

**Rogue Librarians, Episode 24**  
**Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. (Part 2: Close Reading)**

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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 welcome back to our guest, the fabulous Heather.

Thank you all, glad to be here.

Alanna, our usual third is not with us today because, well, you know, life.

But still, we are the Rogue Librarians.

For those of you who may have missed our last episode, Heather, who previously served as our Twitter guru, and now it's X and we have X'd it, ha ha.

She is also an avid reader, a book reviewer, and an all around reading enthusiast.

We're glad to have Heather here to discuss this book with us, but we'd also love for you to join the discussion.

Please, please, please send us comments and questions at [roguelibrarianspodcast at gmail.com](mailto:roguelibrarianspodcast@gmail.com).

Let us know you're out there.

So today we are continuing our discussion of Are You There God?

It's Me, Margaret by Judy Blume.

The book was published in 1970 and catapulted Judy Blume into literary infamy.

It was the first book of hers that had gotten really any traction.

And it's left such a legacy.

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

It was also controversial because the main character, Margaret, does not practice any particular religion.

And it has had many accolades over the years.

Back when it came out in 1970, the New York Times selected it as the Outstanding Book of the Year.

Decades later in 2010, Time Magazine included it in its all-time 100 novels written in English.

Scholastic, and I believe the Scholastic was a survey that they did, selected the novel for its 100 Greatest Books for Kids, our must-read books.

And then on its 50th anniversary, there was a film released, which, really, why did it take so long, is my question.

It's just an iconic book that has, as the film posters proclaimed for over 50 years, one iconic book has connected generations.

Now, the movie.

So Heather's going to give us a brief summary of the plot of the book.

The story follows 11-year-old Margaret Simon, who finds out they're moving to the suburbs in New Jersey from New York City.

Her parents want to try and do the suburban thing that we were all doing in the 70s.

And it's Margaret's journey as she adjusts to new school, new friends, dealing with basically all those pre-teen, young girl questions about life, her body, friends, periods.

And her parents, one is Jewish and one is Christian, so they decided to raise her without any formal religion and let her choose when she got to the point of adulthood where she could just pick what she wanted to be.

But she's feeling a lot of questions about this, and so she spends her time trying to find God and understand religion and find out what's right for her.

That's a really good summary, Heather.

Thank you.

Since we've been doing this podcast for a little over a year now, we thought we might take this opportunity to play around with the format of how we actually talk about our books.

So Dorothy and I just decided to go a little bit rogue and try out some different things.

First, we thought we would each simply pick a scene that we wanted to talk about.

So Heather, as our guest, would you like to go first?

A very important scene to me in the book was, you know, the character of Laura Dankler in the book is the poor girl who's bigger than the rest of the class, more developed and, you know, just all around getting picked on for that.

Nancy tells Margaret that Laura has been, you know, doing stuff with her brother and his friend behind the store.

And these are just, you know, rumors you hear a lot, you know, unfortunately, in school and stuff like that.

But when Margaret is, you know, assigned to a project where she has to actually work with Laura and talks to Laura, and she brings up that, you know, Laura's doing these things, and she finds out that none of that's true.

And Laura is actually a real person who's very upset by all these rumors and gossip about herself.

And she just basically goes off on, you know, Margaret and her friends for, you know, the way they look at her and treat her without getting to actually know her.

And this profoundly affects Margaret.

And when Laura goes to confession across the street, Margaret follows Laura and attempts to do the confession thing herself, but she's so upset about, I guess, feeling guilty that she can't even really do it and goes running out of the church because she's got the realization that, you know, hey, wait, we've been mean to Laura, we've been the mean girls.

Yeah, I, you know, I never really thought too hard about that scene where she runs out, but I love that take that she literally can't confess her sins because they upset her so much.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

It's almost like she has to sit with it.

It's this like brand new revelation that she just needs to sit with before she can even confess it.

She has to own it first.

And which not, not a lot of people that age are going to do.

No, I mean, deep thinking is not always something we learn to do for a very long period in our life.

Mm-hmm.

You know, and this also reminds me of again, you know, so much of the world today, people believe that many of the problems of the world are a result of people moving away from organized religion, that fewer people are, you know, you know, going to church on a regular basis and affiliating with religious institutions.

