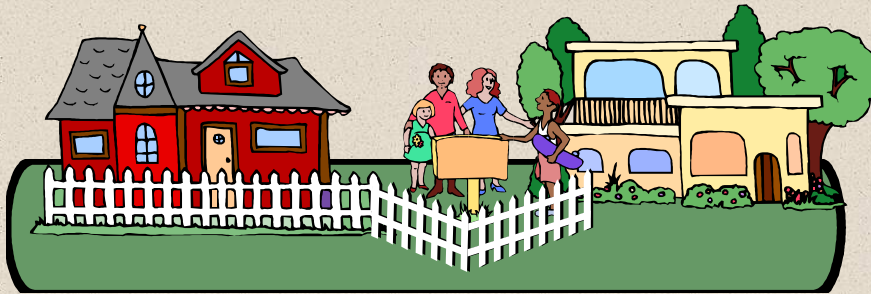


Neighbors and Friends

Helping Address Intellectual Freedom
Challenges in Your Community



I'm going to be talking pretty fast

I don't have handouts

The good news is that you don't really have to remember all of this

My PowerPoint presentation, along with my notes, is up on the FOLIO web page

Who am I and why am I here talking about this?



Who am I and why am I here talking about this?

Obviously I'm a library supporter, like all of you

FOLIO Board member

Like several other Board members, career librarian

Most of my career spent in public libraries

Worked on the collections side, which gave me experience with challenges

I know what it's like to have someone come up and tell you what they think is wrong with the library's collection

It's one thing to have happen when it's your job

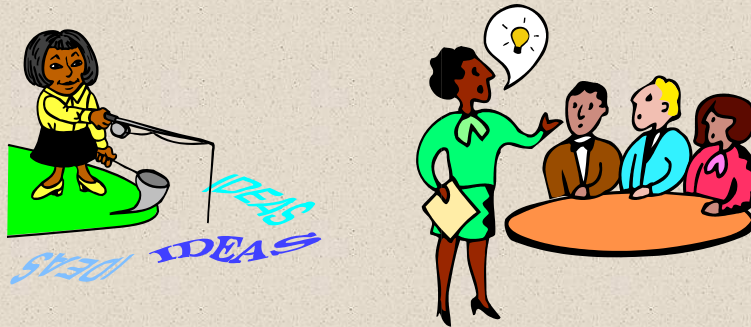
You have had training on how to deal

You kind of expect it

But when it's not your job, it can catch you off guard

I want to give some ideas of how to be prepared and respond

Intellectual freedom is the freedom to
hold, receive, and disseminate ideas
without restriction



Intellectual freedom is the freedom to hold, receive, and disseminate ideas
without restriction

That's it

In libraries, intellectual freedom is the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment

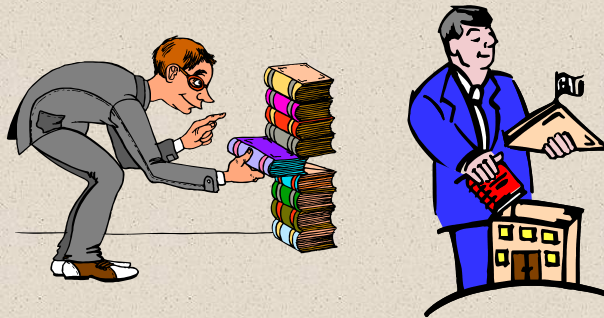


ALA defines as the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment

This little guy and his wagon have made an appearance in every presentation I've given for probably 20 years

I'd miss him if he weren't here

Intellectual freedom is often associated with attempts to prevent libraries from providing access to materials or ideas, or to limit access to materials or ideas



