

Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode

Books About Banned Books

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Welcome to a special, special bonus bonus episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which two librarians discuss banned books.

We are your hosts, Marian.

And Dorothy.

And we are the Rogue Librarians.

So it is Banned Books Week 2024.

And as Rogue Librarians discussing banned books, we could not let this week go by without doing our bonus bonus episode.

We came upon the idea for this just by doing some fun reading and noticed that there have been many, many books published in what I'm gonna take a reach and call a mini genre books about banned books.

Or book banning.

And so we thought that this would be a fun topic to tackle and talk to you about some of our favorites.

Absolutely.

We are gonna do our bonus bonus reading books about banned books.

So it's just extra special all around.

It is.

So do you want me to go ahead and start, Dorothy?

Yeah, why don't you go ahead and start.

Okay.

So the book that got my brain thinking about the bonus bonus is a new book published in 2024 that is entitled Lula Dean's Little Library of Banned Books by Kirsten Miller.

And at first glance, this looks like it's going to be a rather lighthearted book, very funny, lots of f-bombs in it.

And the gist of the story is that Lula Dean, who lives in the tiny town of Troy, Georgia, has decided that all the books in the school library and public library that to her seem offensive need to be banned, removed.

And of course, her adversary is Beverly, who is the president of the school board or a member of the school board who is determined to save our liberty, our freedom to read or the freedom to read of the Troy, Georgia residence.

So what ends up happening is Lula has gone on a rampage in the library and she has decided that to further appropriate reading in her small town of Troy, she is going to build and open up her own little free library in which she is going to place only the books that are pure and that residents of the town should be reading.

And these are things like cookbooks, the rules, the Southern Women's Guide to Etiquette, things of this nature.

Well, Beverly's daughter decides she's going to take these matters into her own hands.

She removes all of Lula's prized books and takes the dust covers off of them, the book jackets, and puts them on replacement books that are specifically banned books that would make Lula's skin crawl.

And she places these back in the Little Free Library.

And as the townspeople happen upon these books, these reading these books ends up changing their lives for the better.

And many wrongs are righted and many things start to happen.

So what started as a very light hearted premise as you read about each individual who picks up one of the books and reads the contents and how it changes their life and just broadens their thinking really is deep.

There's a lot of depth to it and some gut punches and and really a highly recommended book.

I was pleasantly surprised that my little so called light hearted reading turned into something that has quite a bit of substance to it.

So Dorothy, how about you?

Well I was browsing a library over the summer and looking at the new book section and I saw a picture book and I'm always intrigued by picture books, especially one that is called Banned Book by Jonah Winter and Gary Kelley.

So it's got the big sort of banned bar across the front and these devilish faces coming out the top, peeking out the top of a book.

And the artwork is this sort of dark industrial Soviet-era propaganda poster, kind of monochromatic illustrations.

They've really set a particular tone.

And then the thing about the book is that there's lots of bars over a lot of the words, a lot of redacted stuff.

So it opens, once upon a time, there was a book about some blank, blank, blank, redacted, called Banned Book.

And then underneath that, you get an italics and brackets.

This content has been removed because it has been deemed inappropriate for children.

And so on and so forth, the number of parts that get blacked out sort of increase as you go along.

And the reasons change here and there.

these words are not allowed.

This content has been removed for certain reasons.

But it's an interesting thing that happens when you're reading it because you're trying to fill in, in your mind, this sort of blank space, you know, of what are the words that they're trying to take out.

And as you get farther and farther into the book, there's so much black space that it's very difficult to read that way.

And then you realize that here's a page, for instance, I won't read all the blank parts.

Well, I'll just kind of give you a little hint of what that's like.

It's like blank claim that blank, blank, blank, blank, blank.

They only want to blank, blank, blank, protect children, blank, blank, when blank, blank, what they really want, et cetera.

So when you read it, just the words that show, it's very interesting what happens.

Claim that they only want to protect children when what they really want is power over everyone because they don't believe other people have the right to think.

