of it because it spoke to them in a voice like their own.

It really mimicked the ways kids talk to each other and the self-centered concerns that we as preteens all had.

I mean, that's how we view the world.

And we are used to hearing that voice in books now, but at the time, absolutely new.

It was very new.

It was very new and it was topics that we had in our heads, but we'd never seen in books before.

Then there were, of course, the age-appropriate concerns.

To quote Time Magazine's 2010 article, All Time 100 Novels Written in English Since 1923, said that Blume turned millions of preteens into readers.

She did it by asking the right questions and avoiding pat-easy answers.

And I think that that sums it up very well why it appealed to us then and why it's still appealing to people now 50 years later, enough to even create a feature film.

Mm-hmm.

Right, right.

And I just want to say, in having reread the book for the first time since I read it when I was 10 or 11, it was an incredibly impactful read.

It completely transferred me back to being that age in my head and remembering the traumas of that age and how I felt when I read that book and how my friends and I would have sleepovers and talk about, you know, have you read Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret?

Have you started your period?

How are you preparing yourself?

You know, like, these are tough questions that girls and young people need answers to as their bodies are changing and not just girls, the boys need it too because they also need to understand what is happening to each other's bodies because this is also the start of the age at which people start to notice the opposite sex.

So, yeah, it was just a very impactful book.

It is a very impactful book.

Absolutely.

And we can't talk about the historical context without sort of placing the book where it lives in the 70s.

I mean, it was published in the 70s, so even really written prior to that.

So it is dated in the details.

Everyone's white in the book.

They only talk about two religions, with three if you count Catholicism.

So I think there's one little mention of not looking into Islam.

And Hindu because she didn't know anybody.

Yeah, she didn't know anybody.

So it did get a little a little nod.

And then I loved your references to like cream rinses.

The one that cracked me up.

I guess that's what we now call conditioner.

I think so.

We had the dad's Playboy magazines, which really dates dates it.

But yeah, apparently Playboy is not even printed anymore.

It's only online.

Wow.

I just that one struck me because I remember Playboys in the house.

They were a little bit hidden, but you know, kids, we know where to look.

But it kind of struck me how sort of everybody's dad has them, you know, in the book, which was a real difference between then and now.

We hide our porn much more.

They hide their porn much more.

Or they think they do.

It's a browser history.

You know, that's a thing.

And one of the things that has been updated about the book since it came out, when we finally get to the long awaited period, they talk about equipment, which is still in the book, but they no longer reference that.

Women used to have to wear a little belt, almost like a garter belt, but for you attach it instead of to your stockings, you're attaching it to the pad that is between your legs.

And shortly after the book was written, the plastic adhesive ones came out and nobody used the other stuff anymore.

So they changed that pretty early on in the book to make it more accessible to kids.

What their experience was going to be with their period, was it going to have all that equipment?

But I think as a period piece, I love that historical note.

And I know there's not a lot speaking of it being a period piece of the 1970s.

All the articles mention that and have to make a joke about it being a period piece.

Yes, double on time.

So pun intended, I guess.

Keeping it light.

And then, Heather, I think you were going to tell us about technology kind of at the time and how that played into the book's success.

Yeah, Politico, which we are going to be referring to a lot because they had the best information historically, stated that Blume had really fortuitous timing.

Leonard Marcus, who is a Children's Book Historian, said that Margaret came out just as publishers were starting to issue children's books in inexpensive paperback forms.

And they were available in the big box stores in malls like B.

Dalton and the others, and they were starting to sell books to kids without going through librarians and traditional things.

So it became more accessible for kids to get the books, and they were cheaper than the old hardcover ones, which most kids can't pay for out of their allowance.

Right.

And just on that note, thinking about advances in technology and people's reading habits in 2023, 2024, where we are now, the Internet didn't exist.

And so children, adolescents, preteens could not surf Google to find the information that is now available at, you know, at just the click of a button on their cell phone.

So again, just sort of showing historically why this book was so very, very important, where now, you know, the kids, the kids can click and say, what's happening to my body?

And many books have been since published.

