

*Jeopardy! Libraries!
Democracy!*

*Or: Why I Love the Library
Even More than I Love
Jeopardy!*

Wild Wisconsin Winter Web Conference!
January 25, 2024
Ben Chan, St. Norbert College

Wild
WISCONSIN
· WINTER WEB CONFERENCE · JANUARY 24

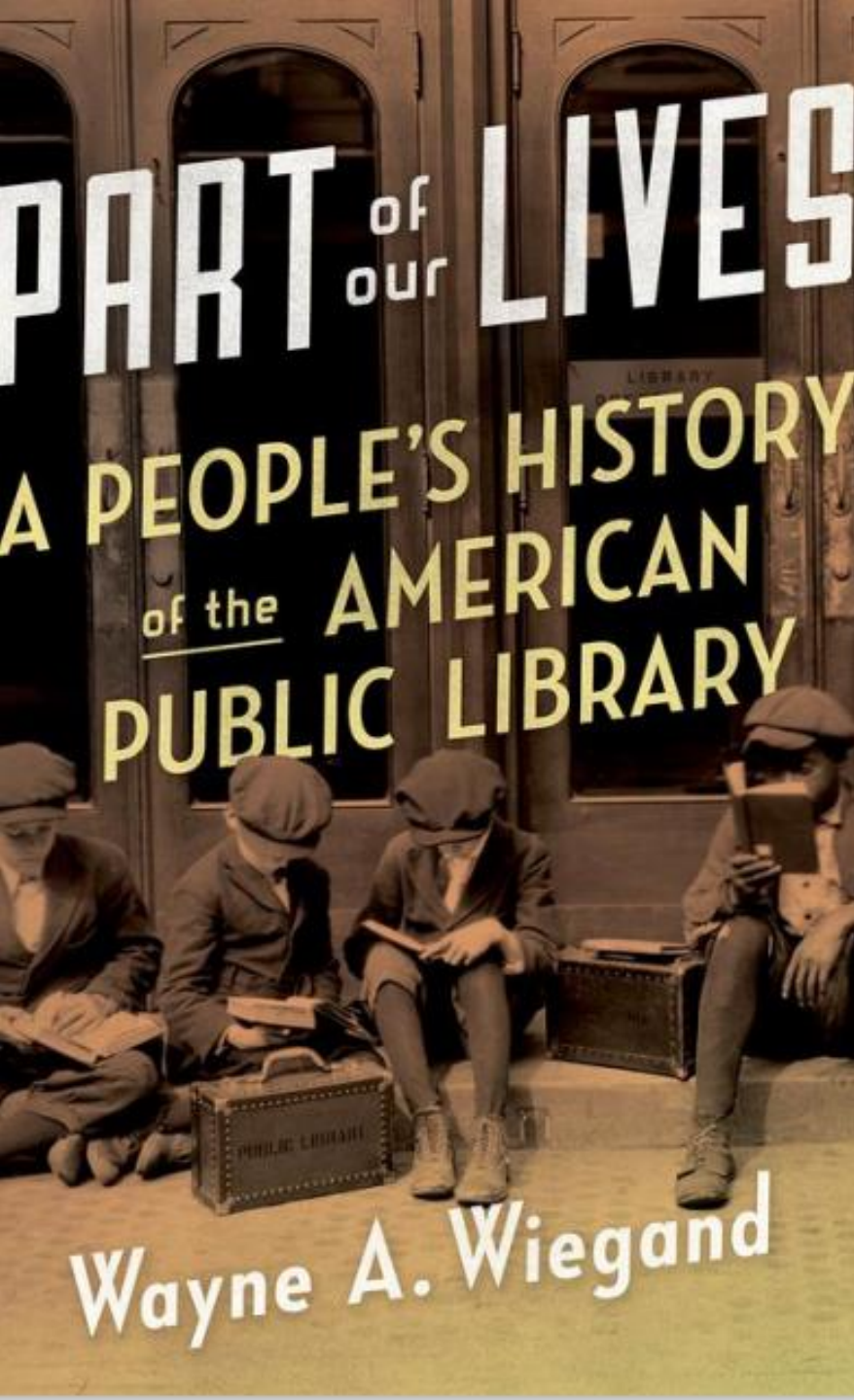


Ben Chan was one letter off in his spelling during Final Jeopardy, a mistake that sealed his fate.



One of the
many
libraries that I
call home





“Americans love their public libraries, but why?”

Despite the fact that the American public library has been strongly identified with the concept of equal education opportunity, it is difficult to prove that these civic institutions are essential to democracy... For the most part its alumni are anonymous and invisible...”

