# THE DAY THE LIBRARIANS DISAPPEARED
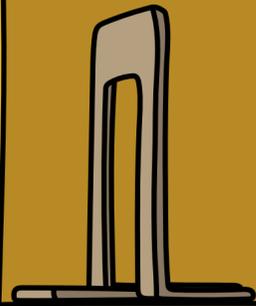
Designed, Written & Illustrated by

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WAKE UP CALL

It started like any other day.

I woke up, went to the school where I worked, and settled in as the snow swirled outside.

My mind turned over the many things to do that day. I had no idea how many more were just up ahead.

You see, this was the day that all the librarians disappeared.

I wasn't the first to figure it out. I didn't even notice at first. I rarely had use for the library and often wondered what the librarians did there all day besides keeping students quiet and charging late fees for overdue books. I figured that it was boring and they never had what students were looking for. In fact, as I walked by the space, I wondered why we even needed school libraries? Students don't read anymore unless it's on social media and all the information we need is found online anyway. And can't they just use the public library?

the way things are now

new ideas

HISTORY by the victors

a different side of the story by people who were also there

this is the way we do things here

the way things could be

pull yourself up by your bootstraps

"a truly great library contains something to offend everyone."
—Jo Godwin

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A few minutes later I overheard a phone call in the office. The secretary hung up the phone. Apparently, the librarians, and all the books, were missing in several other schools around the city as well. The principal dismissed the news, in jest, as a solution to the impossible budget he was working on, and suggested that with one less Masters degree to pay for, perhaps he could afford more mental health and social workers.

"Couldn't we just get a literacy teacher? Maybe this is a blessing in disguise! We could use the space too, since the bond didn't pass. Besides, the English teachers do most of the reading and writing stuff anyway, and they have classroom books."

A gym teacher leaving the office chimed in, "I wonder if anyone will even notice? It's always so quiet in there! I wish I could work in there all day!" As a guilty snicker rolled through the room, the secretary chided them that this was no joke. Her email was filling up with other school secretaries reporting the same thing. "I think you should go check it out," she said.

libraries don't have an agenda
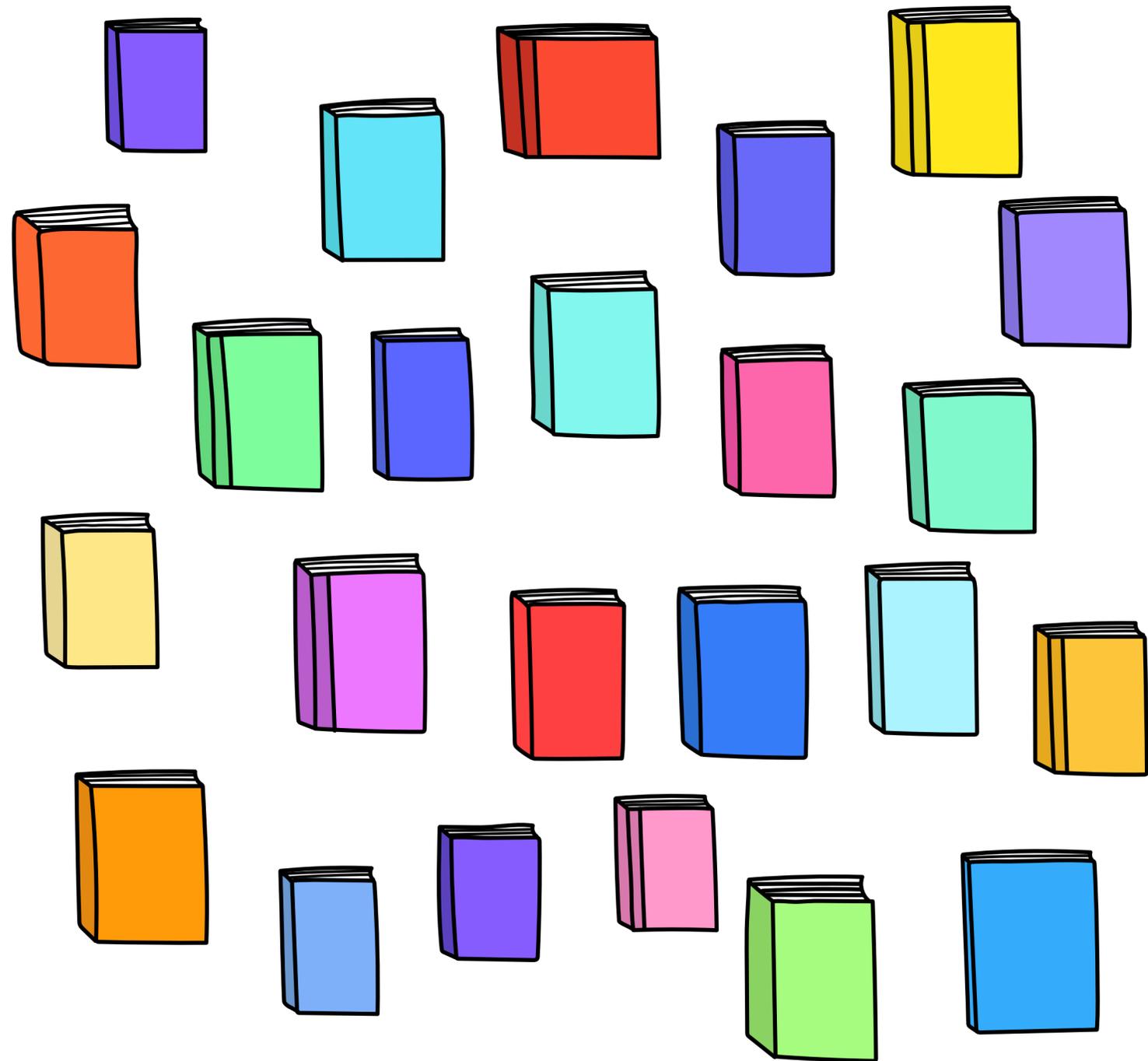
you choose where you want to go