So you have to sort of read between the blanks to get the overall message.

So it's just very interesting, kind of tricks your brain a little bit and makes you really feel what it's like for that information to be missing.

So I was very intrigued by that one.

That is intriguing.

And what year did you say that was published?

That was published in 2023, so it's pretty recent.

Yeah.

Wow.

interesting.

That also reminds me of the next book that I wanted to discuss, which is called *The Wall* by Peter Sís.

I love Peter Sís.

Oh, yes.

And Peter Sís, for those who didn't know, was born in Czechoslovakia and grew up in Prague.

And he grew up there prior to 1968, which was the Prague Spring.

And eventually he did defect to the United States in 1984.

So this particular book, which looks like a picture book and did in fact, win a Caldecott honor the year that it was published, which by the way was 2007.

It's just an amazing story.

So the cover looks like an old fashioned art journal.

And then it has a picture of a little baby sitting in the middle of a star made out of a wall with drumsticks in his hand and a drum and just this adorable little smile.

The subtitle is *Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*.

And so what this book is, it was written by both memory and it's sort of the history of what went on politically during Sís' childhood where he's born and he's always loved to draw and he draws all the things he wants to do.

But then by the time he goes to school, the Soviet Union is ruling the countries, the Eastern Bloc countries behind the iron wall and they're cracking down on things.

And so everyone in school has to draw the exact same thing and everyone has to wear the same thing.

They all have to join the Communist Party.

As a child, obviously, Peter Sís didn't quite understand it, but he went from having pretty much a happy go lucky early infancy to people not being able to be themselves, they weren't able to play music.

His family stopped talking very much about anything other than surface things because everyone was a spy and children in school were encouraged to tell on their parents.

And then of course we get up to 1968, which is a new ruler had come into Czechoslovakia and they were starting to allow the residents to travel a little bit and to wear blue jeans and to let their hair grow longer and to listen to the beatles and Elvis and the Beach Boys.

And Peter Sís has an opportunity to travel to England and France and his parents travel around Europe and they believe that things are going to continue to get better, so they inevitably come back home to their family.

And it really isn't until 1984 that Sís decides that he can't live this life anymore.

And yet there was so much propaganda and so much fear that he would never see his family again that it was an extremely difficult decision.

So the pictures are incredible.

If you've ever seen Peter Sís' drawings, he does these teeny tiny lines and points and the pictures are just unbelievably detailed.

And dense and interesting.

Very much so.

So much to look at.

You could look at this book so many times and see different things.

The page that I do want to kind of read from, and I'm really not reading from it because there aren't, there's no text specifically on this page, but it shows the difference, as Peter Sís has discovered, between life on the eastern block side of the wall compared to life on the other side of the wall.

And as Dorothy described in the book she just mentioned, the dark industrial monochrome, everything is black and white, is what is depicted on the side of the wall of the eastern block.

And the words just really spoke to me in terms of some of the questions that are being, or some of the lies, or some of the jargon that is being bandied about today in our American culture.

And they're words like fear, terror, suspicion, stupidity, injustice, envy, corruption, lies.

But then on the light side, the non-communist block side, we have color and hope.

And the words are truth, freedom, justice, hope, inspiration, integrity, joy, dreams, liberty, dignity, wisdom, respect, love.

That just really spoke to me as to how timeless this book is.

And almost presented as a cautionary moment.

If I were someone who was spouting that I needed my freedom to be preserved by preventing my children from reading certain books and therefore books should be banned, I might look at this and think, oh, maybe I should think about what I'm doing because this is leading to what Peter Sís grew up with, which doesn't look very appealing.

Mm-hmm, yeah, and just a shout-out for picture books too.

I know that most of our listeners are adults or at least teenagers, and if you dismiss books because they're picture books, you're just completely missing out because there are so many picture books that are just profound and deep and dark and they're like poetry and they attack all kinds of different subjects, so it's worth a look.

Yeah, thank you for that.

What have you got?

