

Rogue Librarians, Episode 12

All Boys Aren't Blue (Part 2: Close Reading)

Welcome to the 12th episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We always love for you, our listeners, to participate in our discussion. Please visit theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter @RLibrarians.

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So we always start each segment with a book that we have recently read and I'm gonna go to Alanna today first. Ok, great. Uh I just decided to reread one of my favorite books from the last few years, which is *Cemetery Boys* by Aiden Thomas. And yes, I'm listening to it again. I highly recommend the narrator. It is a great paranormal romance story that features a trans teen who uh has the ability to see ghosts and he is trying to figure out how um this teenage boy was murdered to sent him to the afterlife. Um But he's also attracted to him. So it's really interesting. Um And I love the story. How about you, Dorothy?

I am. Uh I picked up at a library book sale, my favorite place to get books. Um Margaret Atwood's book of poetry, *Morning in the Burned House* and, you know, haven't read Atwood any Atwood in a while. Um So it's just a pleasure to read her language. It's dark. Um But uh I think I'll just, I'll just tell you about my favorite poem because uh this will give you a flavor. Uh There's a lot of little historical settings and characters. Um this one is called half hanged Mary, which

was um about a woman who was accused of witchcraft in the 1680s in a Puritan town in Massachusetts and hanged from a tree where according to one of the several surviving accounts, she was left all night. It is known that when she was cut down, she was still alive. So she lived for another 14 years. So uh it's, oh, it's, it's good. Uh She heard she so good with the, with words, my Margaret Atle lover. Uh What do, what do you got on the, on the pile, Marian?

Um All right. So a book that I have been that I have read recently, um I was just browsing around in the Y A section of a library when I picked up *All Boys Aren't Blue*. And I happened upon a nonfiction book called *Queerly* and wonderfully made a guide for LGBT Q Plus Christian Teens, which is edited by Lee Fink. Um And I picked the book up purely out of curiosity because I kind of wanted to know what take this book would have. Um And I was prepared to um be wary of it and I was pleasantly surprised. I thought the book was very well done. Um It was very open and accepting and the overall message in the book was acceptance and love for um for whomever you are, however you present gender wise or sexuality wise. It was, it was just a shock to me honestly. Um But I, I, and I hate to say it that way, but um we hear so much about um some, some Christian groups who are, you know, who are very, very negative about LGBTQ+. And the gist of this book was if you are a member of a church that um makes you feel self loathing, then you're in the wrong church. There are Christian churches out there that are very accepting and loving and um encouraging of um LGBTQ+ uh folks to be who they are and to be out about who they are and to be seen as who they are. And this was um you know, that, that was the overall message for me, but it, it really is a guidebook on um you know, a lot of, a lot of questions that um young folks might have um deciding to come out how to come out, how to love themselves, um dealing with mixed messages that they're getting from church doctrines and things like that. So I, I thought it was a really um a nice, a nice tool um for, for folks who need it. Um And, and honestly, it, anybody could read it and, you know, if you're questioning as a Christian, you know, whether your child is gonna go to hell because they are not, you know, because they're somewhere on the gender spectrum. I think that this book will also help um a parent to realize that, you know, God, God made us perfectly and um in, in God's image and, and we are all loved as we are. So I'll just leave that there.

Interesting. Thank you. Sounds like it could end up on our list at some point.

Well, today we are continuing our discussion of *All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto* by George M Johnson, which was the third most challenged book in 2021. First published in 2020,

this memoir has received multiple starred reviews and was adapted as a short film in 2021. This book is recommended for those who are 14 and older by the *School Library Journal* and 16 and older by Common Sense Media. As we mentioned last time, George Matthew Johnson is black and non-binary and uses they/them pronouns and as we've said before, we are three white cisgender and straight women. So we've not had the same experiences as Johnson, but uh we will do our best to talk about them and we wanted to mention that some of our discussion will focus on sexual assault. As we said, last time this book has been banned because of its LGBTQ+ content, profanity, and because it is considered to be sexually explicit. So, Dorothy, do you wanna remind us what this book is about?