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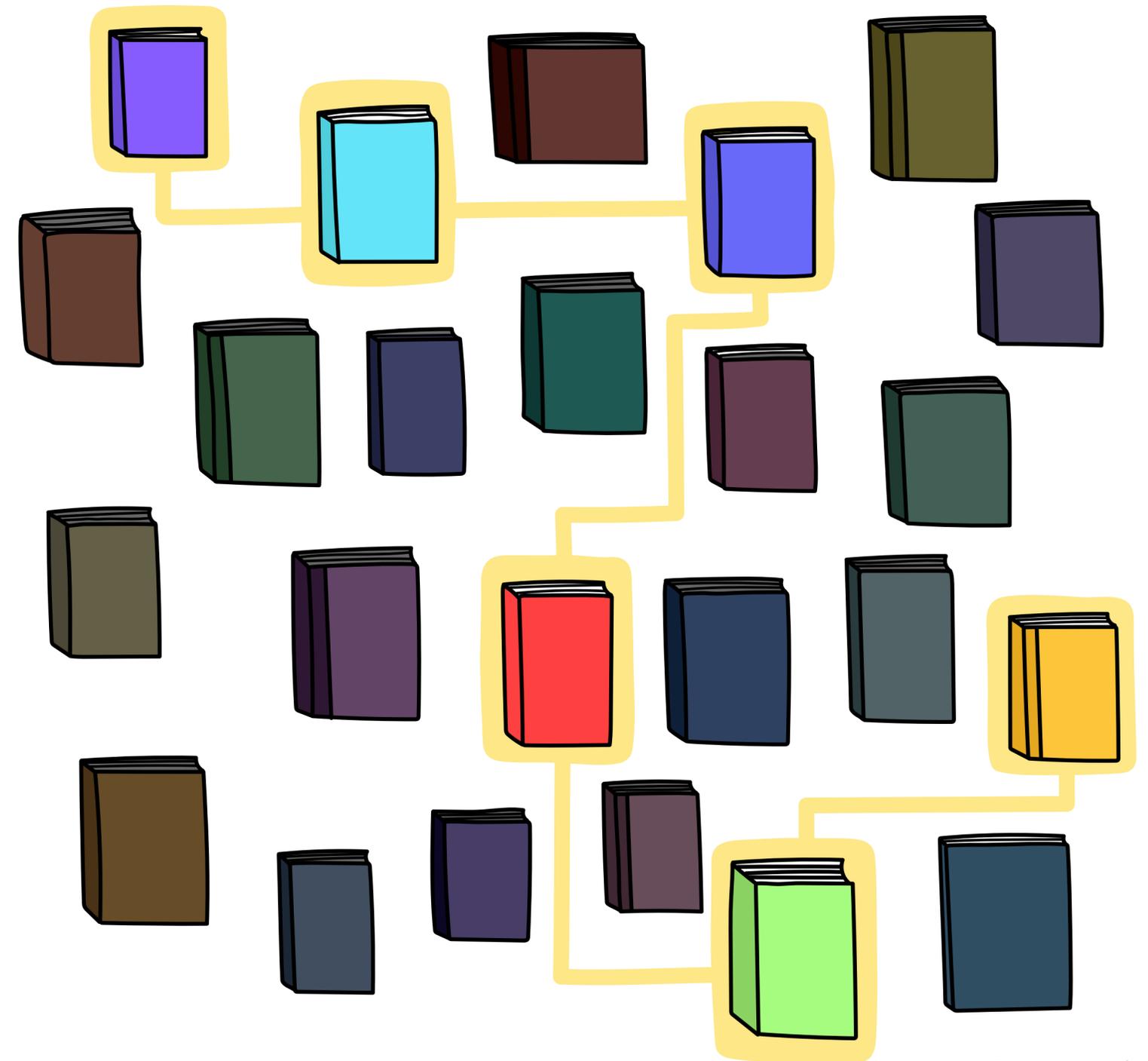
EMPTY

Out of curiosity, I followed the others to see for myself. Sure enough, the library was completely empty. Lights off. Books gone. Empty. As the principal quickly realized this wasn't fiction, he dashed back toward the office. I noticed a huddle of teachers forming down the hall; apparently the rumor had already started to spread.

"It will be fine," said one teacher. "We can distribute books ourselves, and teaching research and reading is the job of teachers anyway, not people paid to shelve books."

Another spoke up, "Yeah, it must be nice to have a planning period all day. They're always reading or poking around on the computer while the rest of us are busy with a full load of classes all day. But they do make good coffee."

They laughed in agreement.

Before the gossip got out of hand, another teacher spoke up.

"I don't know you guys. I collaborate every year on several projects with our librarian, and I've seen them with multiple classes throughout any given day. I've seen them dressed up in costumes teaching lessons, and they've always got kids in there at lunchtime and before school."

Humbled, the group suggested they go see if what they were hearing was true. They headed toward the library where several kids were trying to get in the door to their favorite spot in the morning.

your librarian

knows
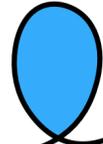
how

to

find

the good stuff

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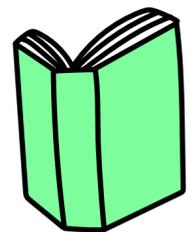
I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I mean, yes, I knew all the stereotypes and typical complaints, but if it was true that school libraries and their librarians were gone, what would it mean? And why were they gone in the first place? I had to get to the bottom of this. As I turned to head back to my computer to do some digging, I was stopped by a student. "Can you help me with my homework? I came in early to print something but I couldn't get into the library. We don't have a printer at home."

"Sure," I said. "Let's find you somewhere to print."

Just then, the first bell rang and students and teachers were all abuzz as they made their way into classrooms. I promised my tag-along I would print her document if she could share it with me digitally.

"You can't be late, hurry!" I urged.

"But I don't know your name and you don't know mine," she said. "How will you find me? Thanks anyway, I'll figure it out," she said as she hurried off to class.

I then realized she was right. I only knew a fraction of the kids in this school. **The librarian knew everybody**. And since most students were here for several years, **the library was a place where many kids felt they belonged**. "It is not going to be good when the students find out," I thought to myself.

And sure enough, it wasn't.

SURROUNDED by POSSiBility

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TIME WILL TELL

Weeks went by and I tried to help as much as I could. First, I took an inventory of all the books in the classrooms throughout the school and made a list of what we had left. It was tedious, but there had to be a way for teachers to share resources and point students to books they might like to read. Second, I tried to get our online databases back, and the dozens and dozens of subscriptions to electronic books, periodicals, adaptive technologies, etc. I had no idea we had so many electronic resources! I thought libraries were all just paper books and outdated encyclopedias. It wasn't but a few days of trying to make sense of it all before I realized this project was going to have to wait for another day.

For now, the students needed my attention.

