

Rogue Librarians, Episode 7
Drama: Part 1 (Why It's Banned)

Welcome to the seventh 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 would love for you to participate in our discussion. Please visit www.theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod.

Um So Dorothy, I'm gonna start with you today. Can you tell us a book that you are reading or have recently read? I read and I was very excited to read *In Every Generation* by Kendare Blake which is a Buffy The Vampire Slayer sort of next gen. Um And I believe there will be more, it's very exciting. Willow has a child whose origins I will not spoil and um that child becomes a slayer but it's also a witch. So she's a witch slayer or slayer. Which as they decide since witch slayer sounds like she's saying which is that sounds great and it's awesome and it was just a lot of fun and you get to see Willow and Oz and Spike and it sounds very exciting.

Very great. That sounds amazing. How about you, Alanna?

I was just listening to *The Inimitable Jeeves* by P. G. Wodehouse. Yes and I haven't read all the Jeeves books. I've only read a few before and I love the narrator for these books...I mean the books are just so laugh out loud, funny. I love P. G. Wodehouse's books. *Leave it to Psmith* is still my favorite, but I was laughing out loud on the bus, public bus. Uh yeah, if you want some more laughter in your life, I recommend them.

Well, those sound like really, really fun books. Um the book that I do just finished um was a little bit more serious. It's a Jodi Picoult book um called *A Spark of Light* and I'm not sure what year this book was published, but it's a story um that is very timely with the new Roe v. Wade decision or the yeah, sadness of that. But anyway, um it's a story about an abortion clinic in the only one in Mississippi in the state of Mississippi in Jackson. Um and you know, you get to know the characters and basically there's a hostage situation that happens in an abortion clinic and the whole story is really just, it goes back and forth, almost like memories that pop into your head, but it's it's all about um character development, it's all about learning who all the players are and kind of what their stories are and it's it's not a judgy book, it's not a preachy book. It's just kind of this beautiful writing that takes into account all the different players in this question of

abortion. So, it was just a really um interesting read and at the end there's a really nice epilogue that's done by Jodi Picoult herself. And and you know what brought her to write this book, it was just really fascinating. Sounds like it.

Today, we will be discussing *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier, which was the fifth most frequently challenged book in 2018 and the seventh most banned book between 2010 and 2019. And for a couple of years during that time, it was the second or third most banned book in the country. First published in 2012, this graphic novel won the Stonewall Book Award in 2013. In addition to receiving many starred reviews and honors, it is recommended for those in grades 5-8 by the School Library Journal and Common Sense Media. It is notable because it is one of the first graphic novels to include gay characters and we'll get into that more later this episode.

Alright, so the I'm just gonna give you a short description of the book. So Callie is our main character and as the title *Drama* suggests, uh it centers around a school play and Callie is the set designer and is very excited about it. But anyone who spent any time in a middle school knows the other version of the word drama, which is who's dating who and who kissed who and who said what to who. So uh that is the you know the play is the backdrop against which the rest of this plays out and we see who Callie has crushes on. She meets some new people and is wondering whether or not one of her crushes is gay people breaking up and getting back together. So it's very cute and I think Callie is a great role model in terms of how she navigated that. But that will be part of the next discussion definitely.

We wanted to talk about why this book has been banned and as you can probably guess the main reason is because it includes LGBTQ+ characters and a couple other reasons people listed for banning it were they deemed it sexually explicit and they considered it to have an offensive political viewpoint. Probably because it included a couple of gay characters and something we wanted to know about this book. As Dorothy mentioned, it is a very light and sweet book in a lot of ways. And there is one kiss between two boys that happens during the play. There's no other sexual content besides a couple of kisses between heterosexual characters. So that is the only sexual content that is mentioned in the book and they are 7th and 8th graders. So um it does not go into any other detail.

Absolutely. And the kiss between the two boys is such a chaste kiss and it happens in the context of the play. Which so it's acting, it's an acting kiss and it was an emergency, like it was a

kid who came in to do the part because the girl who was supposed to do it was crying wouldn't go on stage, there was drama because there was drama. And of course the backup or what do they call it? The alternate is nowhere to be found.

Yes. You know, I feel like in another time it would have just been considered camp, you know, at a time when we basically thought it was hilarious, whenever we saw a man in a dress. Um I remember those times well and it was all over, you know, regular television and nobody was complaining as far as I know. Um but it was done to be humorous for sure.

