

Rogue Librarians, Episode 11

All Boys Aren't Blue (Part 1: Why It's Banned)

Welcome to the 11th 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 theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook at [roguelibrarianspod](https://www.facebook.com/roguelibrarianspod).

Before we begin today, we wanted to say how much we've really appreciated your support so far. It's been exciting for us to build this community and we really appreciate that you have been listening to and participating in our discussions.

You can continue to support us in several different ways. First, please spread the word. Uh Thank you to everyone who has mentioned our show to someone else so far. But second, please subscribe on your preferred podcast platform so that you are notified when we release a new episode every other week. And third, please give us a rating and a review on Apple Podcasts or a rating on Spotify. These ratings and reviews help other people find us and uh they really also make us very happy. We really appreciate it.

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Um And any recommendations you have for perks, you know, we're wide open. So yeah, if you have something, you think it would be fun to have us discuss or I don't know, have a little extra book club or something. Let us know.

Yes. And on that note, as a reminder, we really want to hear your thoughts and your questions and have you contribute to our discussion. And so today we are going to discuss a question that we received after a listener who wrote in um referring to our episode of *Maus*: Part One. And we

thought it would be helpful to every, every one of our listeners to answer it in this episode. So the question is: "I love your thoughtful discussion of why the book is banned and the value it has to readers. I believe you alluded to my question in your first podcast. But let me ask specifically. What do you all think about age appropriateness? I remember *Maus* as having many harsh unvarnished truths, and I wonder if that's ok to show young kids. I think we can all agree a 10-year-old would probably be too young and a 16-year-old could probably handle the difficult truths in this book. What do you all think would be the dividing line? Do school librarians have a rule of thumb along these lines?" Uh Thoughts uh thoughts friends.

Uh I love the question because, you know, it is one thing I think when you are considering what to use in a curriculum. I will point out that middle schoolers do study the Holocaust uh at least seventh grade, you know, in my experience. Yeah, the seventh grade. Um but in the library, you have to really consider your whole readership, right? Because you don't want to only cater to the lowest common denominator when it comes to reading. Um some schools just have a uh you know, more kids that are reading high school level books. So it becomes a real question mark, you know, when is it appropriate to include that book? So it's, it's a great question and it's a nuanced question. Um So, you know, an individual basis would be my recommendation. Um If you have it available on the shelf, kids who are interested, are probably gonna ask or you could have a little conversation about it. When they're checking it out you can get a sense of whether it's something that, you know, they're interested in and can handle. I don't know. Uh, what do you think, Alanna?

Yeah, I agree with you, Dorothy. That it's a nuanced question. Um, you know, the two of you have been librarian, librarians. I come at this, um, from the perspective of an English teacher. So, from my experience there is a pretty big shift from seventh to eighth grade and I've been teaching eighth grade for several years. And before that I taught high school and college. So I, I think in general we felt that eighth graders could handle, um, books that have a little more sexual content. Um, for example, we would do *To Kill a Mockingbird* with eighth graders but not seventh graders. Um, we felt that, um, you know, uh, they could handle a little more violence or language or things like that, not necessarily books for the entire class, but books that we would put out for them to read, um, or give them the choice to read. So there does seem to be a shift in maturity, um, around 13 or 14 years old. So that's why I personally would recommend *Maus* for eighth graders and older. I don't think I would teach it to an entire class. Um, but I would do it in ninth grade, for example, with an entire class. What about you, Marian?

Well, I have lots of thoughts that pop up. Um Right now, um one of which is um when I think about the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, I know that they have a separate exhibit um for younger uh attendees to the, to that museum. And it's called Daniel's Story, I believe. And it's designed for children under the age of 13. They don't recommend that children under the age 13 go through the main exhibit because of questions of age appropriateness. Um So that's, that's one rule of thumb I throw out there and that seems to be consistent Alanna with what you just said about eighth graders and that 13 to 14 year old um division. I mean, in addition to that, um I also think it just depends on the, the person and the individual and their background. Um as Dorothy alluded to, if you grew up in a family of Holocaust survivors, I think this book is perfectly appropriate for a 13 year old and possibly a 12 year old. Um It's not their first rodeo. It's not so shocking. Sadly, for a lot of Jews, this is just the reality that Jews grow up with. Um And I think that's an important point to make as well that if you're shocked about the content, um you're fortunate, you know, and, and if you're not, then, you know, this is why people need to learn about these stories. I mean, they're not stories, these truths, these facts, this is real history. This really happens. This is what human beings are capable of and we're kind of living in a time right now where, you know, the cruelty of human nature is all over the place again. So I guess my answer is, it depends. Um I will say this, that as a school librarian um who has worked in schools for years, you know, we do have a collection development policy. We are required to, um, you know, not books, read, uh, reviews, you know, legitimate, um, reviews from certain sources, certain vetted sources about, um, age, uh, age appropriateness. Yeah. But, um, but, you know, again, it's a range, it's almost always a range of ages and I don't think it would be a problem in my mind for *Maus* to be included in a middle school library. I think I would not have it in an elementary school library.

