INTRODUCTION: Welcome to Behind the Circulation Deskm a Wake Tech Libraries podcast. You'll learn about new items in our collection through lively discussions about our new resources with faculty and staff, little-known stories about how things run behind the scenes at Wake Tech Libraries, and, of course, stories about how students succeed because of what we provide here at Wake Tech Libraries. I'm your host, Nichole Williams, instructional services librarian at the Scott Northern Wake campus.

In this episode, we will talk to Elizabeth Quirk and Jennifer Wolkowski, two members of our English faculty, about banned books and promoting diversity of thought. Be sure to visit the "Banned Books" displays at each of our campus libraries during Banned Books Week, September 18th through the 24th. Now, let's get started with the discussion.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: All right, welcome to Behind the Circulation Desk, which is the podcast of the Wake Tech Libraries, and today we have Jennifer Wolkowski and Elizabeth Quirk here from the English Department to talk with us about banned books and censorship. So, before we get started, I'm gonna let each of you tell a little bit about yourself. So, we'll start with Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH QUIRK: Hi. OK. Well, like you said, I'm Elizabeth Quirk. I've been teaching at Wake Tech for roughly 11 years. I was a student at Wake Tech a long time ago, so I've been on both sides of the classroom. I'm also someone who has been a reader my entire life, and, if anything, when I was younger, I think I was drawn to books that were controversial or banned. But I think, as we all know in in the news, what might have seemed an old-fashioned idea of banned books is something we're encountering as a culture more and more. So, I was thrilled when Dr. Wolkowski, Jennifer, introduced this idea to me and was eager to take part in creating a "Banned Books" exhibit for the libraries.

WILLIAMS: And Dr. Wolkowski, if you tell us a little bit about yourself.

JENNIFER WOLKOWSKI: Sure. My name is Jennifer, and I've been teaching with Wake Tech since 2008, but I, like Liz, have had a passion for reading what I wasn't supposed to read, starting when I was very, very young. And a year ago, I went to New York City and went to the Strand Bookstore and saw a banned books exhibit. And when I brought the idea back to Liz, she was absolutely enthusiastic because of what's going on culturally. I'm sure any student of history can see that we go through periods of banning books and then periods of what I would consider to be expansions of ideas. And so, because of that, we are now in a period of constriction and censorship and control. And I thought, what better to blow the doors off of that and then have the English faculty recommend banned books? So, I'm really hoping that librarians, the circulation desk and the students will enjoy what we've brought to them.

WILLIAMS: OK. So, I'm gonna go ahead and get into the, the questions that I have here, and I think that, you know, both of you have maybe answered this first one in your introduction, but the first question is why are books challenged? What, what do you think drives books being challenged?

WOLKOWSKI: Liz, you want to take that one first?

QUIRK: I think that it's important to remember, when books are challenged or banned, what is being advocated for by those criticizing the books or pushing, advocating for the banning of them, is not so

much not to read, but not to think. It's trying to, to make it so that students are in a situation where their thinking or what they've been brought up to believe is never challenged. And so, I think that, in many ways, the banning of books illustrates just how powerful, important, and important, books are because they can foster thinking, critical thinking. And I think the power of books to do so, especially, perhaps, fiction and, and poetry, and, in my humble opinion, to expand minds, is precisely why they are perceived as dangerous. And, and so, the reason they're banned is the same reason we need to push them to be read – because they're powerful.

WOLKOWSKI: I love that, Liz. I love that and, and to piggyback on that, I find it fascinating to look at why books are banned when they're banned. Because if you look at books being banned throughout history, you realize that whatever the controversial issue is at the time is the thing that is trying to be controlled and quieted. So, you may see books banned in the 1920s and 30s because they consider, because they use profanity, and that is considered the height of misbehavior at the time. And then you get into books that may have to do with issues like civil rights or women's rights or gay rights. Whatever the issue is of the day that is considered threatening to the, those in power, that is what is banned.

