

# Quote Archive

*The Chicago Public Library Foundation is frequently asked to share its collection of quotes about libraries, books and knowledge. This document includes:*

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## Harold Washington Library Center Quotes

These quotes decorate the walls—and inspire visitors—at the Harold Washington Library Center.

### First floor

“The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man.”—T.S. Elliot

“Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.”—Henry David Thoreau

“Let us welcome controversial books and controversial authors.”—John F. Kennedy

“Books are carriers of civilization.”—Barbara Tuchman

“Outside of a dog, a book is man’s best friend; inside of a dog, it’s too dark to read.” —Groucho Marx

“Books are meat and medicine  
And flame and flight and flower  
Steel, stitch, cloud and clout  
And drumbeats on the air.”—Gwendolyn Brooks

“Once you learn to read you will be forever free.”—Frederick Douglass

“I am always reading or thinking about reading.”—Joyce Carol Oates

“A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessities of life.”—Henry Ward Beecher

“I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library.”—Jorge Luis Borges

“Books are funny little portable pieces of thought.”—Susan Sontag

## **Second floor**

“Writing is the best of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time.”—Carl Sagan

“Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.”—Emilie Buchwald

## **Third floor**

“The peace of great books be for you,  
Stains of pressed clover leave on pages  
Bleach of the light  
of years held on leather.”—Carl Sandburg

“What journeys of mind and spirit are there for the taking with a library card.”—David McCullough

“Knowledge is love and light and vision.”—Helen Keller

“Getting my library card was like citizenship; it was like American citizenship.”—Oprah Winfrey

“Libraries keep the records on behalf of all humanity, the unique and the absurd, the wise and the fragments of stupidity.”—Vartan Gregorian

## **Fifth floor**

“All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books.”—Thomas Carlyle

## **Sixth floor**

“Knowledge is of two kinds: we know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.”—Samuel Johnson

## **Seventh floor**

“The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them.”— Mark Twain

## **Eighth Floor**

“An art book is a museum without walls.”— Andre Malreaux

## **Ninth floor**

“I’ve got good teachers who are going to help me acquire wisdom. My instructors are the people of the city of Chicago. Every man, woman and child in this city has something to teach me about how to be a good mayor.”—Harold Washington

“‘Chicago works together’ must mean exactly what it says. This city doesn’t work unless it works for everyone.”—Harold Washington

“Reading was an excursion that took me places an urban kid would never see...I can’t imagine life without it.”—Harold Washington

“Education is not a routine activity which is divorced from national defense. It is, in the most fundamental and important sense, the first line of national defense.”—Harold Washington

“Throughout Chicago history, when we have faced such crises, we have summoned our resources, and developed partnerships. We have reawakened the power to redirect our priorities. Now once again we are called to the challenge. We must apply the lessons of the past to the challenges of today.”—Harold Washington

“When this evening is only a half forgotten paragraph in a library volume on a dusty shelf, you will remain the living inspiration for generations to come.”—Harold Washington

## **Quotes About Librarians**

“If past history was all there was to the game, the richest people would be librarians.”—Warren Buffet

“I’m of a fearsome mind to throw my arms around every living librarian who crosses my path, on behalf of the souls they never knew they saved.”  
—Barbara Kingsolver, novelist

“It’s funny that we think of libraries as quiet demure places where we are shushed by dusty, bun-balancing, bespectacled women. The truth is libraries are raucous clubhouses for free speech, controversy and community. Librarians have stood up to the Patriot Act, sat down with noisy toddlers and reached out to illiterate adults. Libraries can never be shushed.”—Comedian and author Paula Poundstone, national spokesperson for Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations

“As a general rule, librarians are a kick in the pants socially, often full of good humor, progressive and naturally well read. They tend to be generalists who know so much about so many things that they are quite the opposite of the boring old poops they have been made out to be. Most of them are full of life, some even full of the devil.” —Bill Hall, editorial page editor, *Lewiston (Idaho) Tribune*, September 9, 2001

“Libraries and librarians have definitely changed my life—and the lives of countless other Americans...they deserve the support and patronage of every single one of us who values education.”—Former First Lady Barbara Bush