Yeah, definitely. I think, uh, as our listener pointed out, I think we could all agree, you know, on sort of the, the extreme ends of that, you know, readiness, um, 10 would be too, right. Ten's too young. 16 should be fine. So, but it's everywhere else in there. And this is a great place to, uh, remind, uh, people that the librarians, you know, they teach at library school students will self censor. Right. They'll pick up a book. If they're not ready for it, they will tend to put it down and I would absolutely love it. If any of our readers have had experiences reading something that they thought, you know, was someone thought was too old for them or, you know, they couldn't handle, um, or being told not to read it and how that impacted you, did you ever pick up a book

and put it back down again? Was that maybe we should dig into the book we plan to read to, uh, talk about today.

Well, do you want to talk about a book we've read recently?

We'll try to make this quick because I know we just had a long conversation. We'll make this very brief. Um, I read, uh, sorry, let me just jumping in, uh, *Drowned City*, uh, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, uh, by Dan Brown. It's a, it's a, a graphic novel. Uh, and, uh, when, when is it, when did it come out? 2017? So it's not a brand new book or anything. But I grabbed it off the shelves because I liked the artwork on the cover and it's very cool because it's, uh, it takes you through a timeline of Hurricane Katrina and how it, you know, when people were warned to leave, who could leave, what were the problems with leaving? What happened when it started raining? When did the, um, the, the levee break? You know, it just kind of breaks down all of that. So, uh, and then it puts, it puts the words about things that were happening. Like, uh, it's like in third person, some people could leave their houses, but that wording is put in the mouth of a person stuck in a house. So you're like getting this sort of whole picture of what that meant. So I highly recommend it.

I read *A Lady's Guide to Fortune Hunting* by Sophie Irwin, and have the two of you read this already? If you like Regency Romances, I highly recommend it. Yeah, it's very fun. Um, I really enjoyed the main characters. They're, the two main characters, are fighting against each other and then, you know, it's one of the enemies to lovers tropes. So it's predictable in some ways, but highly enjoyable. So I recommend it. And what about you, Marian?

Well, the book that I want to talk about and it, it's a terrible book to talk about without, um, with trying to make this short because I loved this book so much. It's a middle grades book by Kelly Barnhill. Um, Kelly Barnhill is the author of *The Girl Who Drank The Moon*, which is a previous Newbery Award winner. That's on my list to read. And, um, this new book which I believe just came out in 2020 one or 2022. It's brand new is called *The Ogres and The Orphans*, and it blew me away. It is a fantasy fable. Um, I wouldn't normally have just picked up a fantasy fable. A friend recommended it to me, but this book is so good and it's about kindness in a world that has lost the ability to, um, to get information and people have turned against each other. If I were a public librarian, I would recommend this as an all community reads books. I, I just think it's for everyone. It's that, it's that good. I love it.

My favorite thing is when a little great book is so very accessible hits the heart strings of a full grown adult like myself. You know, so a lot of times you're reading middle grade books and they, you kind of have to get through them because you understand that they're written for a young audience. But boy, when you can make it happen that it just hits everyone's heart strings so great.

It's just a book full of hope and you know, we, we can all use a little hope.

Well, today we will be discussing *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, was included on the American Library Association Rainbow List, and was adapted into a short film in 2021. It is recommended for those who are 14 and older by the *School Library Journal* and 16 and older by Common Sense media.