So, now we may look back and laugh at a book that was banned because of coarse language or profanity. But then we look at books that are banned because they discuss ideas like communism or free love or reproductive rights or gay rights or African American freedoms or Latino freedoms. Whatever the issue is, we have to realize that books are banned, as Liz said, because books are powerful, and if someone reads a book, that interpretation takes root in that person, and the idea is propelled forward. So, the, the cheapest shot a person can take is censorship.

WILLIAMS: That's great. As you were, you know, speaking about, you know, some of the issues that people, you know, that spurred people to ban books, I was thinking about titles, you know, of some books like, you know, "Invisible Man." I remember, you know, when some public libraries had banned that, you know.

WOLKOWSKI: Randolph County. Not long ago, just a few years ago, actually.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, I remember. I, I remember that. I remember reading it in college and then being amazed that, you know, it could be banned. So, but we'll get into, I think we have a question later on about some specific titles. Actually, let's see, the next question is why do you think it's important to read banned books. I think, and again, you kind of went over that a little bit earlier, but what's what is the main, what's the main reason why you feel like it's important for all of us to read banned books?

QUIRK: Well, the people who want you, to prevent you from reading books are doing so because they don't trust you to think for yourself, or they see you thinking, you thinking for yourself as dangerous. And so, I think that's reason enough to seek out books that have been banned.

I can speak for myself. When I was a teenager, "Lolita," which is by Vladimir Nabokov, has frequently been a subject of, of challenge. It has from its earliest days of publication, and as, sort of like Jennifer suggested of herself, as someone who was always drawn to what was not allowed, I read that book, you know, maybe half comprehending everything but a, but above all, Vladimir Nabokov's writing style and

his ability to express ideas poetically. It's not, it's not written in any way that is remotely pornographic. In fact, it's one of the great works of prose stylist of all time. And I think I was attracted to that book because it was forbidden or was largely considered controversial, at least. And yet, what came out of that was exposure in a formative way to some of the greatest sentence-level writing that I think is in the English language. And so, my answer to that is you don't know necessarily what you're missing out on when you don't get, when you don't read books that have been banned or forbidden because it's not just one thing you get, you get so much. And for me, I feel like my brain got scrambled at, you know, 16, 17 by Vladimir Nabokov's brilliant writing, and I'm thankful for it.

WOLKOWSKI: I think, can you repeat the question so I make sure I've got my ideas in order?

WILLIAMS: Just, why is it important to read banned books?

WOLKOWSKI: Every movement that attempts to control humans attempts to control knowledge and tells you that increased knowledge is dangerous or bad. And that can be in any historical movement, it can be in any ideological movement. And, as we become adults, we realize that knowledge itself is never bad; it's what is done with knowledge. So, I would say that it's important to read banned books because, if someone is telling you you can't do something, you should always try to figure out why they don't want you to, because it's usually something very different than what they say.

You know, the example that you gave of “Invisible Man” being banned in Randolph County, that was actually one of the books that I chose for the “Banned Books” display, and it was banned because of its sexual gratuitousness. And if there's, and I remember thinking to myself when I read that, I actually couldn't remember any of the sexually gratuitous passages that the person had brought up. It was just a question of handling that book and all of its themes that they didn't want students reading. And, as I would like to just add very briefly, not a single person on the school board had read the book at the time. So, when someone tells you, “Don't do this,” that is forbidden knowledge, and forbidden knowledge is always forbidden for a reason. But I was always a naughty child, so I should probably preface that by saying I, I often disobeyed the, the rules that were set for me.

QUIRK: And I just want to add to what Jennifer was saying. You know, there's often times that kind of dishonesty with the reason behind banning a book. The idea that, that “Invisible Man” is being banned because of its sexual explicitness? No, I mean, that's an excuse. The reason “Invisible Man” was being banned was because it challenged and called out the United States’ history and mistreatment of people of color. And so, there's a dishonesty of around the rhetoric, typically, of the books being banned that, of course, you should be skeptical about. But also, like Jennifer so, so beautifully put, the sheer fact that it's being banned means that you should see for yourself. Find out for yourself.