Absolutely. So, um uh George describes it as a YA memoir and a manifesto about growing up black and queer. Uh And uh states very clearly in the foreword. This book will touch on sexual assault, lost opportunity, homophobia, racism and anti blackness. Uh And has also a very thoughtful discussion of um the N word and the F word, the one that refers to queerness and suggests how to thoughtfully use them in a discussion, uh which I thought was a nice, um you know, addition, uh it's written in four acts and uh each act has sort of a series. It felt to me like a series of essays, stories still. But I, I say essay because usually comes around to like here's the meaning that I want you to get, you know, uh very direct in that way. That's the manifesto we part of it. So we have a uh part Act one, a different kid where we get stories, anecdotes and advice from childhood through high school. Uh And uh Act Two, which is uh called Family where it's written as letters to different members of the family. Act Three, which is teenagers, which uh takes us again back to some of the teenage years, but specifically seems to be about exploring the gayness and their own responses to it. Um And then finally Act four, which is friends which really goes more into the college experience and coming of age and more uh um choices made around sex and, and agency. Uh That's a quick summary.

Great. Thank you. So, our first section then characterization. Alanna, would you like to start us off on that?

Sure. So we're talking about characterization. And as Dorothy just said, this is a memoir. It's a true story. And, uh, one of the things that I think, you understand, as you read this book is that George or Matthew, as they're called at different points, um, has very close relationships with certain people. And, um, the relationship that I found most special was the one he had with his grandmother, his mother's mom, Nanny. And um, you can tell from the very beginning of the

book, how close they were to Nanny. And, um, there's uh a whole section that they write to Nanny. And, um, one piece of it that I found to be especially moving was, um Johnson said because she saw me, I get the chance to tell everyone about her and, uh, even many years before he came or sorry before they came out to her as gay. And that wasn't until they were 25. Um Nanny picked up on the fact that they were different in some way and told all of her grandchildren. You know, I, I love each of you differently because you are different people. And I Johnson said that they were very, um lonely and isolated when they were younger, partially because they were in the closet and they couldn't or thought they couldn't be who they truly were. And, um, Nanny stepped in to be their best friend and conspirator and they would, um, do various, uh, ways of selling money or, sorry, selling things to get money, like selling candy, um, and making a lot of money that way. And, uh, when he needed service hours she created a whole service project for him at their, sorry, she created a whole service project for them at their church. A whole soup kitchen, soup kitchen. And, uh, she really went out of her way to help him in every way she could and she loved him. Oh my gosh. And she loves them no matter what. And even when uh Johnson's cousin, Hope um came out as trans and told the family, my chosen name is Hope. Uh Nanny was upfront with the fact that, well, you know, I knew you from this uh from the time you were born as this person. But, you know, I'll try. Uh So I just, I just love Nanny.

I love that. Uh that George brought that into it because it is so much what an old person's response to like what, you know, what do you mean? You're changing things on me. And I, I liked that it was that it was done with love and that it didn't change, you know how they thought of her and also with Nanny in particular, but with all of the family, uh it really highlighted for me some of the differences in the ways black communities uh view family and take care of each other and uh you know, honestly a little jealous, you know, having that whole extended family, having Nanny there to take care of all the different um kids whenever it was needed. Right. It was lovely. Nanny. Get the sense that she, sorry. Go ahead, Marian.

Oh, I was just gonna say Nanny was the matriarch and, and I don't say that lightly. Nanny was the matriarch, the queen of the family. And until she died, no one else was going to take that role. And she was so pivotal, not just because she was this awesome, wonderful person who saw George as they were and, and all of the grandchildren and cousins and whatnot. But Nanny was very pivotal in raising them all because George had a mom and dad that both worked long hours and, you know, were very serious about providing their, for their families and, you know,

very much a part of their children's lives. But Nanny is the glue that held it all together so that mom and dad could have these careers and, and really, um you know, make the money that provided for the whole family. So that was a really cool, special um special relationship. But I, but I also, I mean, again, you know, I'm I'm white so I, I I'm trying to learn from what I've read in this book, but it seems like um this is kind of, you know, part of the black culture is that there is a matriarch of the family and the matriarch is the glue.