You know, fewer people are doing that.

And so people think, well, that's the reason that the world is falling apart because, you know, people don't have shared values.

But just because you're not raised going to a specific religion doesn't mean that you're not being raised with values.

And obviously in this case, we have Margaret who thinks very deeply and longingly about wanting to be a good person and wanting to have a relationship with God.

And it's the people who are actually affiliated with a religion because this is what their families raise them to do, whether they wanted it or not, or whether they felt anything about it or not, they end up being the mean kids, you know, who are really ostracizing other kids who don't fit in in their mind to whatever it is they want a person to fit into.

So yeah, there's just a lot of deep thoughts in that, Heather.

So thank you for bringing that scene up.

Yeah.

This discussion reminds me as we are recording this, it is the Martin Luther King Weekend, and I was just hearing some discussion of different speeches on the radio.

And one of his quote unquote dangerous messages was just that people needed to look at Jesus' message about loving your neighbor and how that treating others like you want to be treated trumps everything else.

And it just seems similar to what we're discussing, right?

And why was that a dangerous idea, you know, that got him killed?

It's just nuts.

It does make you pause and think why.

And I guess we're still having these questions after 50 years, which is why this, the longevity of this book.

Yeah.

Yeah, it's interesting to me because the readers, according to Judy Blume, always read it like it's for them.

So even though it takes place in the seventies and was written in the seventies, you know, people after the turn of the century even, will write to her and it will be like she wrote it for them.

Which, you know, I think also goes to the commonality of just our basic humanity.

These questions are universal.

Yes.

So the scene that I wanted to talk about, I'm not exactly sure what we're going to get from the discussion, so I'm interested to see.

But the one that really popped into my head was the supper party.

First of all, what a delightful way to think about parties.

It's so old fashioned.

It's a supper party and everybody dresses up.

In their finest.

Yeah.

So Norman has a party for his birthday, and everyone in the whole class is invited.

So Norman is the one they refer to as a drip, right?

Do I have that right?

Yes.

Yes.

And so everyone is simultaneously excited to go to a party, but they don't really care that much about Norman.

So they go and it's a supper party, and they put them down in the basement and leave them without supervision.

And to me, this scene just stood out to me because I teach in a middle school.

So when the boys started spinning mustard through the straw at the ceiling, I'm thinking, yeah, that sounds about right.

When the mom comes down and just looks at the ceiling and looks at the kids, and it's like, I'm not going to end this party early because your parents aren't expecting to pick you up, but they will hear about your behavior.

And all of this is before they get around to playing spin the bottle and two minutes in the closet slash bathroom.

So did you guys have any thoughts about that?

I was just aghast that they were left there unsupervised at the age of 11, 12.

And I think that was very much a product of the times as well.

I mean, I don't know if parents just didn't think about what the kids were getting up to, but I remember that we weren't supervised at parties very much or anything either.

Well, supervised much at all.

It's like that meme you sent or that tweet you sent me.

This was the post.

I don't mess around with anyone over 42.

They built different.

Their families had them formally trained in something by the time they were two.

They had keys to the house by age five, could cook full meals at seven, and were pretty much self-sufficient at nine.

They left their house at dawn every summer morning and didn't come back until nightfall and survived all day on water from garden hoses.

They might get a sandwich on the off chance somebody's parents had went shopping.

They spent three quarters of their lives by themselves, with a parent maybe checking on them twice a month.

Most of them have evaded at least one kidnapping attempt, and they know 15 different ways to remove blood stains from their clothing.

They're the real fuck around and find out people.

That so describes our childhood.

It so does.

Yeah, and I was just looking at the scene that you were talking about, and the mom comes down.

I am shocked at your behavior, simply shocked.

I don't know what kind of children you are.

I'm not going to send you home because your parents expect you to be here until nine, and it's only seven now, but I am telling you this.

Anymore hanky panky, and I'll call each and every one of your mothers and fathers and report this abominable behavior to them.

And then she marched back upstairs.

I know, and left them there.

And they're all laughing because hanky panky, which is exactly me.

Exactly.

Like hanky panky isn't blowing mustard at the ceiling.

It's like fooling around.

Yes.