I'll say the Marquis de Sade, hope I'm saying that right, often challenged and banned. “I read it a little bit, and I said, ‘You know what? I don't feel like continuing to read it.’” I made it [the decision] myself, but not because anyone told me to.

WOLKOWSKI: And, and let me just piggyback on what Liz said because she brought up something fascinating, and that is that the way that we have created censorship in America in the school system is

that people can bring challenges to books for any reason whatsoever. There are even school districts where you don't actually have to have a child in the school district for you to challenge a book. And because of that, I so much want to point out Liz's point about intellectual dishonesty. But then there are also people who genuinely are offended by coarse language, profanity, mentions of sexuality, and I would argue that all of those things are part of the human condition that art seeks to explore. And so, when we ban something because of a word or an idea or an expression of humanity, then we are attempting to control those ideas in art, and we are attempting to control how they are perceived. So, even if someone has the best of intentions in banning a book that they, they find, that that person finds personally offensive, that's like closing an art museum because you find a painting personally offensive. This is an offense to those of us who wish to see that art, to feel that art, to express ourselves through that art. And I know that happens too in society, but that's part of another podcast.

WILLIAMS: So, two things came to mind while you all were, you know, explaining that. It's, you know, a great explanation of why we need to read banned books. And I just thought about how, from a publishing perspective, sometimes one of the best things that can happen for a sales perspective is for the book to be banned because, and publishers will even say that, like, you know, they sell all these copies because people get curious once it gets banned. You know, there's this big spike in sales. So, I think that, what you said about, you know, that actually has the opposite effect, that people, now they want that information because there's been this, it's been forbidden.

WOLKOWSKI: I hope so, that's very American. It's very American to be denied something and then want it. The book that you were talking about, “Invisible Man,” the, the week that it was banned by the Randolph County school system, the local bookstore sold out of all 10 of its copies. So, like you said, few things are better for capitalism than censorship it seems.

WILLIAMS: Right, right. The other thing that came to my mind is, it brought me back to my lessons in library school about how to deal with challenges, and basically, you know, we were led to, well, I was led to, the to the conclusion that there's really no good reason to ban a book. But the way that I, you know, the way that we're kind of taught to handle that is to, you know, provide balance. So, if you have a, if you have a book that's, you know, that somebody's challenging, you just wanna make sure that, whatever the topic is, that you have, you know, equal, you know, equal representation of the opinions or ideas around it.

WOLKOWSKI: I, I remember reading something about that. I, I hesitate to say that it was Florida, but I think it might have been Florida, where they were trying to understand how to teach both sides of the presentation of the Holocaust. And so, I can understand where you would want to have balance. But I also think that it's important that, rather than providing balance because I don't, I don't think if there is a book that celebrates a quality among people, we should then have a white supremacist or fascist book to balance it. I would say that all books have to be moderated with a level of appropriateness. I would never want a 7-year-old to read Marquis de Sade. I would never want a 13-year-old girl to read “Lolita,” you know? These are things, well, I might, but, but just the idea that certain books have concepts that are age-appropriate, and some kids are precocious and some kids are not.

And it used to be that individual families and parents took an interest in their individual child and didn't

presume to make decisions for libraries and school systems and other people's children. And I guess that's where censorship can become quite dangerous. I don't mind if Liz doesn't want to read something, but if Liz tells me not to read something, that's something totally different, which Liz would never do.

WILLIAMS: So, Liz, what is your opinion about that, the whole, you know, not banning it, but the, the balance, provide a balance thing? I totally understand what Jennifer is saying. You know, you don't really, if you follow down that idea, you might get to a point where, you know, you're giving too much, you know, too much credit to, to ideas that really are harmful, right?