They needed help with their laptops, they needed reading and research suggestions, and they wanted to talk about things with each other and with me. I finally convinced the administration to at least open the library space so students could study, read, and focus. But guess who got to supervise? Me and my big mouth. This was not sustainable. I needed help.
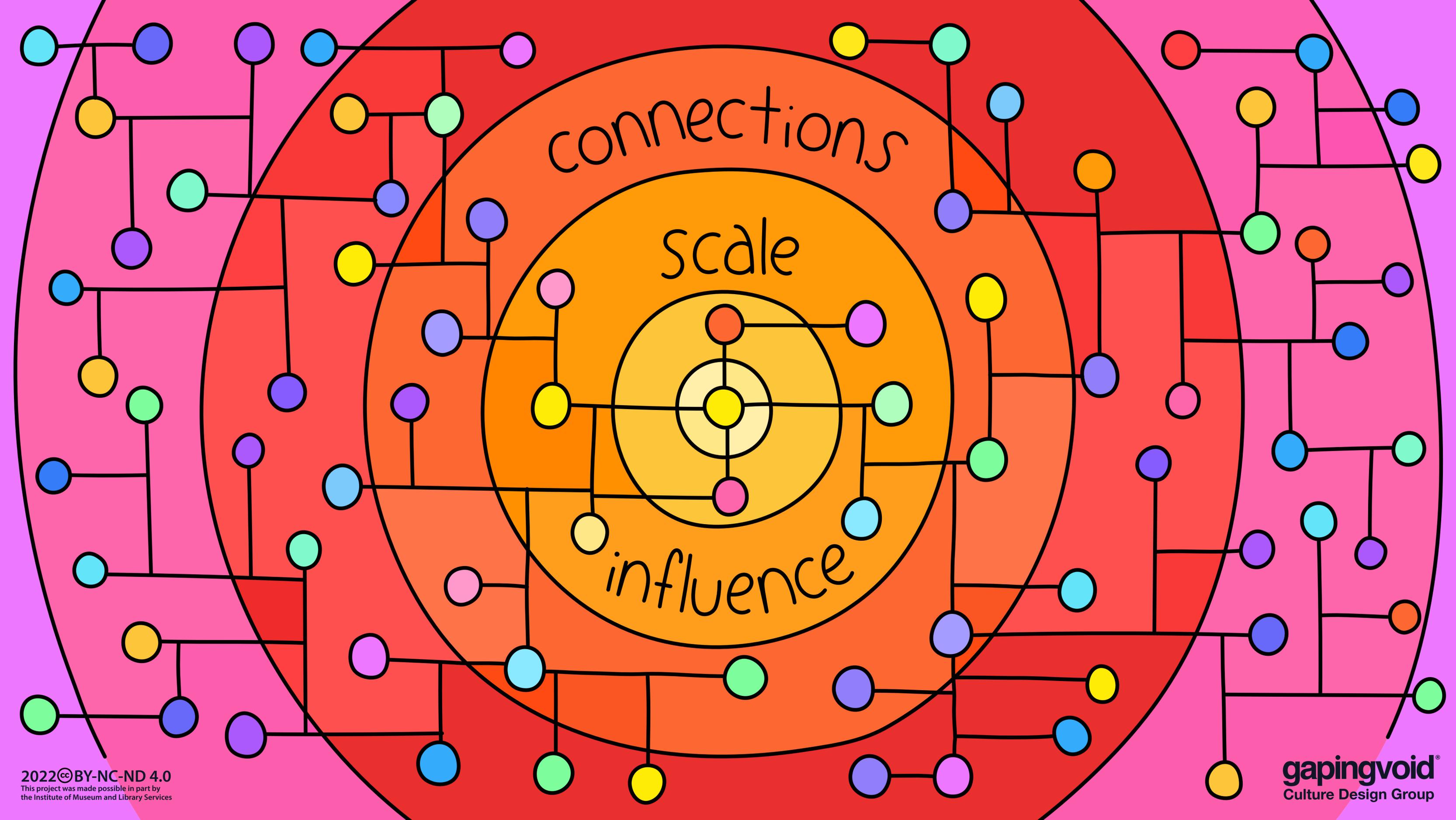
connections

scale

influence

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I put out an invitation to any student, faculty, administration, parent and community volunteers who wanted to help carry the load while we figured out what happened to the librarians. We met in the vacant space that by now was a mix of lost and found items, books lying around on the ground and empty lunch trays. Clearly **the students loved being here**, but it needed some TLC. We divided up the list we had brainstormed and decided to reconvene in two weeks.

The faculty team took on developing a curriculum to teach digital citizenship. They figured it wouldn't be that hard to fit in, but as they soon discovered, teaching students how to be safe, responsible, discerning and shrewd in their use of online media, was going to take more time than they had to work around their own curriculum. Additionally the Counselor and School Resource Officer had their hands full with social-emotional problems spilling over from irresponsible use of technology.