Well, and also, I mean, the panel, you know, we've we've said this is a graphic novel and the panel showing the audience in the front row when the character of a boy comes on stage wearing the dress. Um and it's clearly a substitute because the female played the role in the first act and this is now the second act. Um and they're you know, they're just looking like, wait, what's going on here, You know, there's a little bit of shock in their eyes and it is it's very funny, it kind of reminded me of um I mean I'm dating myself again, but *Victor Victoria*, which was that you know movie probably the first movie I can think of that showed women in you know someone in drag but it was and I remember that it was the story of a woman playing a man playing a woman.

Yeah, I love that. Yeah. The layers that Julie Andrews, it was Julie Andrews. Yes. Well loved. Although I, you know, I guess I do, I have always hung out with a fair number of gay people. So maybe that's why I felt like it was well loved but I think it did really well. Yeah, I think it did too.

I just want to jump in and say, I mean I'm a mom and I have children who were involved in middle school plays and my daughter went on and was involved in high school plays for her four years of high school. Um, this description of the play from the behind the scenes drama to the on the stage drama to the just everything about it is so accurately depicted. It's just, it really took me back as a mom to being a drama mom, you know, and I just, I just really it was just such a fun read. I really just enjoyed the fun read and the details that Raina was able to capture in the beautiful drawings.

Yeah, definitely. And to add on to that Marian and I thought that um, because she experienced uh performing in plays herself, she could draw on her personal experience and this story is not autobiographical, but she did mention in a *School Library Journal* interview on June 22nd, 2017

that the two of the main characters, the twin boys who are also gay were based on real friends of hers. And she tried to depict their personalities as well as possible. And she even sent them the script for this book ahead of time and asked them, is this too personal? Is it authentic? And they said, wow, you nailed it. So she, a lot of her books are drawn from her personal life, which I think gives them even more um, authenticity and meaning. So this book, the drama in it is not based on her real life, but the fact that it's based on her personal experience, I think adds a lot to the book.

That is one of the themes in book banning book challenging that I've noticed people seeming somehow to not want everyone's experiences to be understood. I mean, it's one thing if you write a fictional work that, you know, 100% has an agenda, but when you're just writing something that you're trying to make close to life as possible when you're writing a memoir for having say, you know, to say that it is offensive. It just so misses the point to me. Um, I mean I understand not not understanding, but I don't understand saying we don't want children to know that gay people exist.

Yeah. Well, that was something I noticed I went on Amazon to read some of the reviews where people objected to this book because that was mentioned in the same *School Library Journal* interview. And she said she stopped looking at Amazon because I understand that too. Like, do you really want to see what other people sometimes really negative things they're saying about their books? And um several parents wrote that they thought the material was too mature for a 10 year old and a couple of people mentioned, oh, I bought this for my eight or nine year old because I thought it would be very similar to her previous books, like *Smile* and *Sisters*, but they said, oh, the fact that there were gay characters and you know, even possibly a bisexual character, it was confusing. You know, my child should not be exposed to this, but I think by the time they're in fifth grade, I think they probably would have heard a lot of them about the fact that people can be gay, maybe not bisexual, but I think it might be part of the conversation by then.

And it absolutely is. My kids and their friends in the fifth grade were all declaring and they knew terminology. I did not know they were declaring uh gayness, bisexual, pansexual. Now whether any of them had any idea that this was in fact who they were, I don't know, but they were definitely saying it and I know at least one case where someone said that they were bisexual

and it turns out not so much but uh I guess that's part of why because they don't want their kids even considering.

Yeah a couple of parents said well I had to explain to my child what this meant because they were confused or they said like you know this goes against our traditional family values or our religious values. But maybe those parents would change their tune by now since this book did come out 10 years ago and I think and there are so many more books now that have LGBTQ+ characters.

But at the time this came out, as we mentioned, this was one of the very first graphic novels for children to include gay characters. And um people asked Raina Telgemeier at the time if she wanted to make a statement when it was being frequently banned and she said no my statement is the book and she said, "My viewpoint is it's better to live in a world where we love and accept each other than one where we don't." And she said that she loves that there are now more books that kids can read um that have gay characters and the fact that it's just presented as normal in this book, it's not like coming out is the main... Yeah, exactly, it's not the main storyline and she said when people say, oh you're trying to push a liberal agenda on people, she said I don't even have an agenda. My agenda is love and friendship, people will make of it what they will and I can't let that sway the things I believe in, the things I write about.