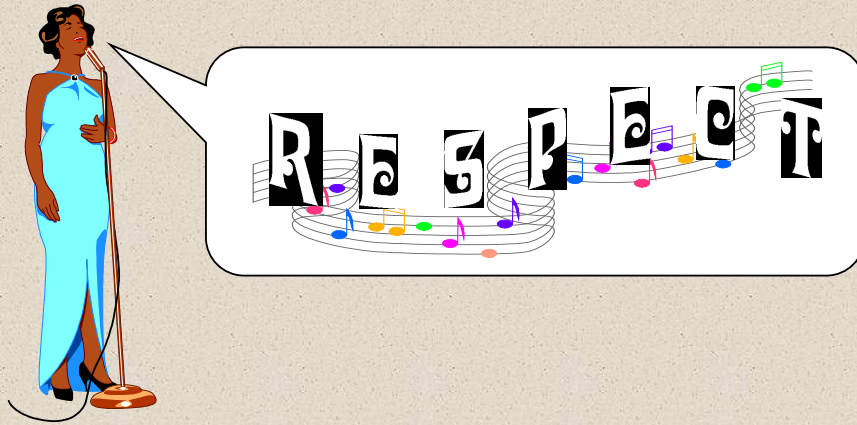
In a library context, ALA defines as the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment

Often associated with censorship or book banning

In the library world, we associate it with attempts to prevent libraries from providing access to certain materials

We hope these guys are putting books into the library, not taking them out

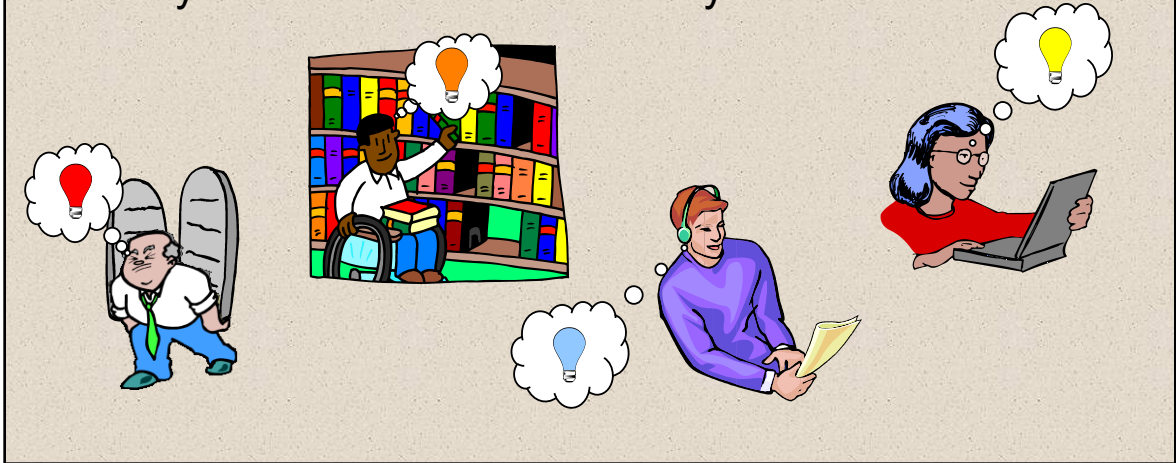
At its core, intellectual freedom is about



At its core, intellectual freedom is about respect

And thank you, Miss Aretha

As library Friends, we respect each person's right to access and absorb whatever ideas they choose in the manner they choose



We respect each person's right to absorb whatever ideas they choose in a reasonable manner

Not sure stone tablets are the best resource, but hey

As library Friends, we don't judge
another person's choices as to what
ideas they absorb, or what ideas
they teach their children



We don't judge another person's choices as to what ideas they absorb, or what
ideas they teach their children

One key to remember is their own children

As library Friends, we respect the fact that
every viewpoint is equally available within
libraries, even if we disagree with it



Especially if we disagree with it

We respect the fact that every viewpoint is equally available within libraries

Even if we disagree

Especially if we disagree

We hold ourselves to the same standards as everybody else

These days, people seem to have an opinion about everything



These days, people seem to have an opinion about everything

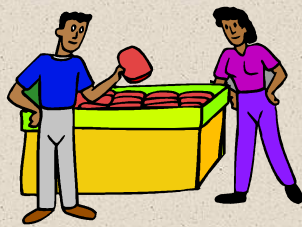
Including everything about libraries

And they want to tell somebody about it

If they approach the library, great

Libraries are prepared to deal with them

They recognize you
They know you are a library supporter



Some people may not choose to approach the library, but to approach a Friends member

Why might someone approach you?