Well, similarly, I have a memoir in a graphic memoir, which takes place under a regime of censorship in South Korea, so it's called Banned Book Club by Kim Hyun Sook and Ryan Estrada.

And I think there's one more author here, Hyung-Ju Ko as an illustrator.

So it's Kim Hyun Sook's story, and it starts in 1983 when she goes to college.

And her mom is upset that she's going to college at all, that, you know, women don't need to go to college.

Her mother had not been allowed to be in school almost at all, but her dad is supportive in helping her.

And she goes to, well, they're also worried.

They're worried because protests are happening on the campuses.

And her dad is supportive and really wants her, you know, to have her education.

So she goes to the campus, and sure enough, just off the bus, she's trying to shove her way through a crowd of people that are protesting the people in power.

And, you know, she's like, I just want to come here and learn.

That's all I'm here to do.

But she joins a couple of clubs, and one of them is this dance.

They wear the masks, they do the traditional dances.

And through that, the people that are in that, it turns out, are all also protestors.

And they're trying to open her eyes a little bit.

They're like, well, tell me the story of, you know, the dance that we're doing.

And it's an ancient story wherein, what do you know, people are protesting the people in power who are treating them poorly.

And it's like, see, the struggle is never over.

They didn't protest enough.

And one of the members invites her to a book club.

And she is very excited.

She's an English major, a literature major, and she brings the Scarlet Letter with her.

And it turns out, like, everybody in the club is reading these, you know, political treatises, revealing all of the problems that their country is having.

And come to find out the Scarlet Letter is also on their list of books that would not be allowed to read.

So she just little by little learns these things.

She will reference something that happened in recent history.

Oh, that was the town where that other book club was all arrested.

And they were like, oh, no, they weren't really a book club.

They were protestors, but they didn't want to say that.

And then, you know, or there was this massacre.

Oh, no, no.

I mean, these people didn't do anything, but there was one guy hiding amongst them that they wanted to get.

So they just killed everyone and then said that those people were violent.

I don't want to get into all the details, but part of it was very chilling because it was so familiar.

So it would say, oh, well, they've got people so divided that they're too busy fighting with each other to bother to oust this dictator.

And this is all post-Korean war.

It starts in 1983.

So I had no idea, I learned so much about South Korean history.

So all kinds of stuff like that just rang truly familiar to me here.

And so it was chilling in that sense.

And over and over, just like when we read eyes Open, I'm realizing this is a well-rehearsed script.

So it's so important to read the books that show us that this is not the first time any of this has happened.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So you just mentioned a graphic novel.

And the last book that I'm going to talk about for this specific episode is also a graphic novel, although technically it's a manga.

And it is a series that I believe started in 2010.

And the series is called Library Wars.

And the story and art are by Kiiko Yumi.

And it says the original concept is by Hiro Arikawa.

And I'm probably butchering that and I apologize.

But the subtitle for this book is Winning the War on Information One Book at a Time.

So Library Wars.

And I did not have a chance to read these books yet.

I literally just discovered them in doing my research and was delighted that the library had the series.

But here's the synopsis.

In the near future, the federal government creates a committee to rid society of books it deems unsuitable.

The libraries vow to protect their collection.

And with the help of the local governments, form a military group to defend themselves, calling it the Library forces.

But when the director of the Canto Library base gets sick, a temporary replacement is assigned according to regulations.

But Iku and her roommate Asako discover a trail of missing books that leads back to the temporary director.

Has he betrayed everything the Library forces stand for and handed books over to the enemy?

So definitely a series that I am excited to delve into.

The picture on the front of the book shows a blonde haired anime female presenting character who has a necklace with an open book on it.

And she is holding a gun.

And then there are two male presenting characters with dark hair.

And they're going to take on whomever it takes to prevent the banning of their favorite books.

So how fun.

yes, kids fight for your right to read.

yes.

And, you know, I was going to talk about a book that I haven't looked at.

But that book reminds me so much.

And it just follows along.