George Matthew Johnson, and we'll talk about later how they use uh both the name George and Matthew at different points in their life, um uses they/them pronouns and identifies as nonbinary. They were recently named one of *Time Magazine's* 100 most influential people for future generations. And they have been an advocate for LGBTQ+ individuals and banned books. And if you're interested, there are several uh interviews that George M Johnson has done with various media outlets, uh including one in uh the Beyond The Scenes Daily Show Podcast. And we recommend that you check those out. As a reminder, we are three white, cisgender, and straight women. So we have not had many of the same experiences as Johnson, who is black and queer. We also wanted to give you a trigger warning that some of our discussion today will focus on sexual assault. So, Dorothy, would you like to get into our summary?

I would love to. Uh So uh George specifically describes the book uh somewhere inside the book as a YA memoir, you know, kind of points out what the heck does that really mean? Right. But it, so it is specifically addressing the young people going through the stuff that he went through and it, you know, purports to be there as a blueprint for people who are going through this stuff and to have no one to talk to and no role models. Um And he also, it's also described on the cover as a manifesto about growing up black and queer uh and um from the get go, he's uh they are very specific about how this book will touch on sexual assault, loss of virginity, homophobia,

racism, and anti-blackness. Uh And also has a very thoughtful uh paragraph about the use of the N word and the F word. And by that, I mean, the one that refers to queerness. Um And so just how to thoughtfully use them in discussion, which I thought was great because so many times it is, it is these individual words pulled from a book that people take issue with. So for George to basically say, look, you know, think about how to use these words. I, I think is very powerful. Uh And it's written in four acts. Um It, it, to me, it felt, you know, it's not like a chronological memoir. It's, it's written uh you know, thematically and you get sort of essays and stories from uh George's life that reflect on the thematic uh point of the story. So we have part Act One, a different kid, uh which are kind of anecdotes and stories and advice from childhood, high school. Uh A family, which is a section Act two, where um the different uh pieces are written as letters to specific family members. Uh Act three is teenagers, which explores understanding, you know, understanding their gayness and their responses to it. Uh You know, what, why they could or could not discuss it with different people. Uh specifically uh more in high school, although not entirely. And um final section act for as friends, which really takes us into college experiences and the true, you know, coming of age and the sexual experiences uh that they had there. So, um and I wanted to touch on the manifesto-ness of it because I think some of the reviews sort of suggest that's not entirely a manifesto and it, and it's not, but I loved the way like the different pieces would end with sort of, here's the thing that you as a black queer person or as a person in general should take from this and you know, sort of enact so, and we can get more into that next week. But uh I hope that gives you a sense of what the book is like.

Great. Thank you, Dorothy. We wanted to talk now about why it has been banned and the main reasons are because of its LGBTQ+ content, profanity, and because it has been considered sexually explicit. And as of January 2023, when we're recording this, school boards in at least 14 states have removed the book from school libraries. We wanted to uh give a little more information about this by referring to an interview that George M. Johnson did with NPR on October 25th, 2022. And the NPR story mentioned that PEN America, which we mentioned in an earlier episode is a group that advocates for freedom of expression, said that more than 1600 books about gender and race were banned in more than 130 districts between 2021 and 2022. So these bans impacted around four million students at more than 5000 schools. And this book has both uh the gender and race aspect. So it is especially targeted. And uh Johnson is very um upfront with understanding that concern at the beginning of the book. And in this interview, they said, quote, the curriculum that is being taught in most school systems is still heavily geared towards the straight white male teen. And so when we now have the ability to put

books into curriculum that tell other stories that tell stories that are non white, that tell stories that are non heterosexual. They're trying to take them out across the board because, you know, it's like, oh my God, how dangerous would it be if young white teens had to actually learn about the other people who exist in society with them unquote? And uh a little bit later in the interview, uh Johnson mentioned that quote, students have publicly said on record that works like mine have saved their lives. Works like mine have helped them name their abusers works like mine have helped them come to terms with who they are and feel validated in the fact that there is somebody else that exists in the world like them and you want to remove that from them. I just think it's sad and a little bit later they said you can't attack somebody you don't actually know. And this is really just an attack on an ideology that just says that LGBTQ people shouldn't exist and they want teens to feel unsafe and to feel silenced. And that is just something that I refuse to see happen because I lived as one that felt that way. And those are just a few excerpts that show how powerful uh he can be uh sorry, they can be as an advocate for banned books in general, but specifically for this book that they've written and just how powerful it is.