“School libraries help teachers teach and children learn. Children and teachers need library resources—especially books—and the expertise of a librarian to succeed. Books, information technology and school librarians who are part of the schools’ professional team are basic ingredients for student achievement.”—Former First Lady Laura Bush

“Librarians have always been among the most thoughtful and helpful people. They are teachers without a classroom. No libraries, no progress.” —Willard Scott, NBC TV weatherman

“Librarians are at the heart of opposition to foolish, dangerous, misguided attempts at censoring human expression in our free country. I thank God for their efforts.”—Clyde Edgerton, author

“What can I say? Librarians rule!”—Regis Philbin

“Librarians are very special people. They are the caregivers of the world of the mind, the nurturers of dreams and the defenders of truth. Perhaps no other profession is so marked by the singular generosity of its practitioners.”—*Denver Post* editorial, March 25, 2000

“When you absolutely positively have to know, ask a librarian.”—American Library Association

“In early days, I tried not to give librarians any trouble, which was where I made my primary mistake. Librarians like to be given trouble; they exist for it, they are geared to it. For the location of a mislaid volume, an uncatalogued item, your good librarian has a ferret’s nose. Give her a scent and she jumps the leash, her eye bright with battle.”—Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Adventures of a Biographer*, 1959

“Libraries are the mind and soul of their communities, and librarians are the mind and soul of the library.”—American Library Association

“Today’s librarian is a well-trained, technology-savvy, information expert who can enrich the learning process of any library user—from early reader to graduate student to young web surfer to retiring senior citizen.”—American Library Association

“The most important asset of any library goes home at night—the library staff.”—Father Timothy Healy, former president, New York Public Library

“In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us how to swim.”—Linton Weeks, *Washington Post*, January 13, 2001

“You can’t have good education without good libraries, and you can’t have good libraries without good staff.”—American Library Association

## Quotes About Libraries

“Nothing is pleasanter than exploring a library.”—Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864)

“Libraries raised me. I don’t believe in colleges and universities. I believe in libraries, because most students don’t have any money. When I graduated from high school, it was during the Depression and we had no money. I couldn’t go to college, so I went to the library three days a week for 10 years.”—Ray Bradbury, speaking about the closing of his public library, December 2009

“My alma mater is the Chicago Public Library. I got what little educational foundation I got in the third-floor reading room, under the tutelage of a Coca-Cola sign.” —David Mamet, speaking at the Carl Sandburg Literary Awards Dinner, 2006

“There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the Earth as the Free Public Library—this republic of letters, where neither rank, office nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.”—Andrew Carnegie

“Perhaps no place in any community is so totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest.”—Lady Bird Johnson

“Libraries allow children to ask questions about the world and find the answers. And the wonderful thing is that once a child learns to use a library, the doors to learning are always open.”—Former First Lady Laura Bush

“Doing research on the web is like using a library assembled piecemeal by pack rats and vandalized nightly.”—Roger Ebert

“I’d be happy if I could think that the role of the library was sustained and even enhanced in the age of the computer.”—Bill Gates

“We may sit in our library and yet be in all quarters of the earth.”—John Lubbock

“I have found the most valuable thing in my wallet is my library card.”—Former First Lady Laura Bush

“I would walk into the Carnegie Library and I would see the pictures of Booker T. and pictures of Frederick Douglass and I would read. I would go into the Savannah Public Libraries in the stacks and see all of the newspapers from all over the country. Did I dream that I would be on the Supreme Court? No. But I dreamt that there was a world out there that was worth pursuing.”—Clarence Thomas, U.S. Supreme Court justice

“A good library is a palace where the lofty spirits of all nations and generations meet.”—Samuel Niger (1883-1956)

“When you are growing up, there are two institutional places that affect you most powerfully—the church, which belongs to God, and the public library, which belongs to you. The public library is a great equalizer.”—Keith Richards, Rolling Stones guitarist

“The richest person in the world, in fact, all the riches in the world couldn’t provide you with anything like the endless, incredible loot available at your local library.”—Malcolm Forbes, publisher

“When I got my library card, that’s when my life began.”—Rita Mae Brown, author

“This library has something offensive to everyone. If you are not offended by something we have, please complain.”—Dorothy Broderick, writer