QUIRK: It's sort of like, I know, in journalism circles, the challenge of, you know, you don't want to end up being like, "… and Sir Hitler, or Mr. Hitler, contends," as if there's equal balance to these perspectives because that's not really how it works. But I think that, when we talk about books, the best of our, the best of literature, they aren't reductive to simple ideas where you can have, "Oh, well, this book is about this, so we can have this other book that's about the opposite." I think that part of that simplistic black-and-white thinking, which is often what drives the banning of books, the challenging of books, it reduces books to some simple idea, really reading widely and respecting the areas of gray that literature presents is, I think, important to keep in mind. So, I guess my response to that would simply be, I think it would be hard to find, you know, a balance opposite of something that is as complex as a work of literature. And so, I agree with Jennifer's perspective about age-appropriateness has to come to the conversation, or I think it's kind of a, you know, a lot of these ideas are relevant for older people. But I agree with this idea, so yeah.

WOLKOWSKI: Well, I was thinking to myself that your, your idea is what we tried when we tried to talk about climate science. And I, it was the first thing that popped into my mind, and for how many decades did we try to say, "OK, these scientists believe that climate change is being exacerbated by human activity. But these climate scientists say that it's just part of the natural warming and cooling of the planet." And over the decades, we now realize that, by providing that false equivalency, we in America have set ourselves decades behind in terms of understanding climate science and taking steps to mitigate it. So, while I understand that, in the, in the shop of ideas, we might be able to be more philosophical, I look at it as, when you go into a, I'll use the museum idea again, the paintings, when you go into a museum and you see a painting, you don't see a painting of something opposite that on another wall to get you to realize that. You go into the Impressionist wing, and you experience Impressionism in it, how it was meant to be, and you see the glorious palette work in colors, and it's supposed to be something that is an overwhelming artistic experience, which is what literature is as well. And then, if one is offended or one is challenged or ones ideas are somehow called into question, that is an opportunity for further study, not to lock up a book and treat it as if it is bad or evil.

QUIRK: If I could just follow up, I think that maybe a better, just to agree with Jennifer here, a better way of framing it, I think, would be, is giving readers from a young age and on through higher education the tools to engage critically with different works rather than shutting works away and saying these are dangerous, these are forbidden. Giving, it's not like I expect a student to necessarily appreciate all the levels of a work without assistance, and I think that, if we give those critical tools, it will allow readers to be able to make their own decisions, engage with the material.

And, in the case of the example with climate change, I agree very much that it was a failure of the way in which, in American media, the issue has been discussed, as if these are two equivalent sides when, yes, you have a few scientists with connections to oil companies that have this one perspective and then the vast establishment of science having another. And I think that, that making that false equivalency and the harm that it has obviously resulted in is, again, comes back to being able to think critically and encourage young people in, in education to think critically. OK, what, where is this information coming up from? How valid is it? As well as the bigger questions about literature and the many levels and threads and shades of gray that are there rather than thinking in these very reductionist terms.

WOLKOWSKI: Well put, Liz,well put. You know, when, when I was a kid, I always loved the shock value of carrying a banned book into a coffee shop. But I realized that, by actually reading those books, it expanded my ability to engage in controversial ideas, difficult ideas, complicated ideas. And so, I love that Liz points out that, by dealing with this, we open up a world of critical thinking and consuming ideas in general, not just the glory of carrying, you know, “Catch-22” in your backpack and being a little bit of a badass.

WILLIAMS: So, we're out, down to the, the fun part now. So, can you each talk a little bit about your favorite banned book?

WOLKOWSKI: Oooh, Liz, you wanna go?