Agenda: Why I love the library even more than *Jeopardy!*

1. Round 1: Civics

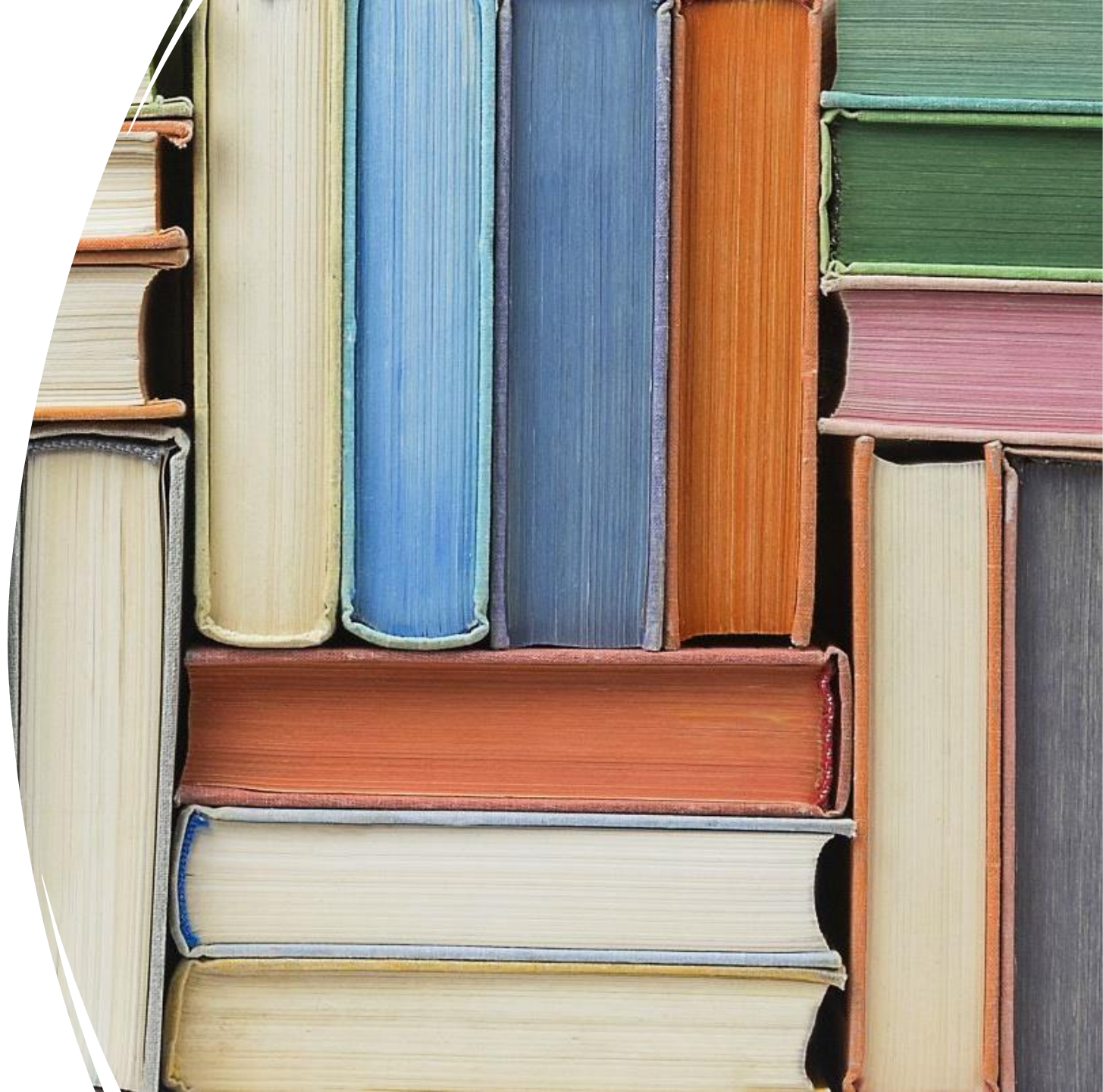
1. Puzzle: if Americans like libraries and *Jeopardy!* so much, why are we so poorly informed?

2. Round 2: Quick Books

1. Libraries and *Jeopardy!* as sites of empowerment

3. Final Jeopardy: Best Song Ever

1. The Library as a space for **DEEP PLAY**



CIVICS

CIVICS

\$200

16

House debates are
presided over by the person
in this congressional
position

CIVICS

\$400

22

Term for withdrawal from
the Union, as by 11 states
in 1860 & '61

CIVICS

\$600

23

Hamilton said using this group to choose the president, rather than direct popular vote, was "excellent"

CIVICS

\$800

24

In June 2012 the president
invoked this right over
Operation Fast & Furious
papers

CIVICS

For a constitutional amendment to take effect, this fraction of the states must ratify it

CIVICS

Libraries and *Jeopardy!* Super- Popular!