“What is more important in a library than anything else is the fact that it exists.”—Archibald MacLeish, poet, Librarian of Congress

“What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks about education.”—Harold Howe, U.S. commissioner of education, 1966-1968

“My pen is my harp and my lyre; my library is my garden and my orchard.”—Judah Ha-Levi, Spanish poet, physician

“The Library is the Heart of the University.”—Charles William Eliot, *CPR and the Library: Resuscitating the Heart of the University* by Isaac Hunter Dunlap, 1995

“My alma mater was books, a good library...I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity.”—Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

“You must live feverishly in a library. Colleges are not going to do any good unless you are raised and live in a library every day of your life.”—Ray Bradbury

“When life seems not worth living, 10 minutes in the library proves otherwise.”—Miv Schaaf

“Throughout my formal education I spent many, many hours in public and school libraries. Libraries became courts of last resort, as it were. The current definitive answer to almost any question can be found within the four walls of most libraries.”—Arthur Ashe (1943-1993)

“If it is right that schools should be maintained by the whole community for the well-being of the whole, it is right also that libraries should be so maintained.”—Andrew Carnegie, 1904

“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.”—Toni Morrison

“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.”—James Michener, writer

“If we didn’t have libraries, many people thirsty for knowledge would dehydrate.”—Megan Jo Tetrick, age 12, Daleville, Ind.

“A library may look like a single building, but please don’t be misled by the walls. It’s a single link in an enormous chain. It’s a single being in a gigantic ecosystem of words and thoughts and ideas.”—Shula Klinger, Richmond, British Columbia, *Beyond Words: BC’s Public Libraries Are Changing Lives*

“To add a library to a house is to give that house a soul.”— Marcus Tullius Cicero

“Libraries are as the shrine where all the relics of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without delusion or imposture, are preserved and reposed.”—Francis Bacon

“Give thy mind to books and libraries, and the literature and lore of the ages will give thee the wisdom of sage and seer.”—Newell D. Hillis

“I go into my library and all history unrolls before me.”—Alexander Smith

“A library of wisdom, then, is more precious than all wealth, and all things that are desirable cannot be compared to it.”—Richard de Bury

“It is, however, not to the museum, or the lecture-room, or the drawing-school, but to the library, that we must go for the completion of our humanity. It is books that bear from age to age the intellectual wealth of the world.”—Owen Meredith

“And even should the cloud of barbarism and despotism again obscure the science and libraries of Europe, this country remains to preserve and restore light and liberty to them.”—Thomas Jefferson

“A library is thought in cold storage.”—Herbert Samuel



“Libraries are not made; they grow.”—Augustine Birrell

“Good as it is to inherit a library, it is better to collect one.”—Augustine Birrell

“Nothing sickens me more than the closed door of a library.”—Barbara Tuchman

“My mother and my father were illiterate immigrants from Russia. When I was a child they were constantly amazed that I could go to a building and take a book on any subject. They couldn’t believe this access to knowledge we have here in America.”—Kirk Douglas

“My library  
Was dukedom large enough.”—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

“Your library is your portrait.”—Holbrook Jackson

“A circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year!”—Richard Brainsley Sheridan

“No place affords a more striking conviction of the vanity of human hopes than a public library.”—Samuel Johnson

“I myself spent hours in the Columbia library as intimidated and embarrassed as a famished gourmet invited to a dream restaurant where every dish from all of the world’s cuisines, past and present, was available on request.”—Luigi Barzini

“But what can a man see of a library being one day in it?”—James Boswell

“The man who has a library of his own collection is able to contemplate himself objectively, and is justified in believing in his own existence.”—Augustine Birrell

“Come, and take choice of all my library,  
And so beguile thy sorrow.”—William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*

“Life is like a library owned by an author. In it are a few books which he wrote himself, but most of them were written for him.”—Harry Emerson Fosdick

“It is impossible to enter a large library...without feeling an inward sensation of reverence, and without catching some sparks of noble emulation, from the mass of mind which is scattered around you.”—James Crossley

## Quotes About Books and Reading

“Books educate us about art and politics and people and ideas. This happens in nonfiction and fiction. And in poetry, of course. So many of us have been moved to a deeper understanding of things—or many things—by taking in a few dark lines on the page.”—Elizabeth Berg, writer