But, you know, just to really emphasize the point that this was the first and the best, just for historical context.

But did you all have anything further you want to say on that?

Or should we just go ahead and jump into our next segment, which is our assessment of the pros and cons?

Sounds good.

I'm ready to jump in.

All right, so you can probably tell from our historical context so far that we're all fans of this book.

So there are quite a few pros.

The first pro that, you know, some people might question, but only because of the fact that the book was written in 1970.

But it's a big pro that this book talks to kids in a voice they can connect with.

Now, the actual words might have changed in the last, have changed in the last 50 years.

I mean, we don't say E-gads anymore.

We don't call, you know, a kid a drip.

We, you know, but we do have these same types of conversations as kids talking to other kids who are going through bodily changes or learning that their bodies are changing, wondering, most importantly, am I normal?

Because isn't that the question that we all start asking when we're in our adolescence?

And this this book, to me, that's what this book is, is a big question.

Am I normal?

And and it's something that everybody can relate to, even when you're our age, which is not adolescent for a while.

Anyways, you're right.

Well, and to further along that, that's one of the things I love so much, because in the book, she keeps asking God to tell her if she's normal.

And yet all the questions she's asking God in the book are perfectly normal questions we all had at that age.

Which is one reason I connected, because it was so real.

I mean, these were questions I had.

These were questions my friends had.

And it was a safe place in this book to read those questions and go, yes, that's what I and it even could be a jump off of a discussion point with my friends.

You know, as we discuss things from the book and yeah, hey, I, you know, I get that or, yeah, you know, Or even parents, right?

I mean, she has a discussion with her mom in the book about the special class that taught them about menstruation.

Yes.

And she's like, Mom, I already know this stuff.

And her mom says, yes, but not every child's parents have had this conversation.

So it could definitely be a way to have a conversation with your parents.

Yes, any well and anyone.

I mean, that's and it's, you know, she's not being judged.

She's just talking to God in the book.

So, you know, she's not nobody's telling her these are bad questions.

They are very normal questions.

And as she's sitting there worried about whether she's normal or not, you just want to hug her and say everything you're asking is normal.

And that's the connection I had to her, which is a very profound connection at such a young age.

And I think a healthy, good connection because it made me feel normal.

Yeah, she's asking these questions.

Well, I'm asking these questions.

My friends are asking these questions.

We're all normal.

Yeah, what a concept.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I mean, even even the discussion of I was trying to find the right page in the book, and it's at the very, very beginning when Margaret first meets Nancy.

Nancy comes and knocks on her door in Margaret's new house in the suburbs where they've moved.

And Margaret's not excited about this move because she's lived in the same place for 11 years.

And now she's starting middle school and a brand new school and a brand new neighborhood.

But Nancy comes and knocks on her door and asks her if she wants to come and run through the sprinkler with her.

And Margaret goes with Nancy and Nancy introduces her to her mom.

And then at some point in that same period of time, Nancy asks Margaret if she's going to join the JCC, which is the Jewish Community Center, or I can't remember what the other organization was.

And Margaret's like, I don't know, I'm not Jewish and I'm not Christian.

But again, that whole sense of belonging and questioning, am I normal?

I mean, the whole world seemed to be, at least to the world of an 11-year-old, seemed to be divided up by, at least at that point in this location, by what religion you were.

So the question of normal just permeates everything she's going through.

And furthering that, it's talking about religion, it's asking questions about religion, it's observing religions, but it's not really bashing any religion at all.

She's just curious.

She's trying to figure it all out.

And then, you know, she's finding that, you know, what people are saying to her about religion is not something that she's feeling when she's experimenting.

But, you know, there was never any negativity in terms of, you know, portraying one religion or another as bad or worse or better or any of that.

And I think that's important because, you know, you have to be able to talk in a safe environment about these topics.

Yeah.

And, you know, this was, to me, a very safe environment.

Yeah, I agree.

Yeah.

Another pro, maybe less intuitive one.

I listened to a podcast on Book Riot on discussing this book, and one of the hosts was male, and he described himself as a big reader as a kid, read through every book in the library.