QUIRK: Well, I've freshened my mind, so I'll, I'll discuss two, and these are the two books that I, briefly I'll discuss two that I pulled out to write a blurb on for our banned book exhibit. So, if you want the more eloquent version, you can read what I actually wrote out, but “Annie on My Mind” by Nancy Gardner is a young adult book that came out in, I believe, I wanna say 1982, and in the ‘90s, when I was a voracious reader, I was reading, you know, almost inhaling, all the young adult books at that time. And when I read “Annie on My Mind,” it blew my mind – appropriately – because I had never read anything like it. And “Annie on My Mind” is the story of two teenage girls falling in love with each other. It's a, it's a sweet little story, but, you know, you go back to that time frame in the ‘90s, and these narratives just did not exist in the young adult sphere. And this book was challenged in really a dramatic way. Again, if you read my blurb, I can get the specifics, but it was actually burned. There were piles of “Annie on My Mind” that were set on fire on the steps of a school board – it’s somewhere in the South, and I don't want to malign a state if I don't remember which one it is – and frequently challenged. And so, that book had a real impact on me as a young person just because I recognized I had never encountered a narrative like that. And, you know, it was beautiful and touching, and just I remember it had such an impact on me.

Luckily, today, there's lots more young adult books deal with queer love and stories like that.

WOLKOWSKI: And they’re being banned, too.

QUIRK: I was gonna say, although they continue to be challenged, and so does “Annie on My Mind,” one of the oldest such examples. And so, that's probably one that's dear to me. The other one that I would mention is “Their Eyes Are Watching God” by Zora Neale Hurston, which I've taught for a number of

years and is just, I think, a beautiful work of art. And it has, when I looked it up, it has not been banned, but it is frequently the subject of challenges, partially, I think, because it's frequently in, assigned in high schools, perhaps. And it does have, you know, sexually suggestive, but, you know, very poetically so, elements. But it's also one of those novels that you can point to as we almost didn't get it, we almost didn't have it. It was published in 1937, I believe, by Zora Neale Hurston, who was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance, a well-known one, but by the time, sometimes "Their Eyes Are Watching God" is thought of as sort of the last work of the Harlem Renaissance, because, by that point, the Great Depression had sort of evaporated the funding to allow for the Harlem Renaissance to flourish. And so, by the time Zora Neale Hurston died, she died in, you know, a tragically impoverished situation, largely forgotten, buried in an unmarked grave, and "Their Eyes Are Watching God" was out of print. It was only much later that it was rescued by Alice Walker in the 1970s, who was looking to the past and thinking, "Where are the predecessors to my artistic vision that have been lost?" And so, she found "Their Eyes Are Watching God." And so, for me, "Their Eyes Are Watching God" is just a beautiful book, and it's one that isn't reduced to black and white terms of, reduced to a single idea, and even in its own contemporaries misunderstood it as a result of that. And so, those are the two that I'll point to, and then I'll let Jennifer go on.

WOLKOWSKI: Oh, I totally agree. Liz, I was captivated by your presentation on "Their Eyes Are Watching God." What a, what a fantastic book of feminism, of civil rights, but of humanity. That's what I love about that book when I get to teach it.

I'm gonna harp on "Invisible Man" because it's one that we've carried through a little bit in this conversation. And that one was written in 1952 by Ralph Ellison. And this book, I would almost argue, is between the Harlem Renaissance and the civil rights books that come in the mid to late '50s. Because this is an early '50s novel, we get a different exploration of civil rights, and it was, like I said, it was banned mostly because of sexual situations which exist in the novel. It's a masterwork. It's, it's a magnum opus. It's hundreds and hundreds of pages, but what makes this book so special to me is the artistry that Ralph Ellison brings to the book. First of all, you never know the main character's name, which anyone who has tried to write themselves a story, a poem, a work of fiction, the first thing you do is name a character, and then you build that character's flesh around him. And here we have an unnamed character who moves liquidly between basically classes.

And so, some of the earlier, earliest objections to this book had to do with communism and the ideas of communism and the ideas of equality, which were considered so threatening to the status quo in the '50s. I wanna point out, in '52, this predates most of what we consider to be the modern civil rights movement. So, notions of equality between classes and among classes, notions of equality between people and among people, the ideas of interracial violence and intraracial violence, and the idea of manipulation and winning the long game, probably horrified people and still do. And yet, when you read this novel, it's like watching a performance that is highly choreographed. It still haunts me, the scene in the paint factory. It still haunts me, the power company, when he's stealing power. Everything is this perfect metaphor: How the whitest paint is made, how the power is stolen and kept, how these dances are done and how manipulated things are.