Well, in addition to Nanny, you can tell that George is very close to other members of their family and there's a very sweet, very touching letter that they wrote to their younger brother Garrett. Um, but I think you have uh a clear sense of how their relationships with their mom and dad also affected who they became, they sorry.

This uh this is our first episode incidentally, not face to face. So a lot of these overlaps and uh are, are results of us all having something to say and not knowing when the next sentence is coming up, right? Um Well, we talked uh before we started recording about how there's so many people in here that we could possibly go into the characterization of each one. You mentioned the parents and I really had something to say about the relationship with dad. Um And so there's in, in the um the section with letters to the different people. I think that's the section it's in, hang on. I'm checking. Daddy's second chance is the name of the chapter. Um Talks about how and I'm gonna quote this. Um I watch black men criticize black queer boys every day. And that's not to say my community is more homophobic than others or that I don't see where Black straight men affirm me, but by and large, it's not enough. My father taught me that as much as I feel that straight black men are often my oppressors. There are moments that I also know they can be my protectors. But the social conditioning that told us to hate our own because of sex and gender can be broken. And it was so interesting with their father because their father had had a child from a previous marriage or a previous mother. Um that was gay and the father had not, uh my impression was not, not handled that well, that relationship well, but maybe have predisposed him and with the influence of his mother who's also amazing. Um their mother who's also amazing. Yeah, really to be a little bit more open to loving this child even though they weren't conforming to this fairly rigid uh black masculinity. Um And there's this whole section about the football game or the toss of the football around where the dad was surprised that uh Matthew uh slash George, you know, was good with the football and I just had so many mixed emotions around that, you know, I'm like, uh under learning uh toxic masculinity, you know, uh why should throwing a football make any difference to how you love your children? But that day

changed our relationship forever. That's the quote in the book. So it's sad that there had to be some traditionally masculine activity, but at the same time, you know, it highlights how nobody fits into a box and, and, and it was a wonderful bridge for the two of them to have together. So it was just, it was a, a moving chapter for me.

I agree and I think that also that brings up the whole, um, question that I think as parents, anyone who's a parent has grappled with, which is, you know, we brought a child into the world and whenever we bring a child into the world, there are all these hopes and dreams that are born with that child. And, you know, more in our society from the time that there's a gender reveal, which is its own bag of worms to open up and that's become so huge in our society. And I don't see it as a positive honestly, I see it as um a societal response to any other alternative than male or female. And, you know, and, and so I find that problematic, but that's a whole another discussion but from the gender reveal, you know, just, just going back to parents and parental feelings and certainly the hormones that go through a mother's body when she's pregnant and beyond. Um, there, you know, there are hopes and expectations that, I mean, you can't help but have, right. That's just natural, a natural part of being pregnant and giving birth. And yet we as parents have to come to terms with the fact that we are bringing a life into the world. We don't really control that life. Um We sustain that life, we nurture that life, we educate that life, but whomever that person becomes is ultimately up to that free soul that we've brought into the world as a new life. However, I don't think that all parents look at it that way. Um And I think that society has reinforced these notions of, you know, if you don't like what you see in your kid, look in the mirror. Well, not that I disagree with that but you know that it's all the parents' responsibility all the time um without accepting the free will of the, the new life. And, you know, so sort of tagging on to what you said, Dorothy. I mean, if we as parents are raising our children, um being exposed to the things that we like because that's natural, right? I mean, I exposed my children to music, I exposed my Children to basketball. I've exposed my Children to cycling and hiking and being in nature and, you know, the list could go on and on and on. Um And that's a part of who, who I am that I have shared with them. But inevitably there comes a time when you realize that your children may or may not love the things that you do as much as you do and you kind of have to have that feeling. But I think that parents really struggle with that, you know, in, in the passage that you referred to, Dorothy, you know, that was a way for dad to connect with George was through the tossing of the football and, and it was something that George themselves, uh, identified as, you know, a strength and it reinforced, I think for dad that, ok, I have a connection with, with my son, my child. Um, you know, which it has always

been there, there's always been a connection. Every parent has a connection to their, to their children, whether they nurture it or not. But we as selfish individuals because we all are, we're human, want our Children to reflect us. So, so there's a coming to terms of, I have to accept that my child is not going to be just exactly like me. My child is not put on the earth to fulfill my hopes and dreams. The child is brought to the earth to live their own life. And I thought it was, it was great to bring it back around to dad that uh that we got to hear how that exploration kind of worked for him.