And so he was very aware back when he was, you know, middle school, elementary school, middle school, that the girls were passing this book around.

This was in the 90s, which I think is so interesting, because, you know, like we've said, this book speaks to people across generations, despite it's being dated.

Everyone, you know, is aware of it.

So he was aware that the girls were passing around the book, and so he read it, and his big takeaway was, hey, girls are also worried about things, you know?

Here I am, worried about, you know, how my body is changing, but, you know, it's easy to feel like the other, the one whose head you're not in, whichever group that might be, you know, has it all together, but you don't.

And so I thought it was, you know, it's an opportunity for people who are not going to get a period to understand a little bit about what's happening.

Yeah, for sure.

Well, it's the accessibility of it.

I mean, it's accessible to everyone.

Right.

Yeah, right.

Shall we move on to cons?

Yes, let's do it.

Well, the number one kind that I thought of was simply, or we thought of, I can't take credit, we thought of is just that the book was written and published in 1970.

And therefore, as we've already mentioned, there are some dating as in time period issues.

Gosh, I'm just coming up with all these puns.

You can't talk about this book without saying these words, but teens, pre-teens today might have some difficulty with some of the language, as I mentioned before, just words that we don't say anymore, like cream rinse for your hair, and describing someone as a drip.

And I'm not even sure, do kids play spin the bottle anymore, or two minutes in the closet or whatever.

But whether they do or not, I think the book has so many merits that I'm hoping and do believe that based on what Dorothy just said about this gentleman podcaster reading the book in the 90s, and the book is still being passed around, that I do think it is still a popular book.

And if it's still on the ALA most banned list, that means that it's still getting attention.

But some kids might find it harder to connect with.

Also, as I mentioned with the internet, people have adolescents have other places that they can get information now.

But again, this book is just so powerful in terms of the am I normal anxiety that is normal for preteens to go through.

I also feel like having watched the movie, which is a 2023 movie, it probably will further a renewed connection with the book.

It certainly I wanted to go back and reread it.

I remember as a parent of a kid at that age, I had my I gave the book to my daughter and said, Oh, I love this as a person your age, you should read it.

And yeah, so I think it just that it still may be dated, but I think that's that it just is what it is.

It's kind of straddling this line between, it was not written as historical fiction, but it is sort of become historical fiction.

And so I don't know where it would be shelved.

I'm curious to go check if it's in our library and where it's shelved, is it?

Cause you know, we genre-fied the library at the school where I work.

Oh, interesting.

And so is it under historical or is it under realistic?

I'd be curious too.

I would guess that it is still under realistic.

And of course, at the library I work at, it is in the YA section, not in the juvenile section.

Really?

Cause this is a middle grade book.

These kids are 11, 12 years old.

Interesting.

Yeah.

Interesting.

But that may speak more to the state in which I work.

Possibly, yes.

The state.

Yeah.

Which is kind of unfortunate, cause as you've said earlier, a lot of girls are getting their periods much earlier than ever in the past.

And if a kid's getting it at eight, nine, 10 years old, you know.

Florida tried to say, hey, I think it didn't go through.

We'll have to check and we'll maybe touch on this.

Well, it's not so much about book banning, but it was about teaching about periods, and they were gonna not have it in elementary school at all.

You know, the article I read was pointing out, but hey, kids are getting their periods in the fourth grade.

Yeah.

Kind of they need to know something before that.

And discussing just period education, obviously this book isn't about a lot of detail about periods.

It's mostly, you know, when am I gonna get mine?

Who's got theirs?

Why haven't I got mine yet?

Blah, blah, blah.

But, you know, many topics associated with periods aren't really touched on at all like the pain of periods.

You know, they...

Yeah, I noted that for sure.

Yeah, they imply it doesn't hurt or I just got some cramps.

And for a lot of people, that is the experience.

But also, as we all know, a lot of people have much more intense, unpleasant periods with a lot more cramps and pain that can be absolutely debilitating and cause them to not be able to go to school or not be able to go to work for the duration of their periods.

And, you know, I mean, pain is a scale and they don't really touch on that at all, but it is a reality and it's something that probably should be part of the discussions.