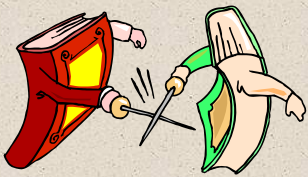
They recognize you

They know you are a library supporter

You're someone they might see at the grocery store, or the post office, or even the library

They may see you as more accessible
than library staff

They might see you as more receptive to
hearing their side



They may see you as more accessible than library staff

They don't have to go to the library to see you

Or they might see you as more receptive to hearing their side

People involved in the same activities as you



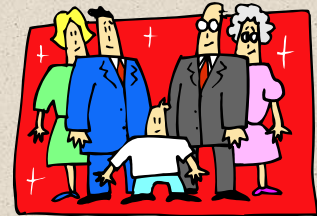
People you know casually



Clubs



Church



Family members

Who might approach you?

People you know casually

People involved in the same activities as you

Church

Clubs

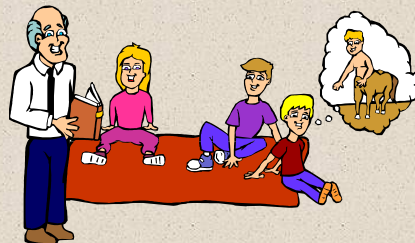
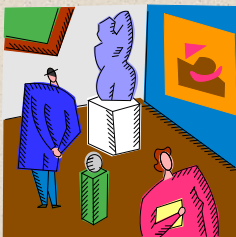
Family members

Things someone might be concerned about in the library

Something in the library collection

Programming that the library is offering

Displays in the library



What might they be concerned about?

Something in the library collection

This is a frequent target

The library may offer materials that present a viewpoint that they object to

Programming that the library is offering

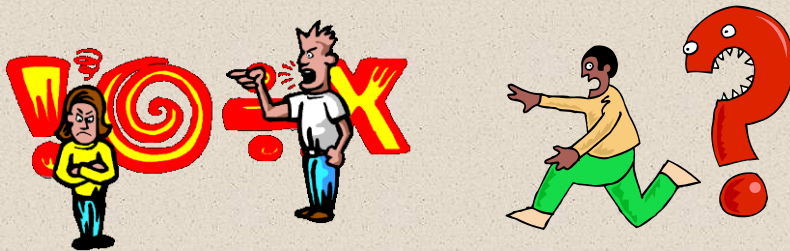
Maybe who's leading a storytime

The topic of a program

Displays in the library

Some people see a display as endorsing a particular view

Remember they are people
They are coming from a place of emotion
Generally fear
Because they are emotional, they are illogical



How to think about people challenging intellectual freedom

Remember they are people

They're not necessarily bullies who want their own way

Mostly they're not trying to be mean

They are coming from a place of emotion

Generally fear

The world can be a scary place

We all have things we don't understand or appreciate

Everybody feels threatened sometimes

Because they are emotional, they are illogical

Appealing to logic or reason won't work

I hate to use the term irrational, but one of the definitions of that term is
"not logical or reasonable"

Meeting them with defensiveness won't work

It only solidifies their determination to protect their position

They frequently care about libraries a lot



They frequently care about libraries a lot

They can and do love libraries

In their minds, they're just trying to make the library better

They see what they're asking as minor

In fairness, they can't imagine that anyone would disagree with them

If for no other reason, again, that they're people

It's not "wrong" to ask questions

Every library user has that right

They deserve to be taken seriously
It can be hard to see them as realistic

*!!@ \$#&!



