

25 Writers on the Importance of Libraries

By [Alison Nastasi](#) on Feb 17, 2013

British children’s author Terry Deary — best known for his *Horrible Histories* series and controversial chatter about the nation’s school systems — told the [Guardian](#) he thinks libraries “have had their day.” He’d prefer that people buy their books instead of borrowing them, claiming that “books aren’t public property.” Deary added, “Authors, booksellers and publishers need to eat. We don’t expect to go to a food library to be fed.” The cranky comments feel like a swift kick in the teeth since libraries around the world are struggling against significant budget cuts each year, and authors have been tirelessly advocating for their importance. We gathered a few passionate statements from 20 writers that emphasize why libraries aren’t “sentimental” institutions. See what Neil Gaiman, Judy Blume, Ray Bradbury, and other writers have to contribute to the conversation, below.

[Ray Bradbury](#)

“I spent three days a week for 10 years educating myself in the public library, and it’s better than college. People should educate themselves — you can get a complete education for no money. At the end of 10 years, I had read every book in the library, and I’d written a thousand stories.”

[Anne Lamott](#)

“My parents, and librarians along the way, taught me about the space between words; about the margins, where so many juicy moments of life and spirit and friendship could be found. In a library, you could find miracles and truth and you might find something that would make you laugh so hard that you get shushed, in the friendliest way. There was sanctuary in a library, there is sanctuary now, from the war, from the storms of our family and our own anxious minds. Libraries are like the mountain, or the meadows behind the goat lady’s house: sacred space.”

[Rita Dove](#)

“My childhood library was small enough not to be intimidating. And yet I felt the whole world was contained in those two rooms. I could walk any aisle and smell wisdom.”

[Tracy Chevalier](#)

“I find that when I come out of the library I’m in what I call the library bliss of being totally taken away from the distractions of life.”

Isaac Asimov

“It isn’t just a library. It is a space ship that will take you to the farthest reaches of the Universe, a time machine that will take you to the far past and the far future, a teacher that knows more than any human being, a friend that will amuse you and console you — and most of all, a gateway, to a better and happier and more useful life.”

Victor Hugo

“A library implies an act of faith which generations, still in darkness hid, sign in their night in witness of the dawn.”

Mark Twain

“A public library is the most enduring of memorials, the trustiest monument for the preservation of an event or a name or an affection; for it, and it only, is respected by wars and revolutions, and survives them.”

Joan Bauer

“My grandma always said that God made libraries so that people didn’t have any excuse to be stupid.”

Miv Schaaf

“When life seems not worth living, ten minutes in a library proves otherwise.”

Richard F. Thomas

“One of the powerful functions of a library — any library — lies in its ability to take us away from worlds that are familiar and comfortable and into ones which we can neither predict nor control, to lead us down new roads whose contours and vistas provide us with new perspectives. Sometimes, if we are fortunate, those other worlds turn out to have more points of familiarity with our own than we had thought. Sometimes we make connections back to familiar territory and when we have returned, we do so supplied with new perspectives, which enrich our lives as scholars and enhance our role as teachers. Sometimes the experience takes us beyond our immediate lives as scholars and teachers, and the library produces this result particularly when it functions as the storehouse of memory, a treasury whose texts connect us through time to all humanity.”

Anne Herbert

“Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries.”

Archibald MacLeish

“What is more important in a library than anything else — than everything else — is the fact that it exists.”

Carl Sagan

“The library connects us with the insight and knowledge, painfully extracted from Nature, of the greatest minds that ever were, with the best teachers, drawn from the entire planet and from all our history, to instruct us without tiring, and to inspire us to make our own contribution to the collective knowledge of the human species. I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries.”

Sandra Cisneros

“I always tell people that I became a writer not because I went to school but because my mother took me to the library. I wanted to become a writer so I could see my name in the card catalog.”

Susan Jacoby

“I loved the library long before I first set foot inside it at age 26, but I never loved it more than I did during the days when the wind from Lower Manhattan was still wafting the smell of death throughout the city. Spending hours in an oasis of civilization somehow made it easier to endure the heightened awareness of just how fragile civilization can be. It is natural, I suppose, that a great library should be a more important presence in the life of a writer than it is for those whose work does not involve constant contact with the written word. My old calendars tell me that I have certainly spent more time in this building during the last three decades than anywhere but in my own apartment. I have relied on the library to provide the research materials for five books and uncountable magazine articles. But what has always impressed me most forcefully is the institution’s connection to the everyday life of New Yorkers, from giggling teenagers to the very old.”

Toni Morrison

“Access to knowledge is the superb, the supreme act of truly great civilizations. Of all the institutions that purport to do this, free libraries stand virtually alone in accomplishing this mission. No committee decides who may enter, no crisis of body or spirit must accompany the entrant. No tuition is charged, no oath sworn, no visa demanded. Of the monuments humans build for themselves, very few say touch me, use me, my hush is not indifference, my space is not barrier. If I inspire awe, it is because I am in awe of you and the possibilities that dwell in you.”

Pete Hamill

“What libraries give you is all three tenses — the past tense; the present tense in which we live; and the future that we can only imagine. These places have teachers who are living and dead and we are lucky to have them. If I sit here and read Aristotle, he is speaking to me across a thousand years — more than a thousand years. That sense that I am in the company of the great greatest people who ever lived is a humbling experience but a liberating experience.”

James A. Michener

“Public libraries have been a mainstay of my life. They represent an individual’s right to acquire knowledge; they are the sinews that bind civilized societies the world over. Without libraries, I would be a pauper, intellectually and spiritually.”

Sidney Sheldon

“Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life. Libraries change lives for the better.”

Jerzy Kosinski

“Here was one place where I could find out who I was and what I was going to become. And that was the public library.”

Margaret Atwood

“Our generation in the west was lucky: we had readymade gateways. We had books, paper, teachers, schools and libraries. But many in the world lack these luxuries. How do you practice without such tryout venues? Without a piano, how do you learn to play the piano? How can you write without paper and read without books?”

E.B. White

A library is many things. It’s a place to go, to get in out of the rain. It’s a place to go if you want to sit and think. But particularly it is a place where books live, and where you can get in touch with other people, and other thoughts, through books. If you want to find out about something, the information is in the reference books — the dictionaries, the encyclopedias, the atlases. If you like to be told a story, the library is the place to go. Books hold most of the secrets of the world, most of the thoughts that men and women have had. And when you are reading a book, you and the author are alone together — just the two of you. A library is a good place to go when you feel unhappy, for there, in a book, you may find encouragement and comfort. A library is a good place to go when you feel bewildered or undecided, for there, in a book, you may have your question answered. Books are good company, in sad times and happy times, for

books are people — people who have managed to stay alive by hiding between the covers of a book.”

Neil Gaiman

“Libraries are the thin red line between civilisation and barbarism.”