It, it's a huge book, and it's a difficult book, and I can't imagine teaching it responsibly to young children. But I know that, for people who feel marginalized, if you have ever felt marginalized in your life, to see the slow triumph of a character is one of the most liberating things you can experience. And it's written perfectly. There, there isn't a slip. There isn't a moment where he doesn't carry it on. You almost think he'll just drop it in some places, but it's flawless. And it's excerpted in many of our anthologies, and only the first chapter is excerpted, and it's such a shame, because that chapter is the opening volley, but it creates such a reverberation through the book that I can't recommend it highly enough. And yes, there is sex. Yes, there is violence. Yes, there is cross language. But guess what, that's life.

WILLIAMS: So, both of you all gave, you know, amazing overviews of the, of your favorite books, and, you know, I was thinking when we started this conversation, I was thinking about “Their Eyes Are Watching God.” So, that was just, that's just so ironic that you mentioned that one because that's, you know, Zora Neale Hurston is one of my favorite authors. I remember reading that in high school and coming back to it and, you know it's, you know, it's a shame that there is people who still attempt to keep, you know, other young students from, you know, in, interacting with such a beautiful story.

WOLKOWSKI: And I would point out you were a different person in high school when you read it the first time, and you got different things from it. And then, when you revisited it as an adult, you got different things from it. And that's one of the things that censorship does that’s so pernicious – the idea that every time we encounter an artwork, we are a different person, and we extract and bring different things to that experience. To think that you would hold that from someone, you would withhold that experience to somehow allegedly protect him or her from some, from learning something they shouldn't learn when the fact is that, as you said, you saw beauty in it then, you see beauty in it now, and I guarantee you, if you pick it up tonight and read it again, you will extract different things from it. So, you know, censorship hurts every part of us as we grow.

WILLIAMS: Definitely. So, I wanna talk to you both about your experiences with reading, with reading bans in your own teaching, along the, along your own teaching. Have you had any, any experience with say, you know, any, any departments having any say about that, or have any students objected to any readings you've assigned in class, and how did you handle those situations?

QUIRK: I've had a few issues. One that comes to mind, this was a number of years ago, I had an older gentleman in my class, this was a non-traditional student, who said that he felt like I did, I was discriminating against white men in my syllabus. And this was fairly early in the semester, and I think we had read Frederick Douglass. I don't remember who else we had even read yet, but he had looked down through the syllabus and felt that white men were being discriminated against. And he did come to me with that complaint and met in my office hours, and I pointed out to him that we were reading George Orwell, we were reading Jonathan Swift. I can't remember who else, I think E.B. White, all of whom were white men. And so, I think what he was really saying was we were reading people of color. Yeah, that was his complaint. But luckily, that didn't go any higher than that, and I was able to talk to him in a way that met his concerns.

I feel lucky that it didn't go higher than that because another issue that has happened that's relevant to your question is I'm a faculty advisor of the Wake Review literary magazine, and students write poetry

and fiction and all sorts of things that are published on our online magazine as well as the print chapbook. And one year, we had a poem that had the F-word in it, and we, as a club, thought that the, the, the use of the term was justified within the poem, and, and so, we went ahead and included it. And there was no problem when we printed it. We didn't get any challenges. The challenge came, however, later when we were posting it on the website for the print, web edition, and it actually came from a quarter of IT who, I guess, are used to flagging bad words. And so, they shut it down temporarily until we were able to confirm to them that we were allowed to use that term. So, I'm not, that's not challenging from, you know, the kind of quarters we're used to. But nonetheless, I think it was, it was kind of shocking for the students to see the website suddenly gone because of the F-word temporarily, and so that certainly has been the case.