Yeah, and I just, I mean I want to jump in here because I, in preparation for a recording of this podcast, I had looked up um Raina Telgemeier um website and she has on her website a couple of well I think there are four different video interviews um that she has done, and one of them was with a public librarian in San Francisco, which is where Raina Telgemeier grew up. So um and the question was asked of her this very same question, you know, you know, your book was groundbreaking. Um it has the first gay characters and a graphic novel for children and she basically said, I wasn't trying to break any ground. I didn't even know that I was breaking any ground. I grew up in San Francisco and San Francisco is a very diverse um metropolitan area. Um people who look like Raina um are not in the majority at all. Um Raina went to a school that was, you know, with a whole lot of people who looked a lot different than her and um and she just thought that was normal, like it never occurred to her, oh I'm in the minority or I'm in the majority or anything, she was just going to school with people and she happened to know obviously these twins who you know, um make an appearance in this book who were gay and that wasn't unusual. I mean it was San Francisco. Um and she said it really wasn't until she

moved to New York City to go to art school to become a cartoonist, that she learned that every metropolitan city didn't look like San Francisco. Um and we can all relate to that. I'm sure in our own growing up we become accustomed to what we see every day, but she said it was shocking to her to go to New York City and see so many white people just, you know, white people. So, so again, it was just kind of her mainstream. I mean, it may not be everyone's mainstream, but it was most definitely her mainstream to encounter um to not even encounter to be friends, to be just coexisting happily, like most of us do with the people in our community and they just happened to be there just happened to be a lot of, a lot more people who were outwardly homosexual.

I cannot imagine a middle school drama department in anywhere in this country that does not include some gay children. This is a stereotype I know for sure, definitely has been the experience of, you know, I knew when I was growing up, that's for sure, you would definitely, if you if you had to look, that's where you would go. So how it's not representative of the norm, you know, seems shocking to me. I completely agree with that. I um I know that was definitely the case with both of my children's experience in drama departments. That and the fact that drama kids are very touchy feely, like all over each other, middle schoolers in general, in high school, all over each other. Yeah, I mean, you know, it's it's um it's kind of like a mosh pit of love in the drama department and drama love and drama drama in the drama department for sure. I will also say that middle school kids absolutely know about gayness and it's often used to insult people still, so it's not like they don't know, it's true.

I have noticed the last couple of years that I'm not hearing gay used as a slur as often as it used to be. And the last couple of years I had students who were much more open about being um gay, lesbian, bisexual, and they announced it to the whole class, like, I was used to students sometimes confiding in me that information in various ways, but the second day of class, I had students last year who were sharing that with the people they didn't know, and I thought that was really brave and certainly not the case when I was in school, but it was um, you know, the other kids were just like, nodding their heads, like, okay, you know, this seems normal, right? You know, And um that doesn't mean that they had an easy time coming out to their families, and a couple of the students told me that their families didn't accept that about them, but in school, at least, or at least in in the classroom, they felt comfortable expressing their um identities and also their preferences.

Which to me raises the whole question, Alanna, of, again, who should be deciding what, who should read what book I mean? Because obviously, the children, and we've mentioned this in previous episodes, children read what they're capable, what they're ready to read. So, whatever the content is that they're ready for, they're gonna be interested in it and they're going to read it and they're going to understand it and they're gonna be thought-provoked by it. If it's not something they're comfortable with, they don't read it, they just return the book or they, you know, put it aside, they or they think it's boring or whatever. Um that has been my experience as a teacher, and as a librarian. And and in this case, I feel like it's the parents who are the ones who are uncomfortable because maybe when they grew up in their generation, it wasn't um it wasn't as mainstream and they don't want it to be mainstream or they don't understand it, whatever, but I don't think it's a problem for the, for the kids, I think, I mean, it's like anything else. I mean, you you become the area that you grow up in, as Raina described, but also, I mean, you develop, were not born prejudiced, were not born racist, were not born, you know, with these ideas of who should rise to the top and who should sink to the bottom. This is what we get from being involved in a society and um which raises some questions. Certainly, I've been doing a lot of thinking about that lately with everything happening in education and curriculum and um parents rights, and it just has occurred to me that parents, you know, and we we know and we've discussed before that parents already had a right to moderate what their children were learning, they could opt out of certain books in the classroom, That's great, and but there's as many parents or probably I would think a lot more who want their children to be exposed to these things and it's always allowed complainer that's uncomfortable with where society is going, that seems to get all the attention.