But uh I'm totally with you. What I realized when I had my second child, it from the get go. They're so different from the first child. Uh And that was the way you run into this danger of wanting to have a bunch of kids because you're like, oh what would the next one be? They're all so different. So even just from a very, very young age kids make it very clear that they are who they are and, you know, you, you have a role to play but there's some inherent stuff that you can't, you know, can't change and shouldn't try. Uh, did you, uh, Marian have a particular character that spoke to you?

Um, well, I loved, I loved the relationship that George had with mom. Um, that was such a sweet, a sweet, um, relationship and, you know, mom was strong. Mom was no pushover. Mom was my, I say was as though she doesn't exist anymore, but she does as far as I know, but the way that she's portrayed in the book, I, um, I loved the scene when George is trying to decide where to go to college and he's thinking he wants to go, what is it to Texas or Tennessee or something like that? Tennessee and, and George of course, grew up in, in New Jersey and mom was just like, oh, no, that's too far away. I won't be able to come protect you if you're in trouble. Um, I felt that so much. Yeah. Yeah. And, um, that, that just touched me intensely deeply, um, when the mom is going through, uh, and this is a spoiler alert. So, you know, be aware, um, you know, being in the hospital and, um, they're, you know, they're afraid they're gonna lose her and, and just that, that whole scene there, the intensity of that scene and, um, I don't know, it just, it was just so, it was just so emotional and, and everybody should have a mom like this, you know, and, or a mother figure of some variety like this, that it's just so intense. So, um, so I, I thought the mom was wonderful and solid and strong and a provider and, you know, not always physically present because mom was at work a lot, but mom was there for everything that was important in Georgia's life. I and it's, it's so clear. Uh George doesn't come out until what do we say to his mom? I think in his 20 early twenties somewhere. But it's fairly clear throughout the book that mom knows mom has always known and mom is not going to

make it a thing, you know, that which, which is just such a great way to parent and but still just let let your child come to their own realizations when they're ready. And I loved the moment when she asked him which name he preferred to have because it was so great.

Yeah, he had always thought that his name was Matthew, that it was actually his middle name. And then uh when his cousin reveals that his first name is actually George and he used it in school and the teacher called his mom um called their mom, their mom said, so which name do you prefer? Because you should choose one and stick with that one. And they chose Matthew and it wasn't until high school, when their Catholic school required it to be George that they became George.

But I, I loved that the mom gave him that agency in that moment, even though he was fairly young and, and as a parent whose children have changed names multiple times, I loved that that was explored and, and even though George is uh um non binary, I think you said uh with that they then pronounced, it was not explored in the sense of changing that identity for that reason. But just kids finding their identity and what they want to be called, which, you know, we had that we all had that conversation in middle school. I don't know about you guys, but it's not that we said you should call us this other name, but we always had names in our back pocket. Oh If I should have been named Hillary, you know, I think that was the one that I always loved uh back when it didn't have so many connotations to it. I didn't know that many Hillarys. I think there was one in a TV show that I liked. I always wanted to be a different name also.

So well that, that could take us to our discussion of themes because that was one of the themes we were thinking about is the importance of names. And um also how big a portion of your identity your name is. And for George as we said, uh, they were called Matthew for about the 1st, 13 years of their life. And, um, they also made it clear that you don't have to be confined to a particular identity. Um, whether or not, uh, you choose your name. Uh, but bringing up the example of football and double dutch, uh, they, they mentioned that they were good at football. Their cousins had taught them how to play, but they want, wanted to spend recess playing double dutch with the girls and how that was seen as a problem by a bunch of boys and they were calling um them bad names because they were doing it. So, um you know, it's, it's that binary that they object to like they, they liked doing both of them at various points, but I had uh being forced to do what other people consider is normal. Did not feel good to them.