I've also had students voice discomfort with some of my readings, especially, funny enough, “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift. And Jennifer's laughing and clapping. I know she teaches it, too. I, one time, had a student, this was a number of years, it was actually my first year teaching it, so you can imagine who it was, a summer class, and they came up to me after class and said that they were gonna lodge a formal complaint because I was advocating for the murder of babies. If you know Jonathan Swift's “A Modest Proposal” is probably the most famous work of satire in the English language, and so, you know, you have to have an appreciation for satire when reading it. And so, I said to her, “If you could hold off until our class discussion, I think you may come away with a different feeling about this reading.” And to her credit, she did. And, so as far as I understand, she never did lodge that complaint, but she had read in advance, and, before having those critical tools to appreciate it with in the classroom, she was prepared to complain.

WOLKOWSKI: I think, I think satire is one of the, the strangest situations we face, because the first thing that I thought of is when a student got very upset with me for teaching “Was the World Made for Man?” by Mark Twain. And, as I'm sure everybody knows, Mark Twain is known for his satire, and the piece was an entirely satiric piece. But satire and sarcasm, the, the opposite side of the coin, is that you don't pick up on the fact that it's satirical, and you take it seriously for its face value.

I've gotten more pushback for quasi-religious reasons and things that have been interpreted as a, disrespectful to religion, and it has not gone far beyond because I've had the opportunity to contextualize things. But I think when it comes to students, students have told me that they will refuse to read a reading. The good news is that I have alternative readings. I do not create alternative syllabi, but if the student feels genuinely uncomfortable about something, then that doesn't mean that they have to write an, they have to write something about that particular essay. So, I know that things that have to do with sex or violence or irreligiousness seem to touch certain nerves around, in, in the South, especially in the Bible Belt, because they bump up against ideas of ingrained morality, and because of that, it makes students feel uncomfortable. And they have also been taught that, that college is supposed to be where the left-wing, freaky teachers try to convince you to be left-wing, freaky people. And so, there's already a little bit of animosity that's there. And sometimes, that's just part of doing your job.

I have had the luxury of being able to have alternate readings, but not alternate assignments, but I fear that that's probably, we are headed into some more difficult waters ahead, I think, as these, as, as

challenging is now seen as something one should do rather than learning. We should learn first, and then, if we have a legitimate challenge, there's, that's something to be said. And I do think, I mean, I, I would probably object to some things being taught in some places if they were not age-appropriate or things like that. Or, may I say, and this is probably beyond the purview, if they're taught badly. You can teach a beautiful work of literature and teach it badly and ruin it for a student, for his or her life. And, to me, that's far more of an offense than a bad word or a nontraditional idea.

WILLIAMS: And, so as you were speaking, I was hearing a lot of, you know, as you were talking about some of the issues you've had with challenges in your own teaching career, I was hearing a lot of things because my next question is gonna be about libraries and what our role can be in protecting, you know, these voices from, to be heard, you know, in spite of challenges. And I heard a lot of places where information literacy, you know, could be an important component with that. So, we'll just get into that question of how do you think libraries, especially academic libraries, can have a role or have an effect on, you know, maybe limiting some of these challenges or doing something like, again, with information literacy to, you know, open minds up to, to other voices?

QUIRK: Well, I think that that job cannot be understated in its importance. The, you know, as a, you may be encountering students that are initially encountering their books and their works and feeling uncomfortable or hostile even to what they've been assigned. And I think, even just framing it as a question of, OK, you don't have to like this work, and you're coming with, to it with certain, a certain perspective that may be at odds with that work. But as a student in, in a library where what we're doing is engaging with the material critically, that doesn't mean you have to uncritically take it in. In fact, it means quite the opposite. And so, I think continuously framing with students the discussion in that way, which is, you are not a passive receptor of this work, you are an, you are actively engaging with it. And so, if this is challenging some of your core beliefs or if this is uncomfortable, let that be part of your examination of the work. And I think, you know, especially librarians that are talking to students in a way that doesn't have that same dynamic of professor and instructor, it's maybe a little bit more of a, almost, I don't know if coach is the right word, but you're there to assist them in their goals – you're not the one grading them – is a place to, to really frame that for them. Because I think that, my experience with students is that they do appreciate it when they get the sense that you actually trust their intellect enough to encourage them to engage with it. So, I think framing in that way, not like, “You're gonna read this and now believe these things or whatever,” but that, “Engage with it critically, and here are the tools to do so. And this is how we do so, this is the language that we use to do so,” can empower them to engage with that material, and they may come away with it differently than they expected they would.