There's a couple of things in the book, I think that address these ideas straight on um LGBTQ+, you know, being a reason to ban books, for instance, uh they point out that their whole childhood, they tried to hide the fact that they were gay or queer, um which is ultimately what they decided to, you know, the umbrella that fit them the best. Uh But it was the first thing everybody knew about, about them. Uh that in, in the schools, everyone knew who, who was gay, even when that person maybe didn't know it. Right. So to say if we don't put LGBTQ+ books on, you know, the shelves, our kids will know about it. I mean, this thing that's a misconception on the part of some of the people who want to ban books for that reason. Uh, it's a fact and, uh, not being able to understand it at a young age is, uh, as harmful to those kids. Um, so I just wanted to address that in terms of the LGBTQ+ portion of the banning. Mhm.

And we'll talk more about the sexual content shortly. Yeah, I completely agree, Dorothy. Marian, did you want to add anything?

I'm, I'm just sort of sitting here in my feelings right now to be totally honest. Um, and, you know, I read this book, I loved this book and the thing that just sticks out for me and, you know, maybe this, well, the thing that just sticks out for me is, is in the book when George makes the comment at some point, um, or alludes to it. I can't remember the exact, but about how you don't as a gay person come out one time you come out every single time you meet someone and, you know,

going tagging on to what Dorothy said. I, I just to be, to feel, you have to hide, to feel that you, you have to put yourself out there just to exist in a day to day world that, that other people who don't have to think about that live in every day and, and never wake up and think, ok, I'm going to a job interview. I have to tell, you know, I have to decide whether I'm gonna be myself or, or wear a mask all day. Um ok, I'm going to the grocery store. I have to decide whether I'm gonna be myself or wear a mask all day in terms of what I wear. Um how, how I talk um my, you know, my body language, whatever a person is a person and a person who, it was not made to be a certain um you know, a, a person was not made gay, a, a person was not made transgender, a person was not made anything LGBT Q plus because of a book they read, a movie they saw, or people they hang out with, it's just, it's just part of who a person is and it's been that way historically since the beginning of time. Um And so I guess I just, I'm all in my emotions right now of feeling sad um about, about, about these, these facts. Um And, and George knew when he was writing this book. I, I read that in one of the interviews that he knew when he was writing this book, that it was going to be banned or challenged, challenged and he knew that they, they didn't set out, you know, they knew what they were doing and they put themselves out there anyway. And the reason they did it was really selfless because it really the purpose of writing, this was mostly so that upcoming generations would not have to feel the pain of being alone and that nobody else in the world had these feelings or was like them. It didn't, you know that that was the thing George was who George was and was going to be who George was no matter what and not having books to read or people to talk to about, it didn't make him any less, make them any less queer or nonbinary or gay or whatever they went through. Um And therefore having these, these books available has given George um a way to not self loathe and to want to live their life and, and, and find peace in that and, and isn't that what we all want for our children? Not to live a lie but to feel at peace with who they are?

Should we move on to the historical context?

Yes, which I think is going to be important when we talk about the um sexually explicit part of the reason for the banning.

Yes. So as Dorothy mentioned in the summary, one of the things that Johnson discusses in this book is a description of their sexual assault when they were 13 years old. And we wanted to discuss the role of sexual assault in young adult literature a little bit before we dig more into this particular book. So, uh we found an interview, I believe Marian found this interview with Auburn

Avenue in which George Johnson described writing this book and what the process of it was like, and they said, quote, the process was traumatic while also being very necessary and healing. When I started writing the book, I went to some places and spaces that I had not been to in years, memories were triggered and it was like, my body was going through the experiences all over again while I was writing about these very important moments in my life. My current life was still actively going on in the midst of writing. My grandmother got sick. And so that also changed the way I wrote certain chapters about her and how I ended certain stories, it made the process that much harder. But writing has always been healing for me to just put it on a page and get it out of my system. And I think you see um how difficult it was for them to discuss certain moments.

And the one that seemed most difficult was this experience of sexual assault when they were 13 at the hands of their cousin, their older cousin who was about 4 or five years older named uh Thomas in this book, I'm not sure if that was his real name. Um And in this um situation, Johnson goes into a lot of detail about his relationship with his cousin the and the night when this assault happened and it is an incredibly powerful scene and we thought we would give a little background information uh before we talk about that later.