information without organization is just a mess

libraries make information easy to find

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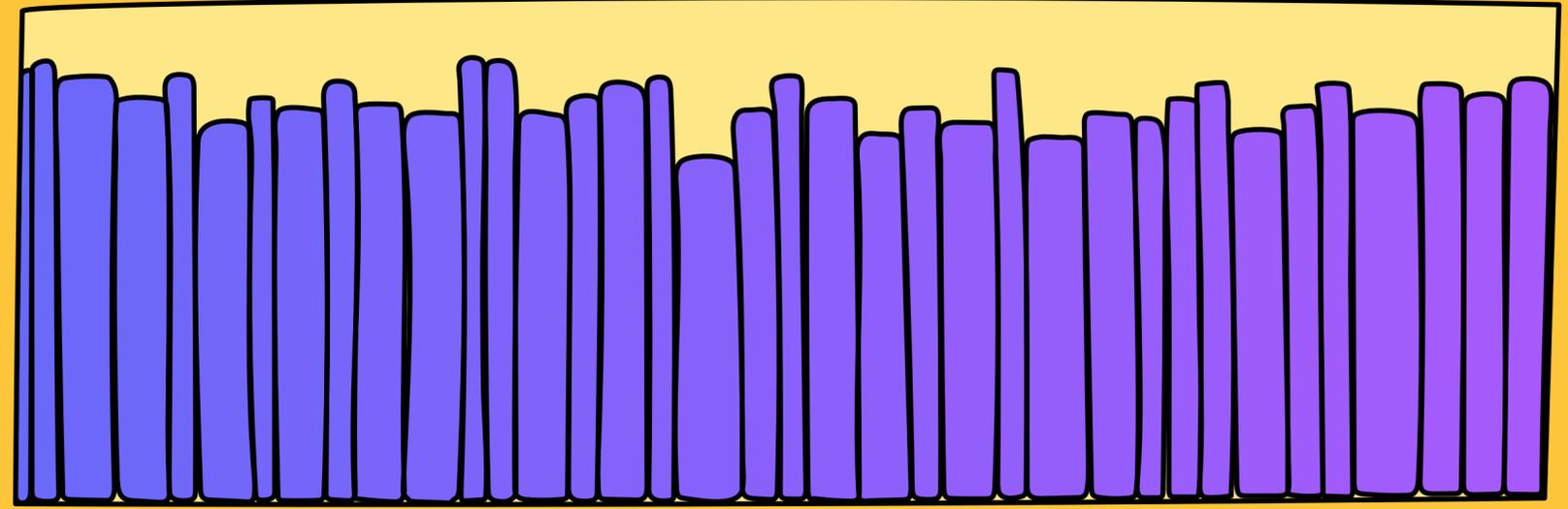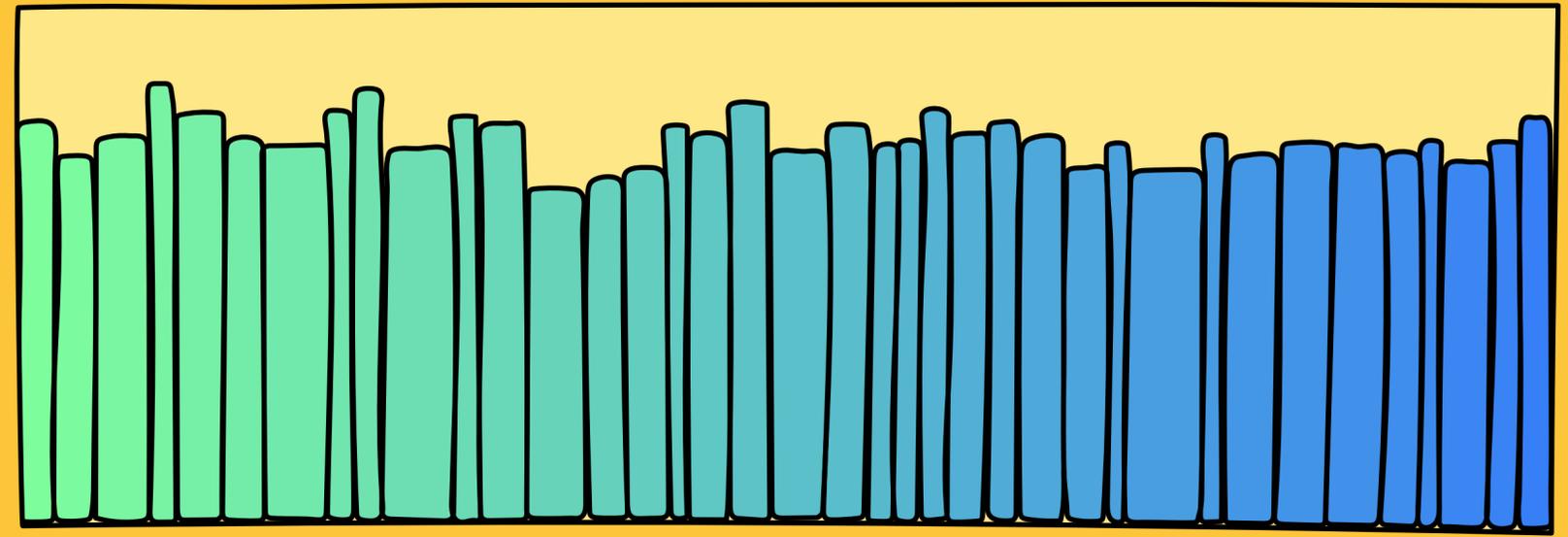
The administration and front office volunteered to provide coverage in the library space before school and at lunch. It seemed that many students relied on this space, at the heart of the school, as a **welcome refuge and safe community** to study, read, relax and collaborate with peers. For some, there was no other place to find themselves in the day. Over the course of the two weeks of extra supervision, the office staff and administrators got worn out, but also **saw how important it was for each student to be known, truly known, by the adults in their lives**. They committed to looking for funding to start replacing some of the materials and staff the library supervision for the long haul.