And yet even just to say a little bit that it hurts, I can understand not wanting to scare kids.

Oh, and I don't advocate that either, but, you know, letting them know.

And obviously, if you have a lot of pain, you want to go to the doctor and, you know, maybe be able to find some ways to mitigate some of that, or find out if there's a problem, like you have a problem that causes you to have a much more painful experience.

And then, of course, you know, I think it's also important for, you know, boys and others who, you know, don't really have any experience with the pain and all that to understand that, you know, it could be very painful for some girls and, you know.

Of course, now we have those wonderful period simulators that men can try.

I love hearing that.

To get a good feel of it, but usually that doesn't go too well for the boys.

Yeah, the boys are like, what the fuck?

Yes, yes, yes.

I should say that men, these are full-grown men that are like, holy moly, you do this every month for several days?

And for years, and for years of your life, a huge bulk of your life, yes.

Yeah, and does, I don't think the period, so the period simulator simulates the cramps, right?

But does it simulate the hormone fluctuations?

Because that's a whole nother issue that-

Which our society often treats as a joke, you know?

Oh, you're cranky, you must be on your period.

Yeah.

Every single time, every single time.

And then more recently, I had a doctor after I broke a bone, because I'm a woman at a certain age, oh, have you stopped menstruating?

Oh, you must have osteoporosis.

And that does not necessarily follow.

So there's just this disdain that, from which we are viewed, or with which we are, women are viewed, if you, like it's a weakness, so.

When it's in fact a normal bodily function that we need to have if we're ever gonna reproduce.

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

I heard about a very interesting book called Eve, subtitle, How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution.

And how absolutely blanky and crazy and unbelievable it is that our, that we evolved the way we did with having babies, that it has worked at all, because it's so difficult.

Well, anyway, we're digressing once again.

Yes.

I had so much more I wanted to say on that, but I'll stop because we're digressing.

I will pick back up with, Heather was talking about education around periods.

And so now this is a new perspective, which simply could not have been considered in 1970 when this book was written.

But I just wanted to throw out in the con section that, you know, it clearly does not address trans women or trans boys or girls who may have emotional issues around periods.

So it's not going to be super helpful and maybe could be triggering to a trans boy who is going to have to deal with a period but really does not want to or a non-binary person who is having to deal with that.

And, you know, it changes how they think of who they are.

Or a trans girl who's not going to get their period may really feel like they are in that I'm not normal group that Margaret is so worried about being a part of.

I do want to throw in here too that all the discussions of wanting to get their periods, I personally never was excited about it and was hoping to put it off as long as possible.

Yeah, well, and I remember my biggest fear was not whether or not I was going to get it.

It was that it was an unknown and that it would sneak in at just the worst time because I was very into sports.

What if it happened in the middle of basketball practice and my coaches were men?

What if it happened in the middle of school and I suddenly stood up and there was a big blood stain on my seat or on my clothes?

It happens.

And people would see it and make fun of me.

And they did.

All right.

I have one more con and this we talked about a little bit before recording and we had a lot of different opinions on it.

So I'm just going to throw it out here.

But this is an idea from a review by a parent on Common Sense Media of the book.

And this person read the book as a child.

She said, I remember growing up with body image problems, friend drama, finding dirty magazines, first makeouts and so on, all stuff that's in the book.

But this person was an insecure child and felt that this book sent the wrong message, that it was normalizing the idea of increasing our bust so that men could touch them, wanting to look a certain way for the male gaze.

And didn't want her children to read that, felt that it would not help their body image to read that book.

Now, I'm throwing it out there as a con, because I think we all agree, and we could discuss, that Margaret learns not to care about whether or not she's keeping up with everybody else, or when she grows breasts, or whatever.

But, you know, she has a pretty healthy, you know, body image of herself.

It's just, everyone has questions.

But books belong to their readers.

And if this person felt, as a child, once you read the book, that it made her more insecure, I think that there maybe could be some validity to that.

Well, there's validity for her experience.

And as a parent, she does have the right to not have her child read it.