One thought I just had about the supper party too, was that it was a chance for Margaret to really see a few things about some of her classmates.

For instance, it was fairly apparent that Philip Leroy was kind of a jerk, and she was noticing that.

He was the one who started the spitting.

He was the one who came out of the bathroom with Laura Denker, and he was smiling, she was frowning, and that was left right there.

And of course, from today's vantage point, we can imagine all kinds of things.

Of course.

So it was a chance for her to people watch a bit, and that's part of how she was starting to really understand people's motivations and who was actually...

She felt bad for Fishbine, for Norman, that this was his party, and people were acting like this.

And then there was the whole...

I don't think they ever used the word cooties.

I think that's an older word maybe or a younger word, but it was who you associated with.

You would then be marked as an uncool kid if you were seen associating with Norman Fishbine, or if you were seen associating with Laura Danker, you were considered to be forward or whatever.

Right.

And this class seems like a pretty small class, especially because they're still in elementary school, where when you get up to middle school, you start to find your people a little bit more, and it's less impactful if, you know, Nancy won't talk to you.

But where they are, you know, that just results in people like Norman and Laura being ostracized entirely.

Yeah, definitely.

And, you know, just talking about this age in general, I mean, everyone is so desperate, particularly when puberty starts, and it starts, you know, in any range of ages, as we know, still.

But you become so self-conscious and desperate to be normal, which, you know, is a big overarching motif of this book, is that everybody wants to be normal.

But, you know, part of being normal is not being that outsider, that ostracized person, and or being associated with that person.

So yeah, it's pretty heavy stuff when you think about it.

You reminded me of two stories.

One, my sister and one of both of our closest friends met because our friend was relaying a message to my sister that was like, oh, so and so doesn't like you.

And then she was like, but I don't care.

And the two of them became great friends instead, which I love.

That's amazing.

And I also remember when one of my kids was small, there was an awkward, because they're my kids, so awkward, this goes with the territory.

They were friends with a boy that had spina bifida.

So he had leg braces and often smelled, he had like bathroom issues, which is probably putting it lightly for spina bifida.

And he was a great kid, and my kid was friends with him.

And another kid came in and said, if you keep hanging out with him, I can't be friends with you.

They literally just laid it out.

And I adore my child who was like, oh, okay, but was not about to stop being friends with the boy who was actually friendly to him.

Go figure.

So just that whole middle school dynamic.

And we say middle school because sometimes it's six, seven, eight.

Sometimes it's seven, eight, nine.

All in there.

Sometimes it's five, six, seven, eight.

Maybe we'll call it middle grade like the books.

That whole middle grade jockeying for some kind of status is just very apparent to me in that party scene.

Well, hey, it turned out the supper party had lots to be said.

Marianne, did you have a scene that you wanted to talk about?

Yeah, I did.

And I mean, I don't know.

This scene took me so back to the middle school years of my life.

And it's the scene where the girls, their parents have been informed in advance by a letter that they're going to have, I guess, their version of beginning, very beginning sex education.

So they divide up the boys and the girls, which I remember happening in my school.

And the girls are going to see a movie, a film, and I'm sure it's one of those film projector films, called What Every Girl Should Know, which of course is sponsored by a feminine product company.

In this particular book, it's a fake company called Private Lady.

But the lady who comes to show the movie is called the gray suit lady.

That's how the girls refer to her.

And that just delighted me, because it's so reminiscent of what I learned in school, how watered down it all was.

And the lady comes in, the girls are describing her.

So they're all eager to find out all the answers to all the questions they have.

So they watch this film, which of course is very not really telling you anything.

So then, after the film, the lady in the gray suit asked if there were any questions.

Nancy raised her hand, and when gray suit called on her, Nancy said, How about Tampax?

Gray suit coughed into her hanky and said, We don't advise internal protection until you are considerably older.

And then it goes on.

But that scene just delighted me because it was like, wait, I had that exact same experience.

So I would be curious what your thoughts were on this, because it just delighted me.

Oh, and the way she said menstruation, that they all joked about after the fact.

I remember the main thing I remember about sex ed is it really didn't answer most of my questions.

And I remember they had a Q&A afterward, but the school system had very tight guidelines about what they were allowed to talk about and what they weren't.