A few community members, concerned that the missing library would lead to lower literacy rates, and thus a wider negative community perception, volunteered to staff the library after school. They started an after-school program **to support struggling learners, and some clubs based on student interests**. Some folks even showed up to offer homework help during the school day. While a noble gesture, by the end of the first week, half of the community members were so exhausted that they stopped coming, and by the second week only one person was left standing. I'm pretty sure it was because all the students had stopped coming as well.
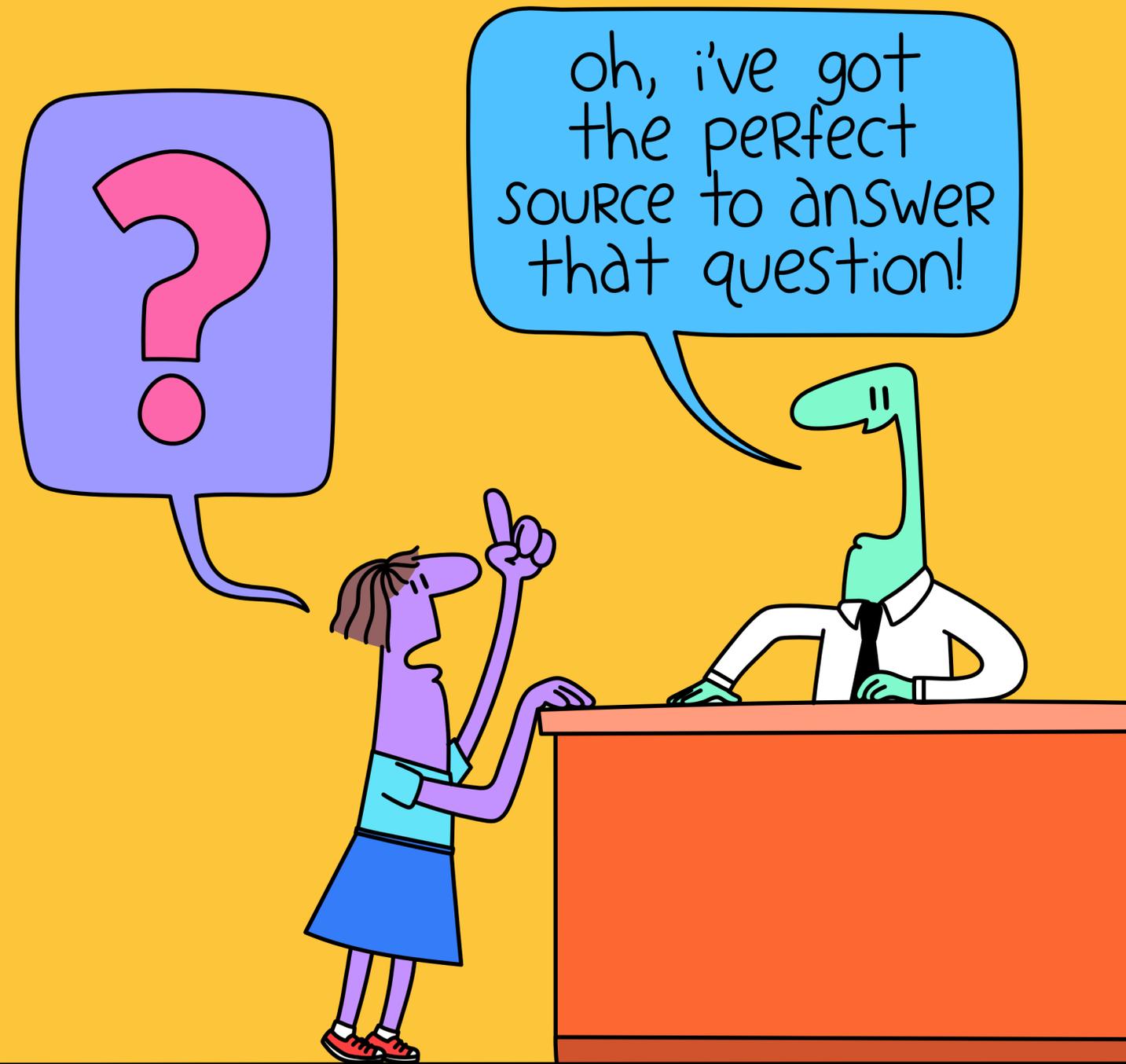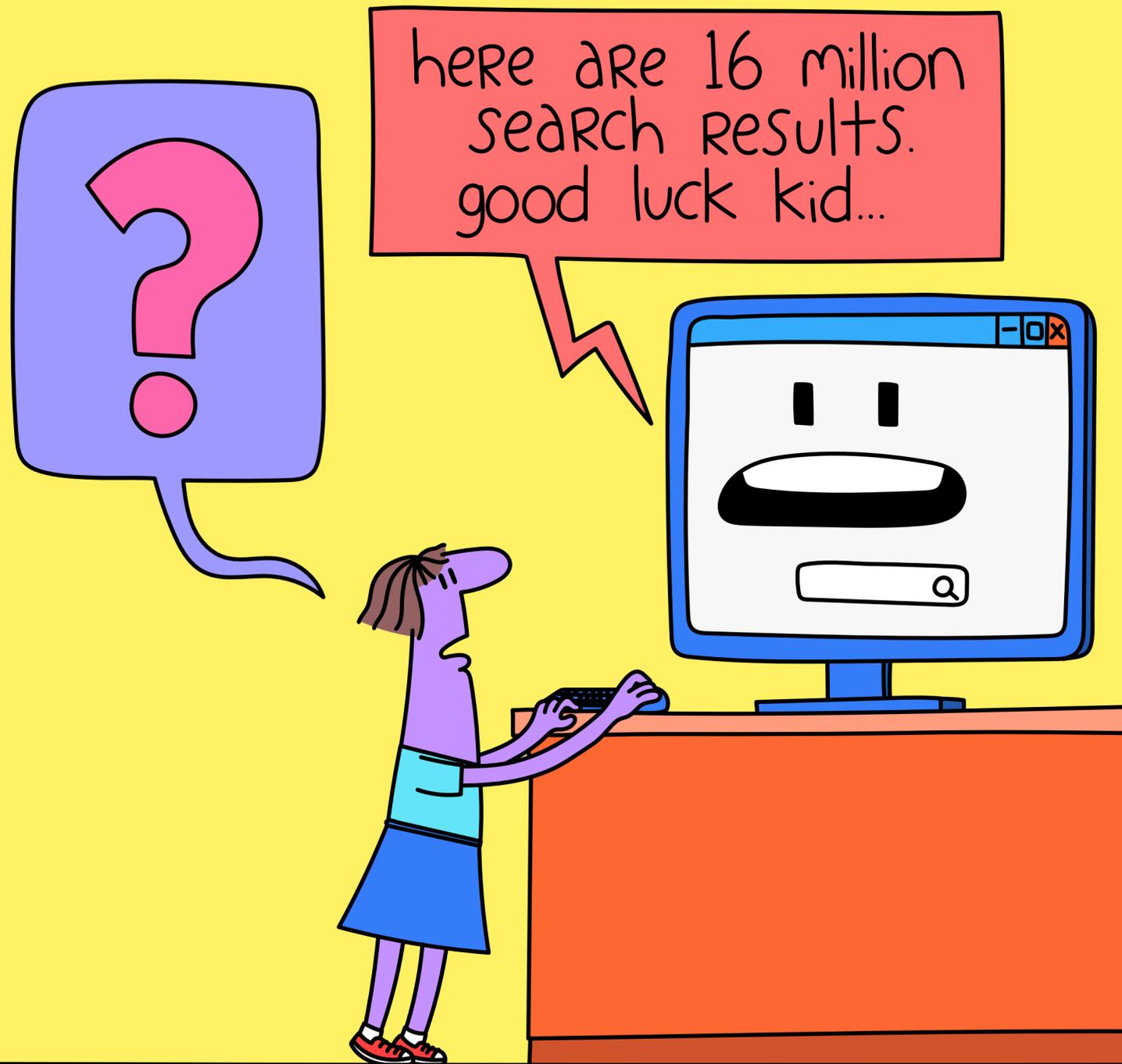
a librarian can do the internet's job better than the internet can do the librarian's job

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The student volunteers were tasked with bringing back some life to the walls and shelves in the library. They missed seeing all the cool artwork and class projects that used to adorn the walls and tables. Also, they were tasked with creating a list of credible websites from which students could get information. This was originally my project of course, but I was busy writing grants to buy some books and technology. Many students, as it turns out, cannot buy their own books or have the use of technology at home. Let's just say that while the library started to come to life by the end of the two weeks, student research quality tanked. Evidence was being presented from outlandish sources, and search engines became the cited source of choice. Any website was as credible as the next. Gone were the days of thoughtful reading and writing.