It can be hard to see them as realistic

Seriously, your 14 year old doesn't think about sex?

Your child needs to use the library to see porn?

Your public schooled child has never heard bad words?

You really believe someone is going to be damned for eternity because they walked past a shelf of books?

When someone expresses concerns to you as a Friend

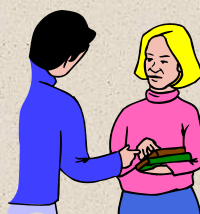
Know your role

Help them feel heard

Share information

Let them know what actions they can take

Know what you can't do



Know your role

Help them feel heard

Share information

Let them know what actions they can take

Know what you can't do

You don't have to do any of these things if you don't want to

You can just direct them to the library

That can be problematic though

People don't like to feel as if they're being brushed off

So this is what you can do

Everyone deserves to be taken seriously
Welcome their concerns



I know I've said this before, but they deserve to be taken seriously

Even though they're wrong

Especially because they're wrong

Welcome their concerns

Thank them for using the library or at least being interested in it

Seriously, there are people in your community who don't even know there is a library in it

Libraries are in more danger from people who don't care about what we do than from ones who use our services

Be respectful
Acknowledge their feelings



Be respectful

- Make eye contact

- Listen carefully

- Don't try to brush them off

- Express that you know this is important to them

- You don't have to agree with someone to be respectful

 - Even if their concerns seem silly, that doesn't make them less real

 - Try to find common ground in that the world can be difficult for anyone to navigate

- It can be as simple as being polite

- Don't take their concerns personally

Acknowledge their feelings

- Tell them you get that they're frustrated

- You understand that they want to protect someone

Accidents happen



Remember that they might have a point

Probably not a good idea to tell them pornography is not actually illegal

Obscenity, which is a different thing, is

For the record, your public library does not knowingly own materials that meet the state's legal definition of obscenity

We don't need that headache

It's possible that the library unknowingly owns materials that are borderline

Accidents happen

Libraries rely on reviews in selecting materials

The reviews don't always tell us everything we need to know

A material may be more graphic than the review led a librarian to believe

Content might be geared toward older users

Surprises happen



So sometimes there might be something on a shelf that really isn't appropriate

It might be shelved for the wrong age group

It might have illustrations nobody knew about

It's an unfortunate surprise

It's not a common occurrence

In my whole career, I could probably count on my fingers the number of times it happened

Once the library is aware, they will deal with it and take appropriate action

The best thing you as a Friend can do is encourage the user to follow the reconsideration process

Share information

Universal library facts

Libraries respect everyone's right to consume whatever material they choose

Libraries respect every parent's right to guide their own children's choices of material to consume



There are certain universal library facts that you can share

Libraries respect everyone's right to consume whatever material they choose

Or not to consume it

We don't judge anyone's choices in that regard

Libraries respect every parent's right to guide their own children's choices of material to consume

With young children, we expect parents to visit the library with their children and help them make choices in line with the parent's values

With older children, we expect parents to have communicated their values to their children to help guide their choices

Reassure them that the values that they teach their children have an impact

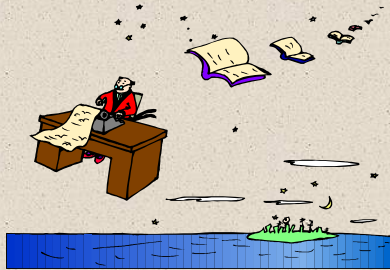
If they've done a good job at that, what a child is exposed to will matter less

Share information

Universal library facts

Libraries are expected to represent the entire community

Libraries have policies to help determine what materials the library offers to its users



Libraries are expected to represent the entire community

- Everyone's tax dollars support the library

- Not everyone in the community has the same values

- There are undoubtedly materials in the library that represent the individual's values

Libraries have policies to help determine what materials the library offers to its users