However, she doesn't have the right to tell other people's children the same thing.

Yeah, which we don't know if she has.

No, I know.

Exactly.

Put her review up there.

Exactly.

And, you know, and any book could trigger something because it is a personal experience.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yes.

But that's why it's a place to start a discussion with the parents or whoever.

Yes, yes, yes.

Heather, you took the words right out of my mouth, because I was just going to say, I think the beauty of a book that, like Margaret, is that, you know, we don't know the circumstances of this person who wrote this review, but it sounds to me like potentially this person didn't have a safe place or a safe person or persons with whom to have the discussion about her body image and why she felt that way.

And obviously human beings grow up and have lots of different experiences and have lots of different reactions to them.

And the healthiest people, I believe, seek out someone trusted to talk through those feelings and to find a way to work through insecurities and to try to find their own self-validation.

And I think this book gives folks an avenue to do that.

And perhaps this reader didn't have that opportunity and felt isolated with her feelings and blames the book.

And I think that probably happens in a lot of situations.

But like you said, Heather, the conversation, opening up the conversation, having a discussion, listening to different perspectives, this is where we learn and come together and realize that more of us have commonalities than differences.

And wouldn't that be a nice thing for our world, our society to find commonalities rather than to continue the divisiveness that inevitably is going to destroy the world?

Indeed, but that's a whole other tangent that could take hours to delve into.

Yeah, fortunately, we are limiting ourselves to only discussing bookings.

Yes.

So unless you all have anything else you want to add to that, I thought we'd go ahead and talk about why this book is important, which is, I suppose, our summary as Rogue Librarians as to taking the pros and cons and trying to devise a summary per our perspective.

But again, I want to go back to Joanna Weiss, who is the Politico article author that we've already referenced in this podcast earlier.

And in Joanna's words, Blume's books matter because they give teens and preteens the kind of information that leaves adults unsettled.

And because they're books consumed privately at one's own pace on one's own terms, they're a secret conversation that feels like independence.

And unless you all have anything else to add, maybe you do.

To me, that's...

It really sums it up.

It really is profound and really is the bottom line.

It really does, because there's just some things you want to learn in a quiet room by yourself or contemplate.

I don't know how much time kids spend just reading anymore, but they are learning all this stuff often in very public ways, through TikTok, and people are making videos, or they're having conversations, group chats.

I don't even know.

But I think the importance of just sitting quietly with an idea and mulling it over is undervalued in today's world.

Yeah, for sure.

So, all right, well, I think that concludes our episode for today.

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But we want to have the discussion.

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Please give us five stars.

We would love that.

It takes two seconds once you click on our podcast just to leave a review, and I went over this in some detail before.

We should put this on our website, maybe a video tutorial, but you have to be on your phone, apparently, with the Apple Podcasts, and you have to keep scrolling down a lot of ways past the list of episodes.

And that is where you will find a place to rate, review.

Yes.

And once again, I'm going to shamelessly plead with you to do that.

We have mentioned that we just completed our first year and are now at the infancy of our second year with this podcast.

And we had a serious sit down and really discussed how much money we're each personally spending on continuing to create this podcast, which doesn't include, you know, the numerous hours, endless hours really that we're all, all of us putting in to gather the information, read the books, do the research, do the recordings, do the sound editing, put it out there, handle the social media.

It's just an exorbitant amount of time that we are putting in, and it's truly a labor of love for us, which is why we want to continue.

But any support that any of you can offer us would certainly help to defray the costs that we have put into this and help us to continue if you are able, because, you know, we're librarians and teachers, so we're not rolling in the money.

So thank you for letting me put that shameless plug in.

We love you.

And Heather, thank you for joining us today.

You are fabulous as always.

We certainly, you just contributed so much today.

And, you know, we just, we appreciate having a third person since Alanna is away right now.

Thank you to Chris.

Our music is so beautiful.

Every time I hear it, I'm just mesmerized, and it just sounds so great in our transitions.

And of course, thank you to our patrons.

Well, we couldn't do this without you, without any of you.

And finally, thank you, listeners, for reading with us, because books are meant to be read.