Last but certainly not least, the parents were a great help… at first. Concerned that librarians have too much say and sway over community values, they were all too happy to volunteer to pick the titles that would replenish the shelves. Further, there was great concern among the larger parent community that student reading interests were waning without new, personalized suggestions they often received from the former librarian. They began suggesting fiction titles that they thought their own children would appreciate, only to find that there was large disagreement about what was appropriate and interesting for all readers. After two weeks they had only agreed on a few titles and by and large they were for younger students. It was interesting that everyone was more concerned with what books were sitting on the shelf than **helping students learn to think and reason and discern what to do** when they got their hands on them.

librarians help teach students how to recognize credible sources

i found this on a trusted scholarly article database!

i saw this on a website, who got it from a blog, who heard it from this guy who says he's official...

you can trust me, i am in the non-fiction section! nobody cares about footnotes these days!

don't worry, i've got footnotes, so you can cross reference!

i've been peer reviewed, and others were able to replicate my findings!

believe me! oh, you want proof!? you can't handle the proof!

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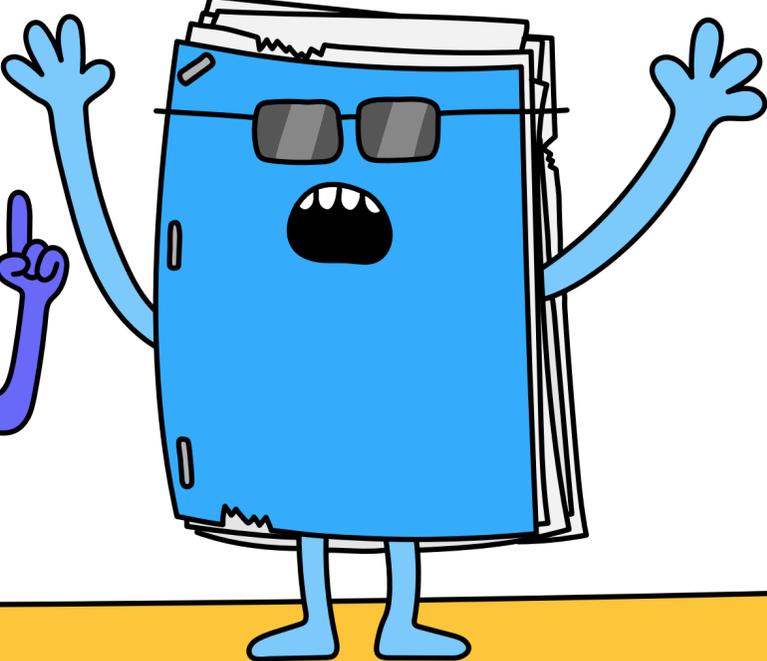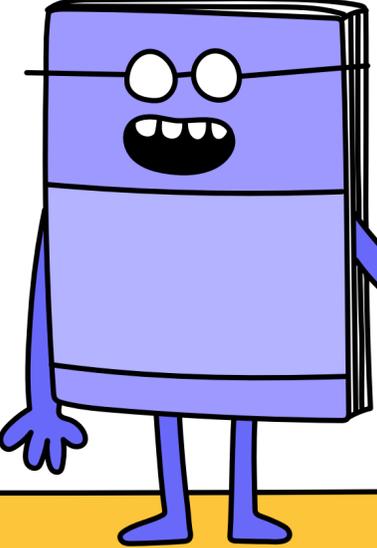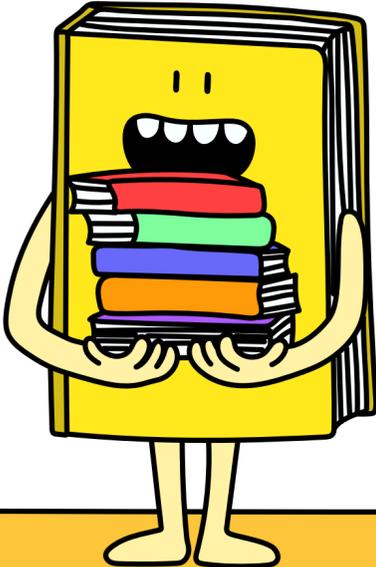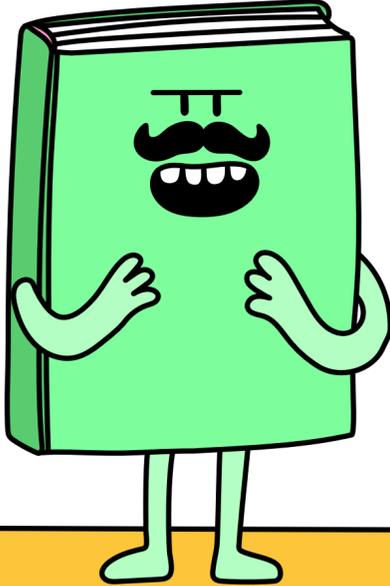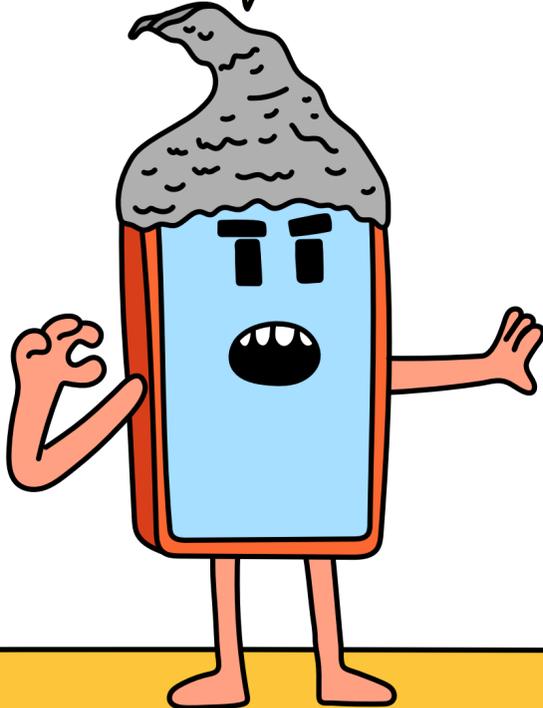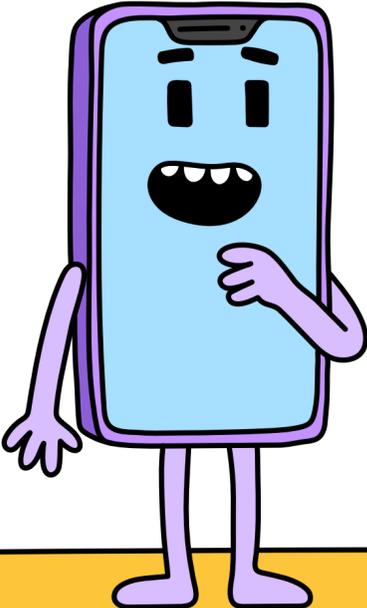
WE NEED A LIBRARIAN