I think people have a stake, communities have a stake who have no children, in what's happening in education and in the books that are available to people because these are the kids who are going to grow up and be part of our society, There's plenty of gay taxpayers and you know, a whole variety of uh minorities that are taxpayers and to say, don't put this book in in the library because it has gained us in it. Get out should get refunded for their school taxes because that's the society they are going to want to live in. I don't know, I get emotional. It's hard not to when this is your life. This is what you care about as an educator and Just the fact that certain people can try to take away these freedoms that we believe in is...

Yeah, it's really hard to see it having not changed since I was a child in the 80s. Now my parents were fairly liberal, they were kind of on the edge of being hippies. But we spent our high school

years going to *Rocky Horror*. Clearly a lot of my friend group were gay or if they didn't come out then came out later and even back then, just like you knew about people being believed and everything, but you didn't see it so much when you're just there and hanging out with people and it was nobody cared, you know, if they thought someone was gay or wasn't, it's it's this message that comes down from on high that it's a bad thing. So just seems depressing that we haven't made more progress in all that time.

It does and you know, and I also want to bring up, I mean I, I taught in elementary school for a number of years and I was a second grade teacher for a while and I remember um, meet the teacher day, a family came in with, with their child. Um, and you know, basically shared with me that you know, that they already knew that this child was, was probably gay. Um, and I mean that's a seven year old and they knew the parents accepted it it and they just wanted to make sure that there was not going to be any bullying or any, you know, that there would be full acceptance and, and you know, and I just thought that was wonderful as a teacher that they had shared that with me and trusted me with this child and this child's heart and mind, you know, to, to encourage this child to grow up and be the person that this child was going to be. Um, and I contrast that with a friend of mine was telling me, um, her daughter was in drama and theater and dance particularly and when one of her best friends and this was now more high school age, one of her daughter's best friends, um, was openly gay and his family pulled him out of drama and theater because they thought that was making him gay and they were going to have him go through the, what's it called, where they try to make you not be gay, conversion, conversion therapy. Yeah. And um and the, and the kid made a suicide attempt, which is extremely common, frequent common thing and you know, I know when parents are, you know when you become a parent, when you have a baby and you know every parent goes through this moment of you have all these hopes and dreams for what you think that that child is going to grow up and be someday and not that that's your right, because you've brought a life into the world, but that life is an independent life now and the life is going to become the person that that person that it's going to become regardless of what you do as a parent. So you can either promote that journey and love that child um you know, um unconditionally or you can try to make that child grow up to be what you want that child to be and cause a lot of anguish and pain and potentially, you know, leave that child to suicide. I mean those are the ways that I see parenting and I've been a teacher for a long time and I've seen a lot of sadness and you know, I just feel like we just have to accept these are individuals that you know, yeah, we can shape them and we can, you know, teach them morals and and all of that, but in the end they're going

to become the person they're going to become a book is not going to change that and conversion therapy is not going to change that?

Those are really great points, Marian. Do we know when the last time this book was challenged? The last time it showed up on the top 10 was in 2018. And I think the fact that we have newer books like *Gender Queer* um coming out that are a little more explicit and the fact that we have a nonbinary character there and an asexual character there um is different from this chaste kiss between two gay characters.

So it was frequently banned up through 2018. And since then it seems like parents have these new targets that they're focusing on. Well, and as we discussed, it's not even always the parents right? It could be with a political agenda, making sure the parents know which books to complain about.

Well, right. And I do wanna chime in on you know? Yes, that may be true targeting this book specifically, but just four days ago, um actually just about four days ago and of course, you know, you won't be hearing this podcast um the day that we're recording it. But um so let's suffice it to say in November of 2022 the independent school district in Keller, Texas just voted by a 4 to 3 vote to ban any library book that mentions any gender fluidity whatsoever, which would include this book.

Um Do you think is it gender fluidity only or does it also include identity? Because I would think that focuses more on identity. Is it also interested in sexual preferences? Are they?