I'm going to have to talk about a book that I picked up because I couldn't find the book that I was looking for.

It's called The Ninja Librarians.

I think it's a series.

And the basic idea, it's kind of like the Magic Treehouse in that they travel in time, you know.

And in fact, Magic Treehouse did have a library, if I recall.

I think so, yeah.

It's a little while.

Well, the entrance to this is through the library's like closet, so very lion-witch in the wardrobe as well.

yes.

Their mission is to protect those whose words get them into trouble anywhere in the world and at any time in history.

So I have not gotten far enough into the book to know where they go.

However, I was just immediately taken back to my childhood, reading particularly a book, I think, called Half Magic.

yes.

Who was the author of that one?

I can't remember.

I can't remember.

But exactly the kind of book that I loved as a child, with a high vocabulary, just words that are fun to say.

I'm going to see if I can find the section here that I read out loud to my husband because it was just so cute.

Edward Eager.

Edward Eager.

yes.

Okay.

Edward Eager.

Absolutely.

Okay.

I'll just read from the very beginning.

Okay.

Okay.

From the beginning.

Twelve-year-old Dorothea Barnes was thoroughly unchosen, not particularly deserving or no marks of destiny, lacked any sort of criminal genius, and could claim no supernatural relations.

Furthermore, she'd never been orphaned, kidnapped, left for dead in the wilderness, or bitten by anything more bloodthirsty than her little sister.

Don't even begin to entertain consoling thoughts of long flaxen curls or shiny tresses, black as ravens wings.

Dory's plain brown hair could only be considered marvelous in its ability to twist itself into hopeless tangles.

She was neither particularly tall or small, thick or thin, pale or dark.

She had parents who loved her, friends enough and never wanted for a meal.

So why, you may wonder, tell a story about a girl like this at all.

Oh, that's great.

I mean, I think you can hear the playfulness in the words.

I very much look forward to seeing what historical figures they save from getting in trouble because of the words that they print.

Again, that's *The Ninja Librarians*.

The first book is called *The Accidental Key Hand* by Jen Swann Downey.

That sounds fantastic.

Now, there's another series I'm going to have to get started on.

Yeah.

Just a fine, easy, quick.

Yeah.

Take me back to my childhood kind of read.

Oh my goodness, there are not enough hours in the day or days in the week to get all the reading done that I want to do.

But folks, this is a good week to pick up your favorite banned book or a banned book that you've always been meaning to read.

And just to celebrate your right currently to the freedom to read what you want to read.

And it's important that none of us take this right for granted as you know that right is consistently under attack and the numbers of books that are challenged and banned are increasing daily.

With Florida and Iowa now being the two states leading the book banning.

So Iowa has stepped ahead of Texas.

All right.

Well, this was our first little foray without Alanna.

So I hope it went well.

We'll probably still be asking for her help with this just a little bit.

So I guess and since we're winging it, we're going to wing our closing as well.

Thank you so much for spending time with us and thank you to Chris for the music and to Heather and Lizzie.

Lizzie.

yes.

To Heather and Lizzie for their support and it's this show is edited by myself, Dorothy and-

And thank you for that, Dorothy.

Is there anything I'm missing?

Our patrons.

Thank you to our patrons because we are absolutely indebted to you for supporting us sufficiently to keep us on track and continuing to read and make episodes.

So thank you for allowing us to continue doing this good work.

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You can join the Patreon and give us a paltry couple of dollars a month, or you can write reviews for us on the Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

And five-star reviews, please.

yes.

Those are the kind that help.

Definitely.

Definitely.

We want people to find us like you did.

So word of mouth is great.

Tell all your friends and we will look forward to sending your way our next produced episode.

I am looking very much forward to our January episode book, which is Fahrenheit 451, which is in fact a book about banned books.

Indeed it is.

Probably the most famous book about banned books.

Indeed.

Indeed.

From 1953.

Wow.

Well, thank you.

Thank you for reading with us today and or listening to us today because books are meant to be read.

Bye.

Bye.