Yeah, but with the, the names I think we also get, we go from Matthew to George to MJ. Uh and you know, it's just, it's great to sort of acknowledge that there are different names maybe for different parts of your life or phases that you're, you know, going through uh people, other people give you. I always loved the idea of nicknames and I never had a really good one. Uh My, my name did not lend itself to a lot of nicknames. My, my mom had one that only my mom ever used, which I loved. But um so that was nice, but also to speak to that binary uh that I loved that chapter. Uh One of, one of the themes that I really saw throughout in a lot of different ways was agency. And with the double dutch, that chapter in particular had these sort of isolated little sentences that was like I chose this, I chose double dutch until you get to the football where the it's more forced. Um It chose him, it chose them because they realized then how their own choices were affecting people around them. I think there's a friend who was trying to be a good friend and but was getting some pushback from the other uh guys playing football and, you know, kind of didn't know how to do it. And I really felt for this, this kid, you know, trying to explain to your friend that you're being harassed because they're gay or perceived effeminate. Um So it was chosen kind of for them to play football. So it very much spoke to me about the agency. The agency is I choose this, I choose this, this, I, I couldn't choose, it was chosen for me.

I completely agree, Dorothy. They mentioned several times the importance of teaching kids agency to make decisions in their best interest. And I think one thing that goes along with that is, is the importance of knowledge. They mentioned that knowledge is your best weapon. And um it, whether it's knowledge of history, they talked about, um you know, how history is taught in school. Um and responding to the teacher's comments about slavery, whether it's knowledge about sex because they mentioned how little they knew about gay sex. Um But having the knowledge helps you to make decisions that are in your best interest and to have the agency.

And I think the whole manifesto portion of the book, which are these little directives, you know, at the end of some of the different chapters is it cares how you reader can take agency for yourself. Um I'm trying to find that page on my notes because I wrote a couple of them down says stand up for yourself, learn what you like and don't like create the special environment that works best for you. No one has the right to deny us the resources we need to properly engage with one another, you know, stuff like that. That's just, it's very direct spoken to the reader. Here's how you can have some agency and there's a lot of, it's kind of a follow up to that.

I mean, I think another really important theme, you know, along those lines is how necessary it is to process our trauma. Um And you know, George talks about how um writing the process of writing down these stories that became *all boys aren't blue* was um part of processing their trauma um of what they went through in their life. But uh George George is quoted as saying it's necessary that we do the work to unpack our shit. It's time for the world to let queer black boys unpack their shit. It's important to do therapy and to discuss mental health too. And George talks very openly. Um and frankly about the fact that in the black uh culture, mental health is not talked about much um particularly with um black males. It's, you know, your mental health is just, you know, this happened. OK, I'm done with it. And then, you know, there's a lot that never gets talked about, it never gets unpacked, it never gets processed. And that leads to, you know, kind of some, some cultural trauma that becomes generational trauma. And we talked a little bit about that. Um when we discussed *Maus*, I, I remember but, but that, which is not um unpacked and processed and worked through is, is going to continue to come back into our lives and haunt us. And, and I think we're living in a time right now where um you know, because of COVID and all of the trauma caused by COVID, I mean, there's, there's just so much more uh anxiety and depression and trauma that people may or may not even be aware they have. Um but they're living with it and, you know, there's, there's always been this stigma about mental health, you know, why is mental health even considered separate from medical, physical health. It's, you know, I mean, it's, it's not like your head is not attached to the rest of your body. Um, you know, or your teeth for that matter or your eyes. Right? I mean, all of these things, it's just your overall health and hello, health, health insurance companies listen up. Um, I'm on my soapbox right now but, but seriously, I mean, you know, mental health is everything. If you are not mentally healthy, it affects your sleep, it affects your, your, you know, the health of your heart, it affects your blood pressure, it affects, it affects everything. Um And you know, um and then obviously to add on societal pressures and, and all of the obvious of, you know, um the gay community is uh the LGBTQ+ community is, is constantly under attack. Um People are not allowed to be themselves if, if they are themselves, then, you know, they deal with bullying or they deal with or worse, you know, um attacks that it's we had another recent attack in a, in a nightclub, uh you know, targeting drag queens just recently. So, so these, these are things that need to be um to be brought out and, you know, um I, I think that's a very important theme that comes out of this book is to reach out to your community, get your mental health, get yourself um you know, un unpack your shit and, and deal with it.

