

My Journey to the Library

The library is one of my favorite destinations in the world. When I arrive at the library, the journey has just begun. It is my to-go place for inspiration, direction, and connection. On the road of life, the library is my compass, backpack, and bridge. It is a special clubhouse where everyone belongs.

The library is my compass. When I walk into a library, I am heading in the right direction. When I first learned to read, I loved sitting cross-legged on the floor of the Lee Memorial Library reading a children's book that Ms. Tara recommended. Sometimes she requested books and videos from other libraries for me. She always knew the perfect book to inspire my dreams and encourage my imagination. It was our family ritual to lie in bed each night, reading and laughing together with Froggy, Arthur, the Berenstain Bears, and other friends I met at the library. As I got older, librarians in our community library and school libraries helped me to research projects and explore new interests. For example, when I developed an interest in nutrition, librarians helped me find the resources to start a club at Northern Highlands called "Healthy and Hungry." We promote nutrition at school and partner with food banks to fight the skyrocketing problem of hunger. Whatever answers I am seeking, librarians are quiet heroes with kind hearts and lightning-fast minds who always help me find the answer. Author and graphic novelist Neil Gaiman said it best. "Google can bring you back 100,000 answers. A librarian can bring you back the right one." Libraries and librarians are a compass pointing us in the right direction.

The library is my backpack. It is jam-packed with my favorite things. The library is so

much more than a free bookstore. When you walk into a library, you find people using a computer, escaping in a novel, doing homework, enjoying storytime, learning a language, searching for a job, preparing for a driving test, discussing a biography, researching health information, reading a newspaper, exploring science, making crafts, listening to a lecture, making college plans, learning about the community, and seeking answers to important questions. I have done all these things at the library and more! In addition, the library is a catalyst to discover new interests. As a child, I attended every craft workshop the library offered! The classes cultivated my creativity and passion for drawing and ceramics. The lessons I learned at the library fueled my interest in pursuing a career in health marketing, using my creativity to help people live healthy lives. The library was also the gateway to fun family excursions. Thanks to the free museum passes, my family visited the Guggenheim Museum and American Museum of Natural History where I discovered a fascination for ancient Egypt. My library card gives me access to a treasure trove of resources, including movies, magazines, music, audiobooks, and a boatload of print and digital resources, such as Ancestry.com which got me jazzed about researching my family's genealogy. There are a multitude of things to do in this special place. Arthur, a character from one of my favorite book series, said: "Having fun isn't hard when you've got a library card." Arthur was right!

The library is a bridge. It connects us to new ideas, new people, and new adventures. It is a refuge from the demands of the world. Many people wear an astronaut helmet like Auggie in *Wonder* or an invisibility cloak like Harry Potter. We hide our true self from the world. In the library, we are accepted for who we are. Librarians are some of the kindest people on the planet. As a child, I carried a lamb blankie everywhere I went. If I left my blankie at the library, the librarians always knew it was mine and called our home before we had discovered it was

missing. Librarians are our biggest cheerleaders, always ready to help and inspire us. But the power of the library is more than that. The library is a calm and quiet place in a noisy world. The library is a unifying place in a divided world. The library is democracy in action, a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can gather to solve their problems and pursue their goals. Everybody in the library is doing something different, but we are all together. The library reminds us that we are a community.

The library is a special clubhouse where everyone belongs. When I was a child, I met kids in craft classes and other events at the Lee Memorial Library who are still my friends today. There is just something special about library people! When you connect with others over books or crafts or other activities, the conversation starts at a deeper level. As I prepare for my journey away from Allendale, I know libraries will be an important part of my future. On college visits, my family and I take time to visit the library on every campus. I know I will spend a lot of time at the college library, researching, studying, working on group projects, and just relaxing in a comfy library chair. Wherever I am in the world, the library will be my home away from home. It is a place where I can be myself and go wherever my creativity and imagination take me. The library is one of my favorite destinations in the world. When I walk into the library, I know a new journey is about to begin.