So, first of all, the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, or RAINN, defines sexual assault as sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent to the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include attempted rape, fondling, or unwanted sexual touching, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body or penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape. And RAINN also makes it clear that sexual assault is in no way related to the sexual orientation of the perpetrator or the survivor. And a person's sexual orientation cannot be caused by sexual abuse or assault. Some men and boys have questions about their sexuality after surviving an assault or abuse and that's understandable. This can be especially true if you experience an erection or ejaculation during the assault. Physiological responses like an erection are involuntary, meaning you have no control over them.

And that's something that comes up in Johnson's depiction of what happened to him. So, uh it is very clear that uh Johnson wanted to include this scene in order to help other people understand if they've gone through similar experiences themselves. And the question of whether or not to include sexual assault in young adult literature has been um brought up much more in the last eight years or so. In 2014, an article called "Critical Representations of Sexual Assault

in Young Adult Literature” by Erika Cleveland and E. Sybil Durand in *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, discussed whether or not teachers should be choosing to teach young adult literature that includes sexual assault and how that has affected students, especially their understanding of rape culture. And they mentioned in the article that they agree with CJ Bott's argument, the teachers must be aware of books that discuss sexual sexual assault to meet their students needs. And some teachers have shied away from using these books in the classroom because it would be seen as risky. But um Bott acknowledged that sex is always a controversial topic, topic in young adult literature. With rape being one of the edgiest topics. But she said trying to pretend rape does not exist is dangerously ignorant.

And when the researcher Victor Malo-Juvera conducted a survey of students who had read the novel *Speak* in their 8th Grade English classes. They um and they had discussed it in their classes and uh rape myths. They said that it decreased their acceptance of rape myths and they thought that it showed that it can be a vehicle for engaging students in critical discussions of social issues. So it's really important for educators to include texts like that in their discussions. But they did find when this was written in 2014 that um some researchers found that youth of color and gay lesbian and bisexual youth seemed particularly vulnerable to dating and sexual violence. But at that point, there were huge gaps in young adult literature. So the victims were all white females and did not include youth of color or LGBTQ+ youth. So they said that they thought that we needed more representation and we needed um victims who were LGBTQ+ and uh males. And they said that it's really important for teachers to discuss um all the aspects of sexual assault in their classroom so that they can have these conversations. And it can be a very valuable resource for teenagers who may be dealing with these things themselves. So that that was a very long explanation. But I I thought that it was helpful to highlight that in 2014, um researchers were aware of the positive effects of discussing literature like this, but there were huge gaps.

And so Johnson's book is especially important in helping to fill this gap because he was uh sorry, they were the victim um as a male. Uh at that time, now they identify as non-binary and um they are black. So uh having that representation is just so important and there have been some other uh peer reviewed articles discussing why it's so important to, to include books like this. And I just wanted to mention one other by three teachers uh who taught 8th, 9th and 10th grade, wrote an article about teaching books that feature sexual violence in 2018 in the journal of language and literacy education. And it's um called but she did not, but she didn't scream

teaching about sexual assault in young adult literature. And they mentioned that it's really important to teach books like this in the classroom so that you can have the conversations together and teachers can provide background on it. And they mentioned that um sexual violence committed against LGBTQ+ students is underreported due to social barriers such as the fear of being outed in isolation and students who don't do not adhere to a strict gender binary, face violence at underreported levels. And they recognize that sex education in K through 12 public school is outdated and still heteronormative. And um it's really important especially um nowadays to bring this into the open and they mentioned the Me Too movement. Um And if these conversations are not had in the classroom, then students have an incorrect or incomplete understanding of sexual violence.

And as you probably know, the Me Too movement um began as uh in 2006 with the uh survivor and activist Tarana Burke using um the words Me Too. And it wasn't till 2017 that the Me Too hashtag went viral and brought more people to an awareness of how much um sexual violence plays a role in different people's lives. So that's a very long explanation. But um I, I think it helps us understand where Johnson's book fits into um the this important topic of young adult literature that features sexual assault.

Yeah. And if you're, you know, concerned about the sexual assault piece, uh, one of the things I, I would just point out about it is that, that they handle it with so much care and consideration for the abuser. Which true, which, uh, I think is, you know, astounding, but the abuser was someone that was close to them. And, um, you know, they, the situation is one, I think a lot of young people might find themselves in that could easily be written it. But I can imagine a YA book with a scene similar to that, that simply puts it out there as exploration, right? Oh This happened. And I was curious but they clearly, you know, make the case for why it's why it's abuse, how it affected them uh and their ideas about themselves and their sexuality. Uh And I just think it does it in such a non um you know, there's no hysteria is highly unemotional. The whole scene is, is written very um matter of factly, these are the things that happened and this is why that was wrong.