And we had to write our questions on little pieces of paper and the teacher would, you know, open each one.

And if she could, without getting in trouble, read the question and answer it, she would.

But the majority of the pieces of paper, she'd be like, I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to talk about this.

I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to talk about that, because they weren't allowed to talk about anything like regarding, you know, say being gay, obviously, or masturbation, or any of those other, you know, things that people had a lot of questions about.

And I remember at the time feeling so sorry for the teacher because I could tell she wanted to give the information because she understood the kids needed it, but she couldn't.

And I could feel that emanating off of her at the time.

Right.

You know, people are so afraid that kids are going to learn about their bodies and then go rogue and use their bodies in negative ways.

But why doesn't anybody talk about the harm that we're doing to kids if we don't share with them the necessary information about what's happening to their bodies?

I did want to point out that Margaret had that conversation with her mother before this event where Margaret was like, I already know all this stuff.

And her mom was like, yes, but not everybody's parents have told them about it.

And she kind of had that aha moment like, oh, not everybody's parents tell them this stuff.

That's crazy.

And it is, but it's also true.

Yeah, it is.

Which is why we need to do so much of a better job than the gray suit lady did in this, where they were all very clear that it was an ad for the product.

They all knew it.

And then when they all went and bought their own products, nobody, they specifically did not want to buy that brand, that product.

Yeah.

I just thought that was funny because, you know, everybody talked about which kind they were buying.

Oh, did you get the, what was the brand?

The lady, special lady, private lady, I think private lady.

Did you get private lady?

They all got this other one that was for younger people.

I think if I recall.

Yeah.

It was the teenage softies or something.

Teenage softies.

I love these made up names.

Interesting.

So very much.

Interesting that the question Nancy asked was about Tampax, which is a real brand.

And perhaps used because maybe the publishers didn't want her to mention tampons.

This is a wild guess.

Tampax may very well have been the first.

And it was definitely sort of a taboo thing that, Oh, you're putting something inside your body for protection rather than having it come out.

Yeah.

Well, and that also ties into the misconception a lot of people have that a tampon will perhaps break the hymen and therefore take your virginity, which is the most ridiculous concept.

But that a lot of resistance to anyone using a tampon until they were an adult was because of that misconception.

Yes.

Which is, you know, but it was a real thing.

And as the Gracie lady said, no, we don't want you to do that.

But she doesn't say why.

Of course not.

All right, so moving right along.

So as we've already discussed in our scenes, there are many ideas to be explored in this book.

And Dorothy, I bet you have one.

So, well, the universal theme really, that middle grades are universally awful.

And that is something, I mean, whenever I mention that I work in a middle school, people look at me and go, oh, wow, wow, you've got good for you.

Yes.

Are you crazy?

But it is a rough time for young people.

Everybody wants to be normal.

What is normal even?

They're hyper aware of the changes in their bodies.

Now, what, you know, nobody thinks that they are normal.

They always think that they're the abnormal ones.

The bullying is off the charts during that time.

As people are jockeying for that position, like we talked about the supper party.

So it just, you know, really delves a little bit into all of those insecurities and desperation to be just like everyone else.

So I do love that Margaret comes to the conclusion that, oh, that's not really the goal.

To be like everyone else.

Though I would add, she does end up being normal in terms of getting her period at about the expected age, you know, which is the big question mark in there.

But she reflects on these things, and she realizes that everyone's different.

And that kind of leads, Marion, I think, to the one that you were going to mention.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Thank you for that, Dorothy.

It's a perfect segue into stereotypes.

That idea of stereotypes runs throughout this book.

Various stereotypes that stuck out to me, obviously religious roles, you know, what is the role of religion in our societies and raising our families and that sort of thing.

The bullying, which Dorothy set up so well with the bullying coming at its peak, in a sense, in a time where it plays on the insecurity of people who just desperately want to be normal.

And of course, that's, you know, demonstrated through the way they talk about and treat Laura Danker, those who are not cool, or in Judy Blume's words in 1970, drips, such as Norman Fishbein.

Of course, you know, the whole stereotype of Philip Leroy, swoon, you know, all of the girls in the preteen sensations think that Philip Leroy is so cute.