After the two weeks were up, we came together to figure out where to go from here. The parents brought boxes of books they had purchased themselves and set them out on the table. This, combined with some donations from mini-libraries all around town, and the few agreed-upon titles we purchased with the $278 I fundraised, was a meager offering. I thanked everyone for their support and efforts, but we all agreed that this too, was not enough. **There was more to a library than we thought.**

With the last few hours on that Friday afternoon, we brainstormed all the things we thought we would need in a person in order to bring back the school library…

in our world

everyone belongs

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LIBRARIAN, THE LIST

A Community Champion of this place.

Someone who can create a place that is a hub of community to welcome and connect with each person who comes around

Someone who fosters a space for discovery…even if it's alive and buzzing with focused energy

A Consultant and Connector

Someone who partners with and empowers parents to navigate the throes of raising children in a digital age

Someone who talks through ideas and brings them new energy and life

Someone who could provide equity and access for all, especially those who have less to start with

An Advocate and Guide

Someone who can be a dialogue partner with strong readers

Someone to ask questions and listen

Someone who gives students ownership, leadership and an open door

Someone who recognizes talents and fans the flame

Someone who helps disorganized, disinterested kids become students and lifelong learners

Someone who will write a letter of recommendation

Someone who reaches underserved families through targeted support for their children

Someone who highlights positive press about the school and community

Someone who helps students fill out college applications and scholarships, for the first time, or the tenth

Someone who finds out what will make a kid read, write and research, long after they are a student

OUR
knowledge

iS
ShaReD

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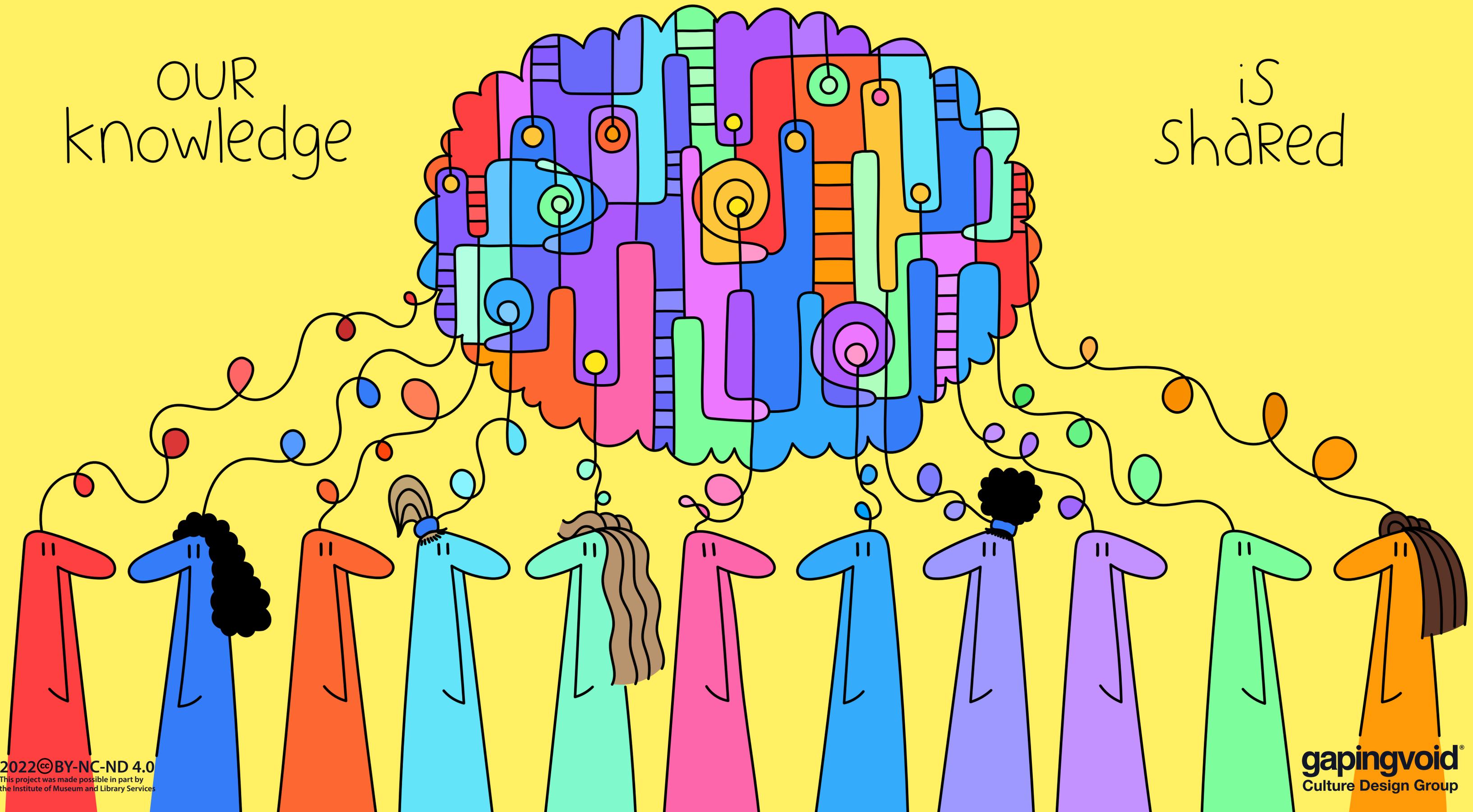
A Digital Specialist

Someone who can make the sharing and discernment of information efficient and effective

Someone who models and integrates the application of new technologies for learning

Someone who teaches students to search and filter information that is relevant to their purpose and audience

A Master Teacher and Expert

Someone who, as a teaching partner, connects colleagues to new resources, technologies and each other

Someone who saves teachers time by finding and sharing resources

Someone who builds up teachers and advocates for them

Someone who creates exciting learning experiences

Someone who prepares students for college level writing and research

Someone who helps students learn to see all sides of an issue

A Steward & Curator of information and resources

Someone who can guard, protect, share and curate the resources and technologies that hold our collective information and literature