Mhm I agree. Yeah, that, that, that's a great point. Dorothy. Um They mentioned at the end of it that as an adult, they are able to experience a lot of empathy for their older cousin, especially because uh he died at a young age. Um he was killed while defending another family member. And so he sorry uh Johnson understands that he um was dealing with trying to figure out his

own sexuality, this cousin Thomas and um used George to do that and he tries to understand where Thomas was coming from while still saying I was a victim. A 13 year old should never have the or anyone should never have someone touch them without their consent or, you know, ask them to perform oral sex or anything like that without their consent. And he said I was, uh, sorry, they said I was too young for this. Um, you know, to, to be introduced to this, but still, it, it was clearly sexual assault.

And I think it's written in such a way that a lot of teens probably need to read it and think to themselves, uh, you know, did I sexually assault someone? You know, like, I don't think that Thomas was clear that that's what he was doing at all. Uh, I think Thomas was, you know, how do you remember how old Thomas was in the scene older than he? But five years older, still a teenager, right? Still around 18 maybe. Yeah. And I, and I think it's important for people to read it. So as to consider their own actions in terms of, you know, it. So what, there's two parts people who are, who have been abused need to see that reflected and it, this does a great job of thinking about how to process it. But also, you know, teenagers younger than 18, for sure, make, uh, make dumb decisions and do things. Uh, if you think about all the bullying that happens in middle school, I don't think those kids set out to be bullies. Right. They don't really understand that. That's what they're doing or how it hurts people. Which is another reason I think it's important to have these books available.

So, and I want to break in here, um, so many thoughts have come into my head again. Um As I said at the outset, this book was so thought provoking to me. But um you know, there's so many things to think about here. Um As a reader, as a parent, as a um a member of society, the first thing I wanna say is art mimics life. Life does not mimic art. OK? If you look at the history of art, art mimics life things that are depicted in art, be that written, be that visual um movies, et cetera, et cetera, the news, whatever is a form of art, it's, it's telling what has happened in life or based on what has happened in life, predictions of what will happen in life. That's, that's my understanding of art. Um And so I think about people who might hear about this book and think, oh my God, um if my kid reads this book, they're gonna want to be gay. Um And we've already addressed that and now I'm thinking about the people who might hear about this and think, oh my God, if my kid reads this book, they, hm, they might be disturbed by learning about sexual assault or they might become an assaulter or they might be a victim of assault because they read this book. What I'm thinking is what an amazing cautionary tale because we are not doing our kids any service, any positive service by being naive. The world is a cruel and horrible

place. And the Me Too movement made a lot of us look back at situations that have happened in our lives and say, oh my God, I was sexually assaulted, oh my God. You know, because I mean, when you, when we, we talk about rape culture, um rape is incredibly under reported. Many people will never report rape because they fear for their safety. They fear that they will not be believed. Um, children who have been victimized either sexually or just physically verbally whatever, do not speak the truth for fear of retribution for fear of um, no one's gonna believe them, they're gonna blame the victim. And we have a huge problem in the American culture of blaming the victim. Um And so as a parent, I want my kids to read books like this and understand what sexual assault is and protect themselves or protect themselves. Um And, and when I say protect themselves, I mean, in both ways don't assault someone else and don't be assaulted, you know, don't put yourself in a situation to be assaulted and God forbid if something should happen to you, you know, please talk to a trusted person. Hopefully me. Um and let's, you know, let's report it. Not including sexual assault in literature, doesn't mean sexual assault is not happening. And we have to come to terms with that and how do we want to teach our kids that?

And I think about, you know, I think George discusses a little bit in the book also about, you know, the talk and everybody's talked about the talk. What does the talk mean? We talked about the talk and *The Hate U Give* that um, black boys in particular, but black children in general have to have the talk so that when they're pulled over, not if, but when they're pulled over by a police officer, hopefully they will survive it if they follow rules that white people don't have to follow. Um, and, you know, and it feels like kind of the same thing here. There are people who have to have, um, exposure to this information. Well, everybody needs to be exposed to this information. But, you know, parents, you should be talking to your children anyway about how to protect yourself, how to protect your children against, um, predators. I mean, you know, unfortunately there are predators out there of all different kinds and, you know, it's, it's, it's, it's a reality and so literature is a great way.