- As a Friend, it's a good idea to make sure this is true

- The policies should be publicly accessible

- In many if not most cases, the policy is on the library's website

 - Know how to navigate to it

 - Be able to explain that

 - If it's not online, explain how to access it

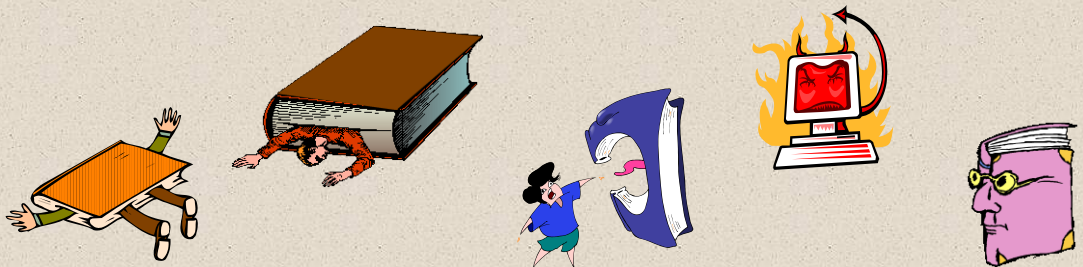
 - Encourage your library administration to make it available online

This is also part of letting them know what actions they can take

Asking for information

Try to find out specifically what the individual objects to and why

What about the [material/issue] concerns them



This one is kind of tricky

You really don't want to get into an argument

Or a huge back and forth

You don't have to

It's perfectly fine to just encourage them to follow established processes

It can be useful to know where they're coming from

Try to find out specifically what the individual objects to and why

This is information you can share with library administration

It can give them context to prepare a response

What about the material concerns you?

If it's about the content, how did you find out about it?

Did you observe the content? All of it?

Asking for information

Try to find out where they learned about the issue



It can help to know where the individual learned about this issue

This is information you can share with library administration

It can give them context to prepare a response

If it relates to something that's recently been on talk radio, or appearing in online sources, it's helpful to know that it's out there

Editorial Comment



My unpopular opinion on the soapbox

As librarians, we're taught that when someone questions a material, to ask if they have consumed the entire thing

Read the whole book, watched the whole video, etc.

It might make a difference for them to have context for whatever they're objecting to

In my recent experience, it's pretty pointless to ask this

They usually haven't consumed the whole thing and have no intention of doing so

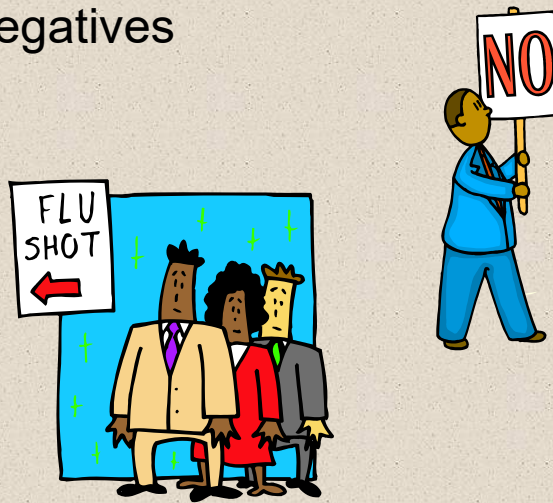
Whatever media they are relying on has told them all they want to know

It doesn't hurt to ask, but I don't think it does any good

You can gently suggest that they review the entire content, but don't be surprised if they refuse

DON'T

Repeat negatives



Don't repeat negatives

All the other person hears is the negative

"The library doesn't have pornography"—all they hear is library pornography

Just like saying "Vaccines don't cause autism"

Use positive phrasing instead

Something like "The library has a lot of materials that meet your needs"

"The library staff will be happy to help you find something that you want"