Someone who can prevent homogenization of reading materials, expanding depth of thought

Someone who can take a room full of books and make it more than…a room full of books

Someone who finds all kinds of resources and answers to all kinds of questions

Someone who can point to what's available, a filter for what is important/ accurate, and an advocate for reaching quality conclusions (research)

Someone who can help students find, access and evaluate information for college, career and life

Someone who provides supplies they are able to easily access and use

Someone who provides books with relatable characters

Someone who curates the best resources so there isn't a choice overload

Someone who can find an audiobook to accompany print for a struggling reader

there's more to librarians than just books.

teacher
guide
advocate
expert
consultant
detective
curator
connector
specialist
mentor
champion

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There was probably a lot more, but we decided we had better start looking for someone who could take this on before it looked even more impossible to find them. After all we had been through, just in two weeks, it wasn't hard to convince the school leaders to protect the funding necessary for our school libraries to thrive. It wasn't until they were gone, that we truly understood everything the librarians brought to our school.
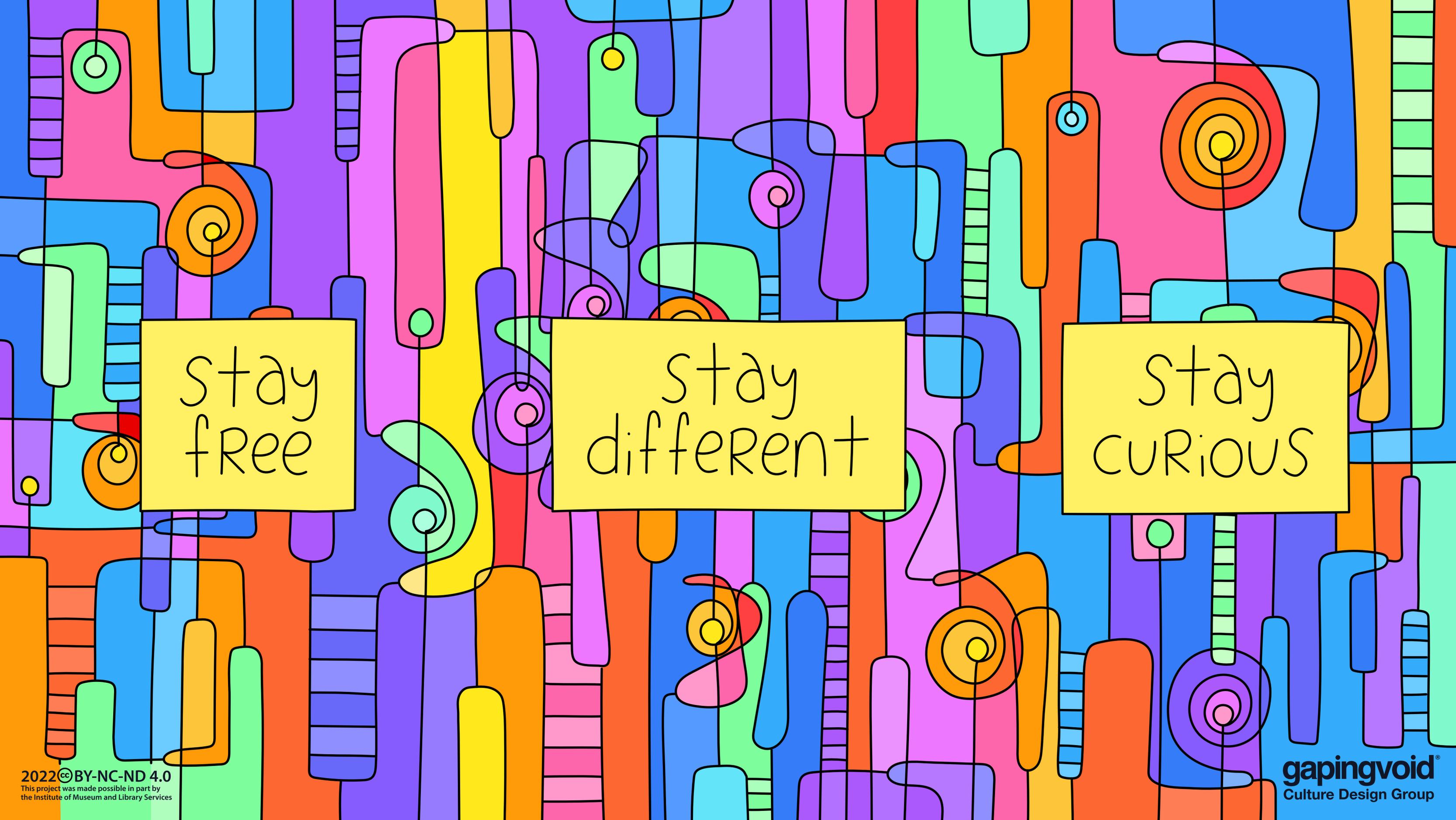
stay free

stay different

stay curious

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THE END

It's been years now since that time of uncertainty. The librarians never returned. There was a lot of soul searching and scrambling. We looked and looked for someone special to take over our library, but **those with the unique skills and temperament, knowledge and passion, were hard to find**. Things became so dire that I volunteered for the sake of our students. There was no way I could live up to all of it, but I just took one day at a time, adjusting, learning and doing what was right for kids each day. I had to reinvent myself, as the profession, technology, needs and interests of students changed as well.

One thing never changed, though. The need to know and grow.

We've lost our libraries before. I'm committed to making sure it never happens again.

- Ms. Alexandria
Librarian

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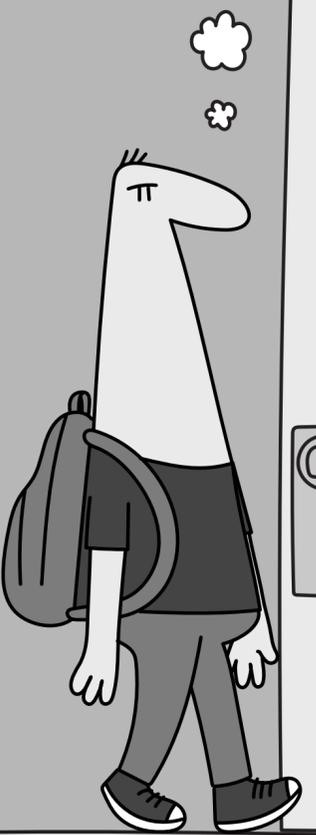
Libraries.Today

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