WOLKOWSKI: I absolutely agree with Liz, and I love how she framed it as the idea that librarians and libraries are places of learning with your own set of tools that you add to your toolbox. And I myself will never stop loving librarians for what they did after 9/11. As far as I'm concerned, librarians are the unsung heroes of, in any movements that sought to censor and, and check in on Americans, and librarians stood the line. And I will never forget that and never stop appreciating that action.

But what I love about libraries and libraries have always been this: To me, it's a place of exploration, and the idea that, I love that Liz said you don't have to just swallow this full scale, this is to be engaged with actively. And librarians and library scientists and the library clerks and the library space that you guys

have built is such a space of, of welcoming and of calmness. And if you come from a place where you didn't have access to books or you weren't encouraged to read or you weren't encouraged to look at the vast array of choices that you have, many of our students nowadays do not have books in their house. They might have a Kindle, or they might read electronically or on their phones. But if you have never had that place where all you see around you are opportunities for learning and growth, that library has that place where it creates that atmosphere. I've never seen a person angry in a library. Now, I'm gonna knock wood because I don't want to jinx it, but libraries are places where you go to have experiences. And when I went off to college, I knew that I'd be experiencing brand new things and things I'd never seen before, and I was receptive to that. There are some people who are scared of that and some people who are apprehensive about that, but the space that you guys have built at Wake Tech – and I've been to every library on every campus of Wake Tech – the ideas that you've built these spaces where students feel comfortable to explore. And I think that's vital. So, it's not just an intellectual thing that you are doing, but it's an emotional thing you are doing as well. And I can't thank you enough for doing that because many of our students didn't get that the past years in high school and certainly didn't get that the past five semesters during COVID, where many of them literally didn't leave their homes. And to come into a place where books and learning and ideas are all around you in a nonjudgmental place and a comfortable chair, that's sounds like heaven.

QUIRK: I just want to also add that I am so thankful for the librarians at Wake Tech, the library space and, like Jennifer said, librarians across the country. And they've been the first line of defense when oftentimes civil liberties have been challenged. I think, in terms of even just a symbol, they are a symbol of free thought, of creativity, of knowledge. And then I, to this day, find just walking through a library surrounded by more books than unfortunately I'll ever be able to read a deeply inspiring space. And I love that we have that for our students, and I think it's utterly invaluable. And I always encourage my students to go, and not just to go to the library, but talk to our wonderful librarians who, you know, help them in ways that are so one-on-one more than we can do when we have so many students. So, I deeply appreciate librarians in general and those at Wake Tech.

WILLIAMS: Well, thank you so much to both of you. I know that, you know, there's, you know, I don't want to take up all of your day, but thank you so much for both of you for contributing to this conversation. It was a very valuable conversation with so many nuggets in there that I know students, faculty and staff will come away with, with a different perspective on how to even engage with different ideas and not to be, you know, and just come away from this learning not to be afraid of, you know, books and, you know, just wanting to, you know, just get in there and just start reading. And I'm glad that, as a library, we're able to, you know, give access to these things because it sounds like, from what you're saying, is that what, what we can do is just provide the access and just provide the environment for people to do that exploration.

WOLKOWSKI: Absolutely. Thank you, Nicole. We appreciate your time.

QUIRK: Thank you so much.

WOLKOWSKI: Again, thank you.

WILLIAMS: You're welcome. Bye-bye.

CONCLUSION: Thanks for listening to Behind the Circulation Desk. Make sure to follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/WTCClibraries. Follow us on Twitter at @WakeTechLib, and follow us on Instagram at @WakeTechLibraries. Until next time, happy reading.