Art is a great way to open the door as I said before, to having these conversations with your kids in a loving and supporting way. But yeah, we can't live in a bubble folks. We, we're in, we live in a cruel world and we have to prepare our kids for that cruel world. And um you know, as, as you said, Dorothy, this, this passage is handled with such grace and compassion and you know, beautiful honesty that um finding this objectionable I is, is something that I would question, I would question, what is your, what is your goal if you're objecting to this being in there? Are you

denying that this kind of stuff happens in the world period? Are you maybe, maybe the, the powers that be are so they don't, they want to continue with the behaviors they have of controlling people who are, are have less power than them that they want to be able to continue to get away with this and not have anybody say, wait a minute, that's not OK. So it just raises a lot of questions for me.

Well, let's move on to our discussion of the pros and cons uh one big pro and this is something that Marian and Dorothy you've both mentioned already. Um But the thing that stuck out to me so much was Johnson's honesty throughout this book and in the author's notes, they wrote in writing this book, I wanted to be as authentic and truthful about my experience as possible. I wanted my story to be told in totality, the good, the bad and the things I was always too afraid to talk about publicly. This meant going to places and discussing some subjects that are often kept away from teens for fear of them being too heavy. But the truth of the matter is these things happened to me when I was a child, teenager and young adult. So, as heavy as these subjects may be, it is necessary that they are told but also read by teens who may have to navigate many of these same experiences in their own lives.

Yeah, I mean, that's the, it's so great that uh George is an advocate for LGBTQIA+ youth and can so articulate so well, you know, kind of why they need it for sure.

And also George is an advocate for black youth. Yes. You know, which, which is also extremely important.

Yeah, that was on my list of pros. Um The book does a great job of helping to understand the intersectionality, you know, which is such a big word that can be hard to really understand uh until you get into context. Uh But he does, they do a great job of pointing out when the things they were dealing with had to do with blackness, how, how the black community treated the LGBTQIA+, how that fits into the bigger picture. When was it, you know, when was it gayness? When was it blackness? And how did the two sort of stack up on top of each other?

Definitely. And, and they mentioned that, you know, what people saw of them first, depending, depended on who they were. So, if they were white, they probably noticed that Johnson is black first. If uh he was with a group of black people, they probably noticed that he was um you know, not exactly exactly. You guys, we need a, we need a penalty every time we get pronouns wrong.

Yeah. So uh so depending on who they're with, um a certain part of them stuck out more. But like you said, there's this um intersection of both that you probably can't fully understand unless you are someone like Johnson. It makes me, you know, and it, I think even though not all readers are going to be black or gay, it can help to think about the concept of intersectionality and, you know, maybe you are a, an Asian woman, but you can think about the intersectional intersectionality of those two pieces and how they work in your life, right?

And, and for those of us reading the book who are neither black nor gay, um nor male. I think it's another thing that really stuck out to me and, and well done and not preachy, just explanatory is the concept of how hurtful it is, even when it's completely unintentional. Um the gas lighting, um the gas lighting and the, the, the miss um mispronouncing or misidentifying of a person or, or the, the microaggressions. George talks a lot about what microaggressions are and some examples that George gave were things like, you know, when a person says a non-black person says to or about a black person. Wow, you're really well spoken or can I touch your hair or um, you know, just those kinds of things that, you know, a lot of listeners might be thinking, oh um well, I didn't mean any harm. Um Oh, I just am trying to understand someone of a different culture. Oh, but whether your intention is, is to cause harm or not, the things that we do and say to other people are harmful.

And um every single time I use an improper pronoun, not improper. Um the wrong pronoun, every single time I use the wrong pronoun when referring to my friends. Um who've made it clear what their pronouns are, you know, even when I don't intend to say the wrong pronoun and I can, I can tell you I, you know, I intended no harm and I fall back on. Oh, you know, this is just the way I was raised in my language and you know what? That's not good enough because even if there is some truth there, um which you know, there is, I can try harder because when I am failing, I am hurting someone. So I think that that's a really important um and well made point that is woven throughout this memoir Manifesto. Mhm.