And it also just kind of occurred to me that hand in hand with that stereotype of the cool kids versus the drips, you've got this juxtaposition of Laura Danker is a more developed young person, young woman.

And that's looked at as negative because the stereotype in the 1970s was girls have to be virgins, girls have to be good girls.

Philip Leroy, even though he's never like, like he's not Moose or Evan, the brother, Nancy's brother and his friend who are like, you know, claiming to be doing stuff behind the grocery store.

But even so, Philip Leroy is portrayed as everyone's, all the girls swoon over him.

He's the cute boy.

He's the one who at the party is, you know, making suggestions for cooler games that they can play and taking advantage probably of Laura Dinker in the bathroom.

And he's the kid who got in Margaret's birthday.

He comes in and does the, you know, the birthday, you look like a monkey and smell like one, two, you know, kind of goofy, but degrading kind of birthday greeting.

And he also pinches her and says, you know, to grow an inch and you know where you need to grow it.

Yeah.

So there's this juxtaposition of it's cool at that age for boys to be more developed, more sexually interested, but because boys are supposed to be experienced, but girls are supposed to be good girls.

And you know, so there's another stereotype that just jumps out loud and clear to me, you know, and then there's the gossip, gossip, you know, which goes hand in hand with the bullying and how so much of it's what someone who has power or someones who have power determine you know, who the good guys are and the bad guys are and gossip is just made to keep people in power, in power and for people to be,

who are out of power to be put down and have whatever power they might have had taken away from them.

So they use the stereotypes, the gossip mill uses the stereotypes to peg people a certain way.

And I think one of the, it's not really played up, but from today's perspective, one of those stereotypes that I get the impression they're making up these observations, but it's about the teacher.

And they keep saying, when Laura Degger comes in, did you see his eyes nearly popped out of his head?

Right.

Because that could, you know, legit lose him his job.

If they were to say that now, I note that it's always in the voice of Nancy, noticing him and noticing.

So I feel like she's, she's interjecting that instead of him actually doing it.

Yeah, for sure.

Heather, did you have any thoughts?

I was just going to move on to the whole idea of God separated from a specific religion, since obviously that's a major reason the books are banned and so forth.

Yeah, and it's right there in the title.

Hmm, are you there, God?

Yeah, the line is God belongs to everyone, and she can't find him in places of worship.

She can't find God in a building, no matter how many, you know, she tries to do that.

But the interesting thing to me, and always was about Margaret, is that she clearly believes in a God force of sorts, because she prays to him.

I mean, all these times she's praying, are you there, God?

It's me, Margaret.

Can you, you know, let me, you know, grow my chest, grow, you know, whatever.

But she has her own personal communication, and she's very much, you know, okay, then we wait and see what God's answer is going to be.

And she doesn't need a church for that.

She's just asking it from wherever she happens to be at the moment, you know, none of the dogma of the established religions.

And if you really look at religion, I mean, first off, the Judeo-Christian religions, the three big religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, all in fact have the same God.

I mean, it's just how they see that God, how they worship that God, those are different.

But the God God is the same God.

And I would argue probably that, you know, all religions, you know, their gods is just, we're all talking about the same force.

I like that's why some people take the Jedi and kind of make it into a religion as well.

The force is God, is the universe, is the energy that holds us all together.

And if you actually look at the Bible, and I do not know the specific passage, I'd have to look it up.

But you know, pretty much, you know, there is a moment where Jesus says, you know, it's not about the building, you know, God's everywhere.

Well, and that's what's echoed right there in the text, right?

You can't find God in the building.

And I also remember her specifically saying, God belongs to everyone.

And, you know, it's just how we specifically build that relationship with God that's different based on the different traditions and all that.

Margaret's only able to explore, you know, basically Christianity and Judaism, and she says she can't really explore the others because she didn't know anybody who's any other religion that she can start looking into.

But now, you know, as we're learning more about religions and we see the commonalities, I'm a Wiccan, and, you know, a lot of things about Wiccans in general is they sort of pick the aspects of deities that they connect with, and maybe they give them names of, you know, it could be anything from just the Lord and the Lady, you know, trying to find that gender balance.

Or it could be using mythological gods to tap into the aspects.