Yeah. And I think something that goes along with that is they mentioned earlier um that this mask that they feel like they're wearing and they refer explicitly to Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, "We Wear the Mask." Um as you know, either as a black person or as a queer person. Um There's a lot of hiding who you truly are and they did not feel comfortable uh until college to start coming out to a few people and even then they weren't completely out and, um, just how that fear affected so many aspects of their life and contributed to other trauma. Um, it, it, it is a, a thing that a lot of people deal with and maybe most people have to wear or feel like they have to wear a mask in certain aspects of their lives, but they clearly show how big a problem it is to, um, hide who you actually are.

Yeah, I, I have two points. I want to make one about the processing trauma and maybe you guys can help remind me, but I think there was a section where they talked about trauma happening, not just to you but to the, to others around you when it happened. Like if, uh, I don't think this was the incident but for instance, when, um, Matthew's teeth were knocked out, uh, that trauma was Matthew's. But as a mom, I can certainly think, you know, that, that mom experienced that trauma as well, you know, in a different way. Uh, and maybe it was, maybe I'm bringing in something that I heard elsewhere. I can't remember. But, so that is an interesting point. And then, um, on the mask, I'm curious how you guys feel about the whole, um, a fraternity situation because I was so, again, conflicted much like in the part with his, with their dad that it was all about finding this, this masculine identity that they could live into. But then, you know, which rubbed me the wrong way, but it was such an important uh bonding experience to them. And those ended up being, despite the fact that the fraternity was saying we don't, we don't allow gay this four of the eight members in their uh line that, that's how they refer to it, um were gay. Uh So, I don't know, that was just a lot for me to unpack this sort of weirdly finding yourself in something that uh purports to not accept who you are.

Yeah. No, the same thing struck me Dorothy. Um The fact that they were explicitly asked, are you gay and told, like, you cannot be gay and in this fraternity. And so they had to hide who they were. But as you said, it turns out that half of their best friends were gay and they came out to each other secretly. Um And they are incredibly close. It seems like if you are in an environment that does not tolerate who you are. Um But you're in this environment that also um creates closeness by these activities you're doing together. Um that maybe by getting close to each other in other ways, you can then slowly once you feel comfortable, reveal who you actually are.

I think it really speaks to the complexity of uh literally everything in the world that uh the underlying principles of what the fraternities are trying to do are really fantastic when taken with uh an understanding of a whole human being. And then there's layers of societal pressure on top of that to try to push away certain identities. But those rituals, those bonding things are still positive. Yes, I know I was shied away from the idea of sororities and fraternities and hazing just and, and I loved that, that they talked about the problems with hazing. Yes. You know, and we're on the lookout for that and I would hope had they been asked to do anything um you know, uh that, that they thought was dangerous that they would have stood up and said no, although at one point they did say we would have done anything.

Which it also is a big question mark because I, I agree with both of you that I found that that part of the story raised a lot of questions for me. Um I, I also never wanted to be a part of something like that. However, um I'm trying to play devil's advocate a little bit and to be inside George's head, which is impossible to be. But to understand that the George wasn't one thing or isn't one thing, you know, we're all as, as you both have said, you know, complexities and, and George was black is black. George is black. Um, spoiler alert. No, I'm just kidding. George is black and, and being drawn to join a traditionally black fraternity must have been fulfilling for a part of, of George's identity and maybe that was, was the appeal that, that, that we've talked about, you know, being a queer black boy is a double-edged sword because you're first seen as black and secondarily you're seen as, as gay and, and to be able to, to be with a group that didn't necessarily first say, oh you're black because we're all black. Um I don't know, there, there, there must be something that's appealing there that you're completely accepted for being black um outside of your family.