And thank you for saying that the headline certainly says school district bans LGBTQ books and that would include that. So, any book with an LGBTQ+ character or mentioned, mentioned LGBTQ. According to this particular school district, the Keller Independent School District, which is a public school district in the state of Texas, LGBTQ does not exist. And there is a mom that was quoted in this article that just says, um she she stated that she and other supporters of LGBTQ+ students in her Texas community are devastated, but not surprised. And I'm sure that, you know, many of us in our communities probably, you know, no people on both sides. And it is devastating.

And here's something interesting to think about if you want to put a positive spin on something that is just, you know, hard to do. Um it is that they are continuing to make this a conversation. And as long as it's a conversation we can acknowledge, we can acknowledge that gayness is a thing like we're talking about it and for better or worse, at least that at least there is a conversation even though it's driven by some uh people who don't understand it's it's true.

I think that that's a powerful point, Dorothy, that we need to have these conversations and the fact that we are having these conversations, you know, we've mentioned it before any time a book is banned, any time any um any type of book is banned and it hits the media that spurs a lot of conversation and talking points. But it also gets the message out there to the people who need these books that these books exist and our hope is that the people who need these books will find them. Yeah.

Yeah. One of my students said they were at the bookstore with their parents and they saw the banned book table and their dad just bought a whole bunch of books off the banned book table. That's beautiful. So that's awesome because books are meant to be read.

Well let's get into the historical context for Raina Telgemeier's book. I thought it would be helpful to focus on depictions of LGBTQ+ characters in comics and graphic novels. As we said, this book was groundbreaking because it was one of the first to include gay characters and apparently in 2010, the very first comic to include openly gay characters was *Veronica* number 202, which was an issue of Archie comics and the character is named Kevin Keller and apparently he's in a bunch of other comics and also in *Riverdale*. So a lot of people are probably familiar with who he is. I had never read those comics but um it was incredibly popular and apparently it was so popular that the issue sold out. And for the first time in Archie Comics history they had to do a reprint. And apparently the creator was nominated for GLAAD Media Award in 2011 for creating the character Kevin Keller. And almost everyone who the creator has heard from has been very positive about it. He said it was about 98% positive and so many people told him what a difference a character like Keller would have made to them as they were growing up. And since then uh there as we said, there have been many more LGBTQ+ characters presented in comics and graphic novels, especially at the middle school level creators tend to use a matter of fact approach. It's not a big deal. The characters are just there, it tends to stay G rated. Um but it is important to have these role models in these books and I wanted to find out a little bit more about GLAAD because GLAAD, which used to stand for Gay

and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, but now they just go by GLAAD, and I did not know some of its history which may be the two of you already knew, but it is the world's largest LGBTQ media advocacy organization and it was established in 1985 because a few of them saw that journalists were talking about the AIDS crisis in really derogatory ways and using really derogatory language. It was very upsetting to them that their family and friends were dying of AIDS and the government wasn't doing anything to help. And the headlines were um inflammatory and they spoke up about it and they established GLAAD to do that. And they've changed their names a couple of times since then. And uh they have had a direct impact on including positive LGBTQ cultural representation. They've advocated for including L G. B. T. Q plus characters um in all forms of media and they give awards each year, uh two television shows and movies and things like that for their inclusion of these characters and their mission is they said to ensure fair, accurate and inclusive representation. That rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and envisions a world with 100% LGBTQ acceptance. And that was from their website. Well, they've done a great job as all of the material that people have tried to ban.

Yeah, I just think even in the last 10 years the number of LGBTQ+ characters in all forms of media. It's been remarkable to see. I mean you had *Ellen*, you had *Will and Grace*, you had *Glee*.

Um I mean many, many I suppose we should probably move on to the pros and cons, let's move on to the pros and cons. So one thing we already mentioned, Dorothy, I believe you mentioned this earlier was that we thought the main character, Callie was a really strong main character and I loved her enthusiasm for theater for set design. She was so in love with books about set design and just seeing her passion for this and getting to do what she loves and share it with other people was really great to see. It was and I loved how she was not, I don't know, not upset because she didn't have acting or singing talent just channeled that somewhere else got up on that. There's one point where she auditions just to try and get someone else to audition and she's can sing and she's just like I just got up and did it and I think that's such a great role model because you know middle schoolers are really afraid to do things like that.