“We will never be a civilized country until we expend more money for books than we do for chewing gum.”—Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915)

“If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all.”—Senator John F. Kennedy, October 1960

“There is more treasure in books than in all the pirates’ loot on Treasure Island...”—Walt Disney (1901-1966)

“When I was your age, television was called books!”—Grandpa in *The Princess Bride*

“I cannot live without books.”—Thomas Jefferson

“Life would be—to me in all events—a terrible thing without books.”—L.M. Montgomery

“The dearest ones of time, the strongest friends of the soul—BOOKS.”—Emily Dickinson

“There is no Frigate like a Book to take us lands away, nor any Coursers like a Page of prancing poetry.”—Emily Dickinson

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”—Sir Richard Steel

“The only way to do all the things you’d like to do is to read.”—Tom Clancy

“Ink runs from the corners of my mouth. There is no happiness like mine. I have been eating poetry.”—Mark Strand, *Eating Poetry*

“Readers are lucky—they will never be bored or lonely.”—Natalie Babbitt,  
author of *Tuck Everlasting*

“Ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading!”—Rainer Maria  
Rilke, poet

“The true university these days is a collection of books.”—Thomas Carlyle

“Make thy books thy companions. Let thy cases and shelves be thy pleasure  
grounds and gardens.”—Judah ibn-Tibbon (12th century)

“The only true equalisers in the world are books; the only treasure-house  
open to all comers is a library; the only wealth which will not decay is  
knowledge; the only jewel which you can carry beyond the grave is  
wisdom.”—J.A. Langford

“No furniture so charming as books.”—Sydney Smith

“They are the books, the arts, the academes,  
That show, contain and nourish all the world.”—William Shakespeare,  
*Love’s Labour’s Lost*

“Knowing I lov’d my books, he furnish’d me,  
From mine own library with volumes that  
I prize above my dukedom.”—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

“What is a great love of books? It is something like a personal introduction  
to the great and good men of all past times. Books, it is true, are silent as  
you see them on their shelves; but, silent as they are, when I enter a library  
I feel as if almost the dead were present, and I know if I put questions to  
these books they will answer me with all the faithfulness and fullness  
which has been left in them by the great men who have left the books with  
us.”—John Bright

“If minds are truly alive they will seek out books, for books are the human  
race recounting its memorable experiences, confronting its problems,  
searching for solutions, drawing the blueprints of its futures.”—Harry A.  
Overstreet

“All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: It is lying as in magic  
preservation in the pages of books.”—Thomas Carlyle

“The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else that he builds ever lasts. Monuments fall, nations perish, civilizations grow old and die out, and after an era new races build others. But in the world of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again and yet live on, still young, still as fresh as the day they were written, still telling men’s hearts of the heart of men centuries dead.”—Clarence Day

“I have lost all sense of home, having moved about so much. It means to me now—only that place where the books are kept.”—John Steinbeck

“Books are lighthouses erected in the great sea of time.”—Edwin P. Whipple

“The walls of books around him, dense with the past, formed a kind of insulation against the present world of disasters.”—Ross MacDonald  
“I like books. I was born and bred among them, and have the easy feeling, when I get in their presence, that a stable-boy has among horses.”—Oliver Wendell Holmes

“A good book is the best of friends.”—English Proverb

“The books that help you most are those which make you think the most. The hardest way of learning is by easy reading: but a great book that comes from a great thinker—it is a ship of thought, deep freighted with truth and with beauty.”—Theodore Parker

“Books are the ever burning lamps of accumulated wisdom.”—George William Curtis

“The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries.”—Descartes

“People say that life is the thing, but I prefer reading.”—Logan Pearsall Smith

“The great objection to new books is that they prevent our reading old ones.”—Joseph Joubert

“In reading, as in eating, an appetite is half the feast.”—Anonymous

“All that we have read and learned, all that has occupied and interested us in the thoughts and deeds of men abler or wiser than ourselves, constitutes at last a spiritual society of which we can never be deprived, for it rests in the heart and soul of the man who has acquired it.”—Philip Gilbert Hamilton

“If I had read as much as other men I would have known no more than they.”—Thomas Hobbes