Yeah, I think part of that um is a really good point, Marian, I think part of that is he had no close male friends other than his cousins uh when he was growing up. And so for the first time, you know, this environment helps you become really close to other black men and he really yearned for friendship and um belonging. And so this gives him that.

Definitely. And because you're, you're right, I mean, they talk about in school, their closest friends were the women, the women, the girls, they, they did double dutch with. They were, they were my girls um, and got in trouble for coming up with the term honeychild. Yeah. Well, should we move on to our last segment on significance?

Yes. Yes. Ok. So one way we like to get into the text is think about a book, song or TV, show that we would recommend to the main character or author. And I was thinking that I would recommend um two books, George Johnson mentioned that they did not have a lot of um books or TV shows or movies when they were growing up that featured queer um and, or black uh characters. And um I chose two books that feature queer uh teens of color that I think uh George would have loved reading if they had been around when he was growing up or when they were growing up. So, the first one is the book I mentioned at the beginning of the episode: *Cemetery Boys* by Aiden Thomas, which is about uh a trans boy who um is gay and uh is Latino and um trying to figure out so many things about their identity and how they fit in with their culture. And um it's just so beautifully written and presented. And another book that I loved is *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender. And it's also about a trans teen of color, who is trying to figure out um their identity. And in both cases, they struggle to some extent uh with their fathers understanding who they are. Um and coming to terms with their queerness. And um in *Felix Ever After*, uh the main character, Felix is um humiliated publicly by someone posting their dead name alongside of uh images of him before he transitioned. And um and trying to figure out who did that and why um helps them explore, try to figure out who they are even better. Like is trans the right term for who I am. Uh which pronouns um am I gay? You know, all, all these questions come up in the book. So they're both beautifully written books. Um And they both deal with topics that I think uh George would have really appreciated when he was growing up.

Excellent. It leads right into the passage, which is another way we get it into the text that spoke to me. Um And I, you know, I've underlined half the book. So I had a lot to choose from, but I had a big post it note and asterisk on this one. Um I remember the arguments people have about whether you are born queer or grow into it. I think the funniest part about that argument is that it doesn't matter if queerness is by birth or by choice, it is who you are and no one should have the right to change that. And I just loved how, because it is such a big part of the conversation. Uh And for me, helps me, it, the idea that it's not a choice helps me to understand trans and gayness. But I loved being challenged with that. It doesn't matter if it's a choice, it's still your choice, right? So that, that really spoke to me a lot.

Yes. Yeah, that's, that's a really important passage. Thank you for bringing that one up. Um That kind of leads me into the question. Um And, and I will say this because I'm gonna, I'm gonna plug this when I read when I picked up the book *All Boys Aren't Blue* and started reading it. I also, and I do this sometimes I, I also looked for the book as an audiobook and was also able to

simultaneously check out the audiobook and it was great because I could ride uh read during my commutes many commutes. Um But what was particularly special about this audiobook is that it is narrated by George and it gave me a deeper connection, I think to this, the whole, the whole story because to hear George um talk, you know, literally read the story. It felt like a conversation, it felt like I was just sitting there in my living room having a conversation with George about all these stories and, and experiences that they had had in thus far in their life and how those, those stories had molded them. So I, I found it a very, a very powerful way to experience the book. So um if you haven't had an opportunity to do that or if you're thinking about um reading this book, I, I definitely recommend um considering the audiobook um and all that being said as I was reading this book. Um and, and the interviews and, and things that we've talked about with George. It, it made me really um wonder what George would say about gender queer. Um And what kinds of conversations George might have with Maia Kobabe. Um in *Gender Queer* being uh a book that we've already discussed in a pod in a prior podcast. Um What I found particularly interesting here is that both both *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* are memoirs. They're listed as memoirs. Um mhm They're both coming of age stories um or coming of age books, I guess a memoir is not a story but um but when I went to my public library to check out these books. *Gender Queer* is in the graphic novel section in my particular public library in the general collection as in the adult collection, not in the YA collection. And *All Boys Aren't Blue* is located in the YA collection. And I found that somewhat curious. Um So I kind of wanted to, to put the question out there to George and to um my fellow rogue librarians and, and our audience, you know, what are your thoughts on that? And um you know, why, why is that? I mean, certainly one easy answer is that um it seems like *All Boys Aren't Blue* was specifically written for a YA audience and *Gender Queer* perhaps was not. Um But I'm gonna ask um you two what you think of this?