Yeah and and it was also um I thought it was very impressive that a middle schooler had the stick to itiveness that Callie demonstrated when um she has a vision for for what she wants as

definite as in the set and obviously it's middle school and they have quite a tight budget but she is determined that she's going to have this one particular set piece and it she struggles with it and she has to keep coming back in problem solving and problem solving and problem solving and and she she goes home and she stays up all night trying to problem solve. I just thought that was fantastic commitment.

Yeah, definitely Marian, well maybe let's talk about her a little bit more for our next episode, but I love talking about Callie. Um and in general it's fun to see their passion and excitement for theater. Um and a lot of one thing I love about Raina Telgemeier's illustrations is the facial expressions. They're so good from the first, from the first page and their smiles, they're like when they're embarrassed it's so obvious that exuberance and that middle school energy did such a good job of capturing that.

It really, oh my gosh, we're just so super cute. But you know, and I also like the teamwork that's portrayed here that you know, even though there were some characters, you know, as in typical middle school or in life in general, people that you know weren't necessarily ever going to be bosom buddies but you know, but they pulled together.

Yeah, definitely. And another thing I enjoyed is the fact that as we've been discussing this episode that the gay characters are just part of the group of friends they're coming out or being gay is not the most important thing. Um, instead it's just a piece of who they are and for Callie, it's disappointing because she's interested in one of them romantically. But um, you know, he doesn't, he doesn't lie about his orientation. He, you know, just doesn't make it explicit until later in the book. But I liked the fact that it is not the main point of the book.

Also loved how diverse the characters are just with, with no mention of it at all. We have a diverse group of kids here in a diverse group of styles of dress of, you know, hair color of, you know, just everything. Um, you know, success in school, not success in school. Um, you know, there were students who tutored other students. It was just, it was everything. And even though there is a lot of concern, a lot of drama, like we said, with who likes whom and all that stuff. It's not the only thing I think the fact that they're putting on the play is the most important thing and making it successful and working together to make that happen.

But as you said, Marian, you know, worrying about school and there are just so many things going on here and well, I find it does remind me of middle school crushes and you know, Callie's reaction to different situations and, you know, I remember in my own experience, uh, the guy I had a crush on when I was in eighth grade turned out to be gay, but I didn't know it at the time and he didn't come out until 10th grade. So I had a crush on him for a really long time not knowing like maybe I should have picked up on certain things, but just not knowing that. And I think so, I can definitely empathize with Cali that she experienced the same thing in this book.

We can all think back to unrequited crushes from middle school. And in terms of cons, if you two are ready to move on to them. So I found a con when I was doing some research on the book that had struck me when I started reading it this time because I hadn't read it in maybe six or seven years at this point. And um, the choice of musical, um, it's a fictional musical. I think it's *Moon Over Mississippi*. Thank you. Um, fictional musical, but it clearly takes place during the Civil War. They make that very obvious. The two main characters, one of them is a Union soldier. The other is the daughter of a plantation owner. And uh, the choice to make it Civil War era was I thought very strange. And this literary scholar named Michelle Ann Abate. I'm not sure how you pronounce her last name; it is spelled A B A T E um, argued in an article that, um, quote the novel's romanticization of the antebellum south and lack of meaningful discussion of race limits its purpose as a celebration of diversity. And it contends that it represents a whitewashing and idealization of southern plantation life and ignores the realities of life during that era, including slavery. What do you think of that? This criticism?

I mean, I think it's apt, but this was written before we started to really bring that into the limelight. So, you know, were she to write it today? I think she would have chosen a different play or created a different play. I don't know whether it was based on something that she enjoyed. I did when I first read it, I thought that seems like a curious choice for that. Not for the same reasons, but like for middle schoolers to get excited about what would be really interested in this topic in the eighties. When I was a kid, I would not have been that excited about a Civil War epic musical. I mean, giving, giving the benefit of the doubt. Um, I'm going to say, well maybe because they had studied Civil War in history in, um, in middle school, I don't really recall what the curriculum is for history in middle school in seventh grade. Maybe there was some connection there that they were teaching and, and you know, this one connected with the curriculum because I do know that when you're putting on plays, you have to justify why you're doing it, you know, for the funding and blah blah blah. However, um, I also agree that this would