And uh another thing I really appreciated about the book was I found it to be incredibly moving, especially uh their discussion of their relationship with their grandmother, Nanny, I thought was so sweet and you could feel the love Johnson had for his family and friends and the love they had for them. And I'm sure that's something we'll talk about in our next episode. But, um, I just, uh, I, I just really appreciated how much care they had for other people in their lives. Yeah. Should we move on to the cons? The cons? Well, one thing, um, that struck me was I expected

it to be more of a coherent story more similar to other memoirs that I've read. And as Dorothy described earlier, it's more of like there are, there are various sections and it's in chronological order, but there are, um, essays or letters that focus on one piece of their life and I thought they still worked really well together. But if it wasn't what you were expecting, it was, uh, a little jarring for me at first and then I got used to it.

I think that's a good idea because, you know, not, I mean, we are all as self, um defined avid readers. Um, but if, if you're not an avid reader and you're reading this story and, and trying to piece it together and make sense of it as a story that might be confusing. Yeah, I, I found that too. I found a little bit of um a little bit of timeline confusion because things are mentioned. And with essays, you know, there's essays that span some blocks of times that overlap. But, you know, it's nothing that I think hurts my experience of the book, but it's definitely there. Right?

And there are themes that show up again and again. So there's definitely um you know, messages and topics that appear throughout. But um but each piece, you know, could just be right on its own. And maybe that goes with um another perceived con which um I think you wanted to mention Dorothy.

Um uh The one that I wanted to mention was that um a lot of the material uh could be really valuable to students under 14. But because of the sort of college portion, um the, and there's the assault portion. Well, the assault portion. Yes. But I think the assault happened when he, when they were younger, but the uh sexual exploration of the college and uh which is so important, I think for the um older readers to, you know, who are really starting to navigate that. And, you know, in high school, which George makes a point of saying when you, when you are, when you are gay and don't get to explore that at the same age. Everyone else is you sort of end up having to do it, you know, having a second adolescence. Um, but that is, you know, not where 14 year olds are so much like Trevor Noah's book *Born A Crime* which, by the way I haven't read. So I'm only speaking to the fact that I know that there's a YA version of it versus, I mean, there's a middle grade version of it, um, which I think could be valuable. Well, yeah, but the YA version I would still say is like 8th grade and older because there's some pretty explicit descriptions of violence and assault and things like that. You know, I feel like can, can, can have access to the chapters that are meaningful to them. I guess we have to trust them, like we said in the beginning to stop reading when it gets to stuff that they're uncomfortable with, right?

But you think that maybe a different version of this book that's aimed at slightly younger readers would be helpful, Dorothy? I think it could absolutely be helpful. Yes. Uh-huh. That makes a really good point.

Yeah, it does. And it's certainly something to consider. Um Certainly, you know, we've talked about the sexual assault and the loss of virginity and, and for some people that's a serious kind. Um I, I just want to say in, in repeating that, that it is completely appropriate for um parents to make that choice for their own kids. But when you are thinking about whether a book should be completely banned from a library, um, please keep in mind that there are people who need it. Um, and if your child does not, your child is living in a very um safe world. Not every child grows up with that safety and has experienced a lot more um difficult traumatic, um, sexual experiences, way, way, way younger. So just, just keep that in mind that there are some books that are for your child and some that aren't. But if your, if there are children who need to benefit from this book, the book should be available to them. Um And that being said, you know, again, I would recommend this for a high school library. I don't think that I would as a school librarian put this in a middle school library.

I agree. I agree. Yeah.

OK. Um Well, then I think we can wrap this discussion up um in the next episode, we will discuss the book in much more detail. So um it will include some spoilers. I think we've already included a couple.

Um How do you spoil a memoir? You know?

True. Um You could get this on Wikipedia. Um So please, we, we um hope that you will join us next time as we go into a close reading of *All Boys Aren't Blue*'s characters, themes, and significance. If you would like to leave a question or comment, please visit theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook at [roguelibrarianspod](https://www.facebook.com/roguelibrarianspod). If you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you find your podcasts. Once again, we want to um give a shout out to Chris for creating the music and to Lizzie, for doing the audio editing for this episode and all of our previous episodes, we could not have done this podcast without them. And of course, most of all, we thank you, all of our listeners, for reading with us because books are meant to be read. Bye!

*Please excuse the typos and grammatical errors.