“Reading to kids is to ordinary reading what jazz is to a string quartet.”—Sean Wilentz, *Reader's Quotation Book*

“The fact of knowing how to read is nothing, the whole point is knowing what to read.”—Jacques Ellul

“Show me the books he loves and I shall know  
The man far better than through mortal friends.”—S. Weir Mitchell

“People will not be better than the books they read.”—Bishop Potter

“If we encounter a man of great intellect, we should ask him what books he reads.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Reading a poor book is an opportunity lost of reading a good one.”—Anonymous

“One sure window into a person's soul is his reading list.”—Mary B. W. Tabor

“It is not the reading of many books which is necessary to make a man wise or good; but well reading of a few.”—Richard Baxter

“It is with books as it is with men—a very small number play a great part; the rest are lost in the multitude.”—Voltaire

“We should accustom the mind to keep the best company by introducing it to only the best books.”—Sydney Smith

“Choose an author as you would a friend.”—Wentworth Dillon

“Let us read thoughtfully; this is a great secret in the right use of books.”—George Gilfillan

“Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.”—Henry David Thoreau

“Indiscriminate reading is unprofitable to the mind.”—Latin Proverb

“Books, like friends, should be few and well-chosen. Like friends, too, we should return to them again and again—for like true friends, they will never fail us—never cease to instruct—never cloy.”—Joineriana

“Be as careful of the books you read as the company you keep.”—Paxton Hood

## Quotes About Knowledge and Information

“He is wise who knows the sources of knowledge—where it is written and where it is to be found.”—A.A. Hodge

“I find that a great part of the information I have was acquired by looking something up and finding something else on the way.”—Franklin P. Adams

“Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.”—Samuel Johnson

“Research means that you don’t know, but are willing to find out.”—Charles Kettering

“As a general rule, the most successful man in life is the man who has the best information.”—Benjamin Disraeli

“To know where you can find anything—that, in short, is the largest part of learning.”—Anonymous

“The dissemination of knowledge is one of the cornerstones of civilization.”—John F. Budd

## Quotes About Censorship

“Don’t join the book burners. Don’t think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don’t be afraid to go into your library and read every book.”—Dwight D. Eisenhower

“The dirtiest book of all is the expurgated book.”—Walt Whitman

“‘There is no book so bad,’ said the bachelor, ‘but something good may be found in it.’”—Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

“You do ill if you praise, but worse if you censure, what you do not understand.”—Leonardo da Vinci

“Censorship, like charity, should begin at home; but unlike charity, it should end there.”—Claire Booth Luce

“Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind.”—William Westmoreland

“A wicked book is the wickeder because it cannot repent.”—English Proverb

“To limit the press is to insult a nation; to prohibit reading of certain books is to declare the inhabitants to be either fools or slaves.”—Claude Adrien Helvetius

“Whoever would do good in the world ought not to deal in censure. We ought not to destroy, but rather construct.”—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## Humorous Quotes

“A book may be compared to your neighbor; if it be good, it cannot last too long; if bad, you cannot get rid of it too early.”—Henry Brooke

“Book lovers never go to bed alone.”—Unknown

“There are two kinds of statistics: The kind you look up and the kind you make up.”—Rex Stout

“Seventy million books in America’s libraries, but the one you want to read is always out.”—Tom Masson

“‘Classic:’ A book which people praise but don’t read.”—Mark Twain

“Knowledge is free at the library. Just bring your own container.”—Unknown

“Book—what they make a movie out of for television.”—Leonard Louis Levinson

“On how many people’s libraries, as on bottles from the drugstore, one might write: ‘For external use only.’”—Unknown

## Quotes About Borrowing Books

“Never lend books, for no one ever returns them; the only books I have in my library are books that other people have lent me.”—Anatole France

“Borrowers of books—those mutilators of collections, spoilers of the symmetry of shelves and creators of odd volumes.”—Charles Lamb

“The reason why borrowed books are seldom returned is that it is easier to retain books themselves than what is inside of them.”—Gilles Ménage

“Hard-covered books break up friendships. You loan a hard-covered book to a friend and when he doesn’t return it you get mad at him. It makes you mean and petty. But 25-cent books are different.”—John Steinbeck