not have been Raina's choice if she were to have written this book in 2021 or 2022. I mean the same way, you know, there was a musical group called Lady Antebellum who changed their name as a result of, you know, people becoming much more conscientious about how um, symbols that have been glorified, you know, by the history, is written by the victors kind of mentality. You know, that these are not necessarily things that we, we should be celebrating in our history. Um, you know, as names of schools have been changed and name and statues have come down and various other things. I mean, I just, I feel like, um, you know, I think that that that's a legitimate argument that um Michelle Ann Abate, I apologize if I'm mispronouncing the name also, but um, that, that she brings up, but, but I also think that it's a great discussion point to say, hey, okay, you know, this was written in 2012 now it's 2022 you know, each generation is hopefully getting to be a little bit more aware of each other and you know, as we've said, you know, it's been a while since this book specifically has been um, picked out as a book that's inappropriate for middle school because of a gay character. And I think that you know the same could be said for the choice of play.

Yeah. The only other thing I had on my cons list was the twin characters. I kept getting confused just recently. Read something about naming characters that was like be careful if you use all the same letters, people will get confused and uh you know them being twins. It was and she did see times where she was careful to try to make it clear but my brain still kept right.

It did at least help that Justin had longer hair and Jesse had short hair. So that helped to tell them apart. But features were different features were a little different and Justin was much more exuberant in general, Jesse was more shy, but I agree, Dorothy, that maybe highlighting some difference would have been helpful. Um I wasn't getting confused between them but sometimes I was like, oh yeah, which characters in the scene again. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I would have to stop and think it through, which you know, that says as much about my brain as it does about writing this. But you know, you gotta search for cons, there's not a lot to choose from and I wanna in defense of you know of this, this this this con I guess um I am going to make a leap of faith, guess that the three of us grew up reading books with exclusively words and creating our own pictures of people and kids today who read this book are growing up in a world where graphic novels are much more common. And there is an art to reading a graphic novel where you pour over the pictures very much more than I did in reading this book. I was just like, okay, I'm just gonna read and find out what's going to happen.

Um because that's so I mean, and it's interesting because I go back to when I was a librarian when I first became a librarian and there was, you know, the big controversy are graphic novels, books, do we? You know, do we want them in school libraries? Because you know, they're just comics, it's not real reading. And I read many articles, research articles and I mean, serious research articles about the brain power that it takes to flip back and forth between words and comics. And that it takes a whole different part of your brain to be able to make sense of graphic novels.

And I just assumed that so many of our students love graphic novels and they read so many of them including all of Raina Telgemeier's books. I just assumed that they would know how to read a graphic novel. And the last few years I taught *March: Book Three*. And um that's John Lewis's memoir in the form of a graphic novel. And we had to teach the students how to read a graphic novel and they would get confused sometimes by okay, which speech bubble is going with which character and, and um it was, we had to show them this is how your eyes should be moving, you need to look at the box first, which grounds you um with the text telling you what's happening in the scene and then you should look at the image plus the word bubbles, the speech bubbles. So it was a really interesting experience for me to have to explicitly teach that because I thought they would be so used to it. And that book is more complicated. It's much longer, the text is much more detailed, but still, as you said, it does take practice to fully absorb the illustrations with the text at the same time.

It wasn't until in the grand scheme of things recently, I would say maybe five years ago, 6, 7 um which feels like yesterday to me, but I used to just not be able to read a comic at all. I would try and it would just be like my, I'm not enjoying this, there's something missing. And I do think that part of the reason I have gotten better at it is because it has blended more with the kinds of books that I'm used to reading, but it definitely took some retraining of my brain to to be able to read and enjoy graphic novels. I still wonder if I went back and looked at superhero comics. You know that I might still not enjoy them the way that some people do but you know it's interesting. It's interesting, definitely.

Yeah, for sure. Well as you can tell, we really liked this book in many ways. It is a really engaging story. The illustrations are wonderful as always and it's a really fun read. So, Marian, do you wanna wrap things up for us?

Absolutely. Um in the next episode we will discuss the book in more detail. So it will include some spoilers just to let you guys know. However we in invite you to please join us next time for a close reading of *Drama's* characters, themes and significance as always if you'd like to leave a question or comment, please leave us questions or comments at theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod. If you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you find your podcasts, and we would appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts to help other people find us. Finally, please consider supporting us on Patreon. We are a small enterprise and we need your help to run and we thank you for reading with us because books are meant to be read. Bye!

*Please excuse the typos and grammatical errors.