DON'T

Belittle or make light of their concerns



Don't belittle or make light of their concerns

It's kind of hard sometimes

You know their child has heard cursing, especially if they go to public school

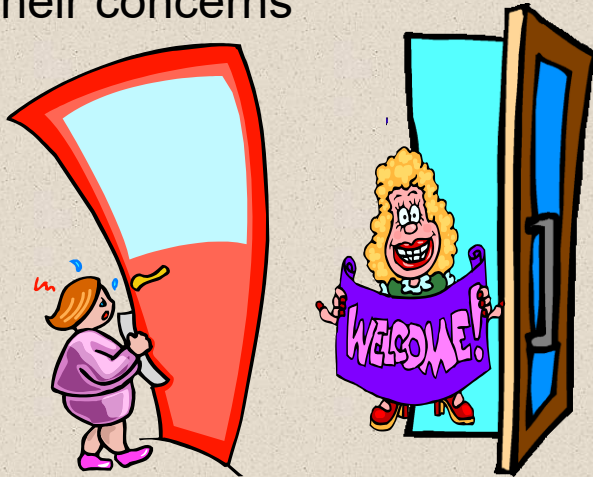
Even though they should know that, they don't

Affirm their right to their own values and to teach those values to their children

Suggest that library staff can help find materials they feel are appropriate

DON'T

Minimize their concerns



Don't minimize their concerns

Yes, very often what they think will happen is unlikely

It's real to them

The library is not doing them a favor by listening

They are doing the library a favor by using its services and caring enough to raise concerns

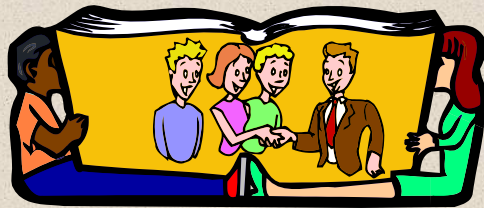
What can the concerned person do?

Submit a reconsideration request

Explain as much as you can how the process works

Reiterate that it will be taken seriously

Become a Friends member



Of course, they can submit a reconsideration request

Know how the process works in your library

It usually begins with a reconsideration form

Know where to get the form

Know what to do with it when completed

Know if the library has a timeline for responses

All this is information that you can and should share

Reiterate that it will be taken seriously

Becoming a Friends member might seem counterintuitive

It might expose them to see how seriously the library takes its role

Maybe even open their eyes to some different ideas

Know what you can't do

Change their minds

Solve their issue



Change their minds

First of all, you can't

You're talking to the hand, so to speak, or to someone who's covering their ears

It goes back to the fact that this is an emotional issue, not a logical one

The more you try to push logic, the more they will push back

It won't help defuse the situation

The bottom line is they want something **DONE**

Learn about how to respond to irrational people

Solve their issue

Remind them that you are a community member just like them

You can't force the library to take an action

As a Friend, you don't control library policy

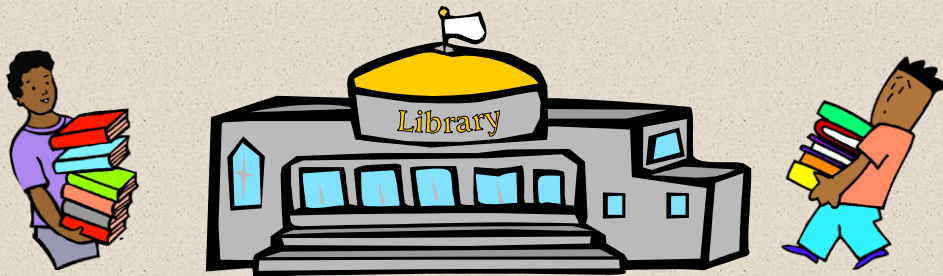
Encourage them to take their concerns to library administration