The thing about pagans is they kind of connect to whatever aspects of the deities.

They're looking at it in terms of what they're connecting with.

And that, you know, this is in everything, you know, every flower, every tree, you know, it's like the force is everywhere.

They don't really need to be in a building or whatever to feel it, because they feel it, because they feel God everywhere, because God is everywhere in there, you know, view of the world.

That dichotomy is interesting to me because I was, like Margaret, really raised without much religious upbringing.

And when I went to a church later with my husband when we wanted to get our child baptized and we chose Episcopal, and the rector there, we had a discussion one time about how there are God people, Jesus people, and Holy Spirit people.

So even within Christianity, I mean, forget all the different denominations, right?

Those are all trying to seek God in a particular way.

But she characterized me as a Holy Spirit person, which is more like what Heather is describing.

It's more an energy that you're drawn to.

Well, and I think now we make more distinctions now between spirituality and organized religions than we ever did.

But certainly in the 70s, we weren't really talking like that.

That's true.

You know, Margaret's questions are, in her journey, are obviously still resonating and have always been.

People, and as Dorothy was saying about people turning away from churches, which we all know factually is very true, because they're still seeking the answers to the questions that Margaret was asking, and they're finding it in different places because we're all different.

And what we need, what every person needs is different.

Thank you Okay, so we thought it would be fun to discuss some of the different covers, because the book has been around for so long, and the cover has changed many, many, many times.

I wanted to talk about this sort of, I think it's the newest version.

It's the one that I was able to run out and buy at the store.

It's fancy, thick leather, where you can feel the type on it.

It's pink, it's just a beautiful, gorgeous, almost one might say a color that could bring to mind once period.

Very, very pink.

And it just has like a little text bubbles for the title.

So Judy Blume's name is very, very big.

And then, are you there, God?

Text bubble, second text bubble, it's me, Margaret.

And then the bubble coming from the other end is dot, dot, dot.

Like, like God is typing an answer, maybe.

Right.

And I wanted to talk about it because I heard when we were doing research, some people were like, oh, I loved, you know, my kid read it, but they, they gravitated to this cover with the text bubbles.

And there is no texting in this book.

No, there were no, so happened.

Yeah.

There was no internet.

It just seems interesting to me that, okay, yes, they are appealing to young people, but it kind of messes with my idea of like what it means for Margaret to be shouting into the void as it were, to be asking God these questions and not getting a response.

And I wondered if there was a corollary right between the void or the unknowable God and the fact that young people today will simply ask the internet their questions.

And that is not a void.

That will get them lots and lots of answers that vary widely.

Different views, that's true.

So not a thought process that I think a lot of 11 year olds aren't going through when they pick out this cover, but it just really seemed like a very interesting idea to me.

Yeah.

Marion, did you have a cover you wanted to talk about?

I do.

And I want to go like completely the opposite way.

I don't believe this was the original book cover, but it's the book cover that I picked up the first time I read this book and checked it out of my elementary school, Catholic Elementary School Library, might I add.

And it's a picture of Margaret sitting in a chair, looking pretty young, dark hair, staring out a window that has shutters on it.

And there are two little plants there, and you can sort of see that this is her bedroom.

It looks like there's a bedside table right next to the window that has a box of tissues.

And but that is my childhood.

And I saw that, well, I don't know what I saw it as when I was nine, 10, 11, when I first read this book, but I see it today as Margaret looking out probably her New York City window before she moved, but that's not determined.

But also just looking up into the sky almost reverentially and saying, are you there, God?

It's me, Margaret.

And having that whole feeling of who am I?

Am I normal?

All of the things that the book covers is just so in my mind right there in that picture.

So let's talk about the power of visual images.

Whereas me, the first book I picked up was like this innocuous cover of just a young girl in the front with a sort of suburban sprawl behind her.

No clues as to what the book's actually about.

It just, reflecting on it now, it's like there's nothing about that cover that would have made me pick up the book.

So it obviously wasn't because of the book, but the book cover was as normal as her questions.

Right.

Yeah.

That's such a suburban house in the background.

And split level.

Yeah.

And I mean, it just, ordinary child, ordinary book cover, doesn't have any premonition or whatever of the controversy that was going to come out of it.