Yeah, that, that's a great question, Marian. I, I think it's, it's clear that *All Boys Aren't Blue* was written for teenagers. It seems to be his or young adults, his primary audience, *Gender Queer*, I would say um was also like maybe written with teenagers in mind. But um given the pushback that it's had across the country, I wonder if your library system made the choice not to put it in the young adult section because that could lead to more problems. And so if it's in the general collection, um it's not, you know, as we talked about the fact that it's a graphic memoir um makes it more problematic for some people. Um And even though the content in this book is arguably more sexually explicit, especially when he talks about the assault and losing their virginity. Um The elements, the sexual elements in *gender queer*, seeing them drawn, seeing

them illustrated, um bothered people more, you know. So, um but I, I could see this book *All Boys Aren't Blue* being moved to the general collection. It could have caused problems too. Yeah, especially because, you know, as Dorothy mentioned, you know, it, it goes into the college years and those are the years of, you know, more sexual exploration.

Um Well, I, I do think most definitions of YA now really, do you know it include the college years because they're quite literally young adults, you know, at that point. So that's a good question. I also wonder whether uh the classifications come with the books. In many cases, the publisher will say this is why a, this is, you know, a graphic novel. So that might have something to do with it. I also think even though both of them are uh non, nonbinary. Yeah, George's book doesn't, it doesn't mention, it doesn't mention it as much. It, the focus is more on, on being gay and black. And I, I just wonder in the back of my mind, is that more acceptable to the general uh banning audience? Because it's less like um telling your children how to be trans.

Sure, it like maybe nonbinaryness or transness is more dangerous to certain people. Yeah. Well, and I, I feel like in, in *All Boys Aren't Blue*, you know, the way that the story is told is through family stories and family experiences a little bit more um very personal. Well, no, because Maia Kobabe's book is also extremely personal.

But it's, I think Maya's book focuses less on the familial relationships they're there. But it's more about their figuring out. Um, well, now I should use, uh, Maia's correct pronouns. Um, sorry. Uh, it's more about em figuring out who, um, e is and this book is exploring who George is. But it's, it feels much bigger than that in terms of these relationships.

Right. Truly, it's, it's almost a conversation I want to have with the librarians and just ask because it's, it's perplexing to me. But, um, and I, I wonder if it had to do with the challenge that came to um to one or the other, uh I'm guessing *Gender Queer* because that was in the news so much more. Um In 2021 with, with it being the most banned book of the year. So, and this is the third most banned, but still there's a difference. There is, there is a difference.

All right. Well, uh thank you to our listeners. Um as always, um for, for being our listeners and, and being committed to our, our podcast, we really appreciate you in the next episode. We will discuss *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Please join us next time for a discussion of why it has been banned. As always, if you would like to leave us a

question or comment. Um If you'd like to join in my question that we just sort of left unresolved, please visit theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod. If you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple podcasts, Spot, Spotify, Stitcher or wherever you find your podcasts. Thank you to Chris (yay!) for creating the music and to Lizzie (Yay!) for doing so much for us um particularly the audio editing for this episode, our first attempt at doing this remotely. Um and for all the previous episodes, we could not have done this podcast without either of them. And thank you to our listeners. Um This is for you, we dedicate this to you. Um because books are meant to be read. Bye!

*Please excuse the typos and grammatical errors.