Again, let them know that the library wants to hear from them

Know what you can't do

Speak for the library

Carry their concerns to the library



Speak for the library

- Don't make promises you can't keep

- You can promise that every concern will be taken seriously

- Not that anything specific will happen

Carry their concerns to the library

- Only they can share their concerns accurately

- It's okay to tell them that you want to avoid confusion

- Communication morphs the more people it goes through

- To keep things clear, they should communicate directly

Support your library through challenges

Educate yourself

Know how your library enriches the community

Show your support



Educate yourself

- Know what intellectual freedom is

- Be able to share that knowledge

- Be aware of current events and challenges to libraries

- FOLIO and OLA are good resources

Have positive examples of how the library helps the community

- Early literacy initiatives

- Donations to local charities

If your library is facing challenges

- Write letters to the editor

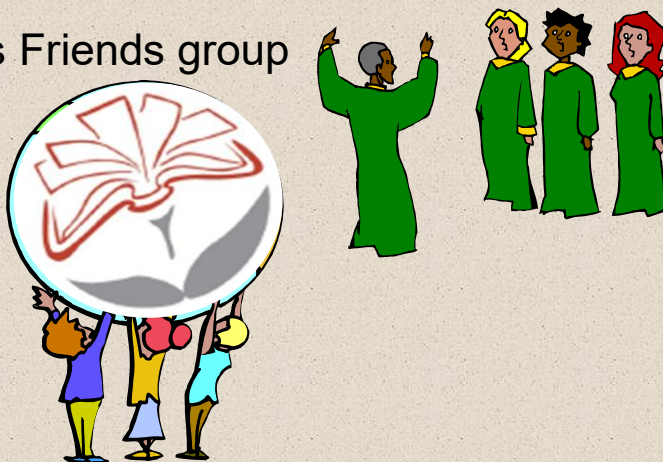
- Attend Board meetings

- Be vocal about your support

Support your library through challenges

Join your library's Friends group

Join FOLIO



This is where I'm preaching to the choir, but belong to your local Friends group

Keep up your membership

Volunteer for events

Join FOLIO

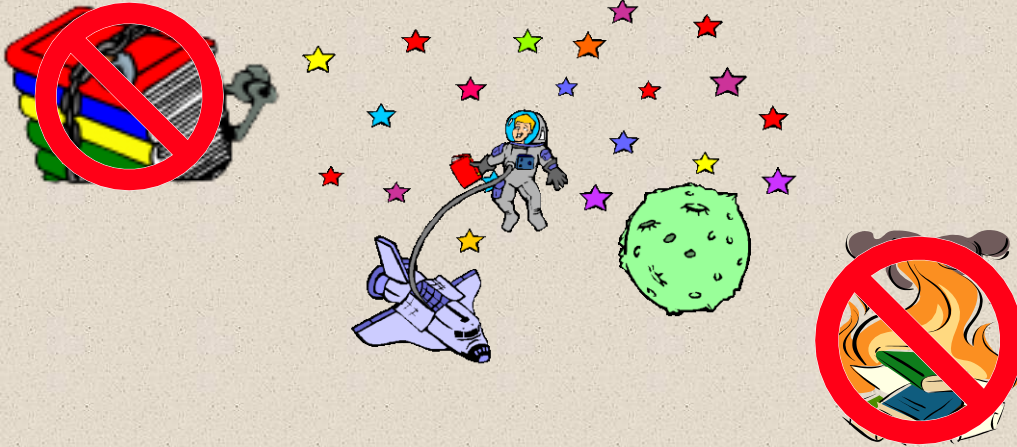
It's cheap

You already know we support local Friends groups

You can get information about what's going on in the library world

Maybe even become a Board member!

Libraries and intellectual freedom are for
all of us



A Few Useful Resources

[challenges to materials and programs the role of friends of the library.pdf](#)

[Seven Ways to Respond to Claims that are made to Justify Book Bans - counter-force](#)

[Maryland Today | 5 Tips for Responding to Book Challenges](#)

[How to Deal With Irrational People - The Overwhelmed Brain](#)

[Managing Conversations with Irrational People - Relationships - eNotAlone](#)

[Intellectual Freedom Tools - Oklahoma Library Association](#)

[Intellectual Freedom Resources for Trustees, Friends, & Foundations | United for Libraries](#)

Thank You
Questions??





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