Good point.

Great point.

Well, moving on to our next section, we thought having looked at the covers and the changes and all the discussion that we've had up until this point, well, we thought it would be interesting to just talk about what would be different if the book were written today.

So same subject matter, same, you know, themes, so to speak, but what details would be different?

So the first one that jumped out at me is that when Margaret first moves to the suburbs, Nancy appears at her house and says, Oh, a realtor passed out flyers to all of us with information about the new neighbors.

Can you imagine?

Oh my God.

Oh my God, like privacy issues, anyone?

Like there is just no way in hell that would happen today.

And the world has changed so much since 1970.

So that would be one thing.

Well, and another thing would be the Preteen Sensations Club would not be meeting in person every day.

They would be texting each other or, you know, Face timing.

Face timing, whatever the kids are doing these days.

Exactly.

And they wouldn't have these notebooks like the boy books, which they gave up on anyways, because it was always Philip Leroy and nobody else.

But they wouldn't have these special notebooks to list the guys they like.

They would be like, you know, commenting on, you know.

Oh, their socials.

Yeah, so then there'd be all the social media.

And that, to texting, that would be constant.

There would be a literally constant conversation happening.

And I have seen in most schools, there are websites where they gossip about which girls they think are, you know, I forget how it was put, but it's happened at my school.

They'll put up which girls they think are easy or, that's a very seventies term too, isn't it?

Yeah.

Yeah.

So that's where that conversation would go, right out in the public.

Any others?

The other one, you know, so there was the spin the bottle game that they played at the supper party, which was so prolific, spin the bottle and then the two minutes in the bathroom.

And I was just thinking that today's young people, people, old people, everybody, people, you know, a video or pictures, or it didn't happen.

So that wouldn't have been quite as fun.

That's horrifying.

Yeah.

Yeah, it is.

The privacy is the whole point of that game.

Yeah.

And even the clothes, I mean, like, they made such a big deal about the outfits they were wearing on their first day, which I remember doing when I was their age.

But, you know, they're sitting there, they're worried about whether or not they wear socks.

Margaret doesn't wear socks.

She gets blisters because of it, you know.

And, you know, nowadays, the kids are gonna be coming in wearing crop tops and pajama pants.

That this is literally what they come in wearing, I can attest.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And if they're wearing anything else, they would definitely be posting a fit check online.

Yeah.

Yes, they would.

Yes, they would.

And then just one last thing that I wanted to bring up, unless you all have another one, is just diversity.

There was not much diversity described in the book.

And, you know, it was 1970.

And even though it was New York City and New Jersey, it's just not discussed that much.

We know the Christians and the Jews, but we don't know for a fact if any of the other kids, and they probably aren't African-American or, you know, Asian or whatever, Middle Eastern.

Indian, Hindu.

Right, all of those things, which today you would see so much diversity, and not just on the coasts, but throughout the United States, you know, but also just the idea of what religions are discussed in the book.

There would be diversity of the religions discussed in the book, as we've already mentioned.

Right, and of course, even the fact that people, a lot of people now don't go to church, you know, it's not the big deal it was in 1970, where that was such an important part of what they did.

Also, the conversation about moms working or not working is not a conversation anymore.

In fact, they all have to work, because that's what's happened with the economy.

All right, on that note, I'm going to go ahead and segue us to our final segment, The Significance, which we're keeping as is.

Yeah, so I'm gonna jump in because I just have been dying to say this, which is my big lasting question from having read this book for the first time when I was 10, 11, 12, whatever I was, to now where I have raised a child who read this book as a middle schooler and is now 27 years old, holy cow.

Why is a woman's period still such a taboo topic?

I wish I had an answer to that.

And why does that lend itself to all the things that women shouldn't hold office because, oh, when they get their periods, they're hormonal and they make irrational choices, and then they go through menopause, God forbid, and then, you know, what does that mean?

And just the whole, what the heck?

It's just a part of biology.

Yeah, it's simple, basic biology of half the population.

And guess what?

You know, I'm not gonna go there, I'm just gonna stop.

Because I'm about to say something that I should not say out loud on a podcast, but just suffice it to say, women can handle holding office really, really well.

Well, as evidenced all around the world by women holding office.

Yes.

Yes.

But it does seem absolutely ridiculous that we're still having this taboo talk after all these years and so-called enlightenment.

So let's let Heather introduce the passage.

Yes, please.

What would you say to the author is the question.

And what I would like to discuss is the letter.

Margaret's given this topic, well, all the kids are given a topic that they're supposed to pick a topic that they could ruminate on and research and create this basically some year long.

Yeah, something meaningful.

On something very significant to them.

And so Margaret, of course, chooses to do her religious questioning.

And when she goes to do it, she feels like such a failure because she didn't get the answers that she wanted.

So she simply writes a letter to the teacher saying, I tried this, I went to church, I went to synagogue, I did all this, but all I see is religious causing fighting between my family, and it's just caused all these problems.

And it was a very significant insight for her, and it was a very powerful letter, and we never followed up on it.

I would have asked, you know, maybe this could have been a great springboard for a talk with Mr.

Benedict or whatever about, you know, what she's found and how profound it is for her, and you know, where she might go from here kind of thing.

And I just feel like that's a lost opportunity.

Yeah, yeah, I agree.

I remember feeling that I was left hanging in that moment.

Yeah, I agree with that 100%.

And I remember, you know, my vague memories of reading that when I was young, that was a big part of it.

I remember thinking she had done something more meaningful than probably what any of the other kids did.

And then I, when I reread it, I realized he never said that.

He implied it to an adult brain, but to a kid's brain, they can't tell that that's what's being implied.

Well, and I just picture, you know, the description that Judy Blume writes or wrote about her running out of the room and running into the girl's bathroom and sitting down on a toilet seat and just crying her eyes out.

So she's made herself more vulnerable in that letter than in pretty much any other scene in the book.

She's made herself so vulnerable to a teacher that she obviously developed a relationship with throughout the course of the year and trusted.

I don't know.

I would have started that whole conversation differently.

I would have been, I would have said something like, wow, Margaret, I was really impressed, like right up at the beginning of the conversation so that she doesn't run away thinking, she's done something bad.

Right.

Yeah, very true.

But remember, he was a first year teacher.

Yes, yes.

He was.

All right.

The third part of our significance of the book, we just try to connect it to sort of the world at large and via a recommendation, either maybe for the author or for a character in the book.

And I kind of have two, which is a surprise to me because I wasn't sure going into the conversation, but the first one is for Judy Blume.

And I'm sure Judy Blume is on top of this, but I would love for her to watch the Netflix series Sex Education.

Yes!

Just to see how far we have come that this could exist.

And I love the focus, the educational focus of the show.

And then the second recommendation is for Margaret, I guess it's just food for thought when you are considering religion.

One of my favorite poems by Ani DeFranco, one of my favorite musicians, and it's a short poem, so I'm just going to go ahead and read it.

It's called Literal, and it goes like this.

When they said he could walk on water, what it sounded like to me is he could float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.

Literal people are scary, man.

Literal people scare me out there trying to rid the world of its poetry while getting it wrong fundamentally.

Down at the Church of Look, it says right here, see?

So that's one that has always resonated with me.

I could see why.

I just cannot take all of that stuff, too literally.

In the next two episodes, we will be discussing the book *Flamer*, which is a graphic novel by Mike Curato.

This book was just raised itself up on our list of books to be read and discussed after having a recent discussion with the president of the ALA, whose name is Emily Drabinski.

So that was what moved that book up on our list, and we're very much looking forward to reading it based on her recommendation and certainly discussing it.

So if you have a question or a comment for us, and come on, you know you do, don't be shy, don't be like Margaret and her friends.

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I would be willing to go on record saying that you can probably link to that from our web page.

Finally, thank you so much to Heather for being our fabulous guest.

Thank you very much for having me.

This has been really fun and informative, and just a really interesting topic for something I really, you know, a book I really loved.

Well, we plan to have you back for sure.

Absolutely.

Thanks also to go to Chris for creating the music.

We could not have done this podcast without them or without our colleague Alanna.

Alanna, we miss you.

Alanna should be back next time.

Next time, we hope, fingers crossed.

Finally, thanks to all of you for reading with us because books are meant to be read.