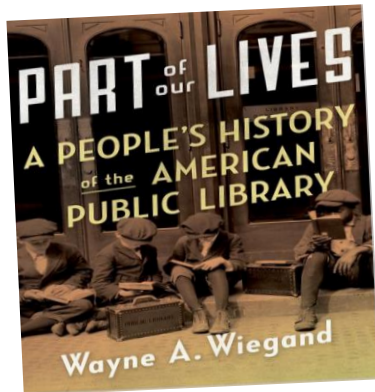
- “A 2013 report by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project noted that... **98 percent** identified their public library experience as “**very**” or “**mostly positive.**” (Wiegand)

- . ***Jeopardy!*** averaged 9.2 million total viewers across the 2021-22 season
 - . C.f. 2023 Major League World Series averaged 9.11 million viewers

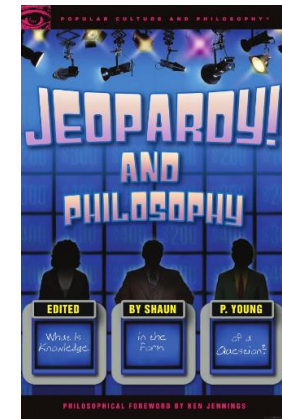
Libraries and *Jeopardy!* Cornerstones of Democracy?

“The three most important documents a free society gives,” wrote author E. L. Doctorow in 1994, “are a birth certificate, a passport, and a library card.”

“In this room,” Pulitzer Prize–winning historian David McCullough said as he swept his arm around the Tulsa Public Library’s auditorium in 1995, “we are at dead center in the absolute heart of the best institution in our society—the free library.”



Joseph Foy: “The variety of knowledge a contestant needs to successfully navigate a round of *Jeopardy!* is not at all far removed from the diverse base of information required to be a fully functioning citizen of democratic state... ranging from political, social, cultural, economic, scientific, historical, and international in nature.”

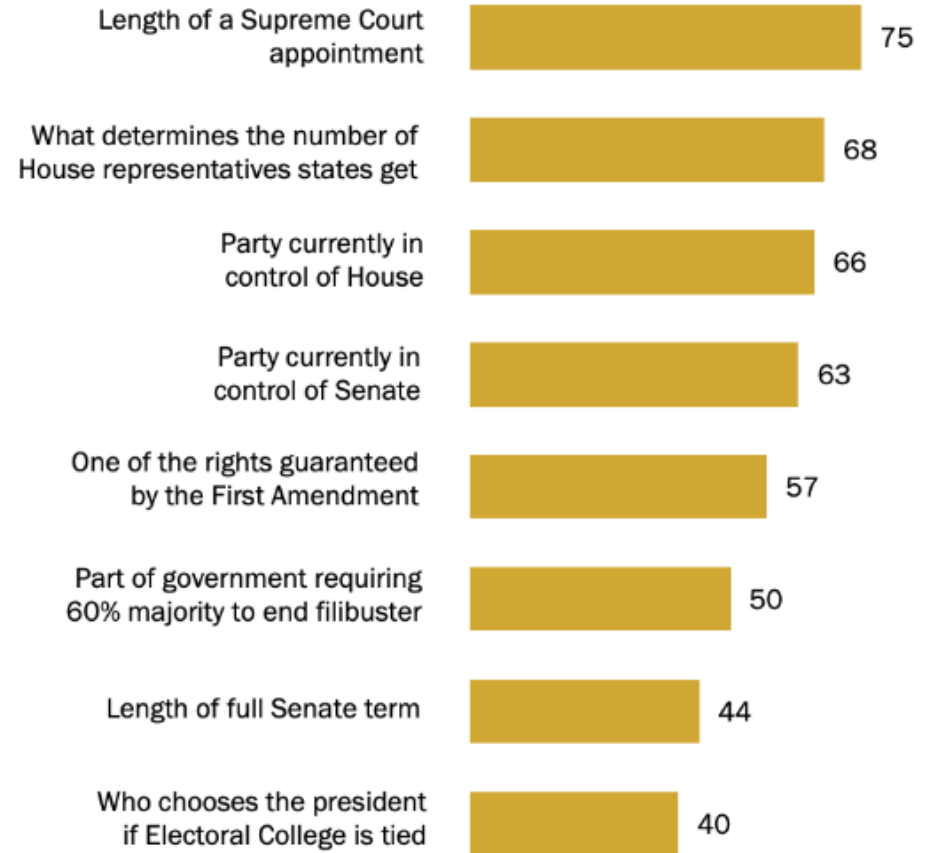


The Puzzle

“Civic knowledge is roughly the same as it was 50 years ago despite significantly higher amounts of formal education, Joseph Schumpeter’s (2001) dour statement from 1942: ‘information is plentiful and readily available. But this does not seem to make any difference’ (Buschman 2018)

Americans’ civic and political knowledge varies widely depending on the topic

% who correctly answered each of the following



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

GREEK

dēmos
the
people

GREEK

-kratia
power,
rule

GREEK

dēmokratia

Oxford Languages

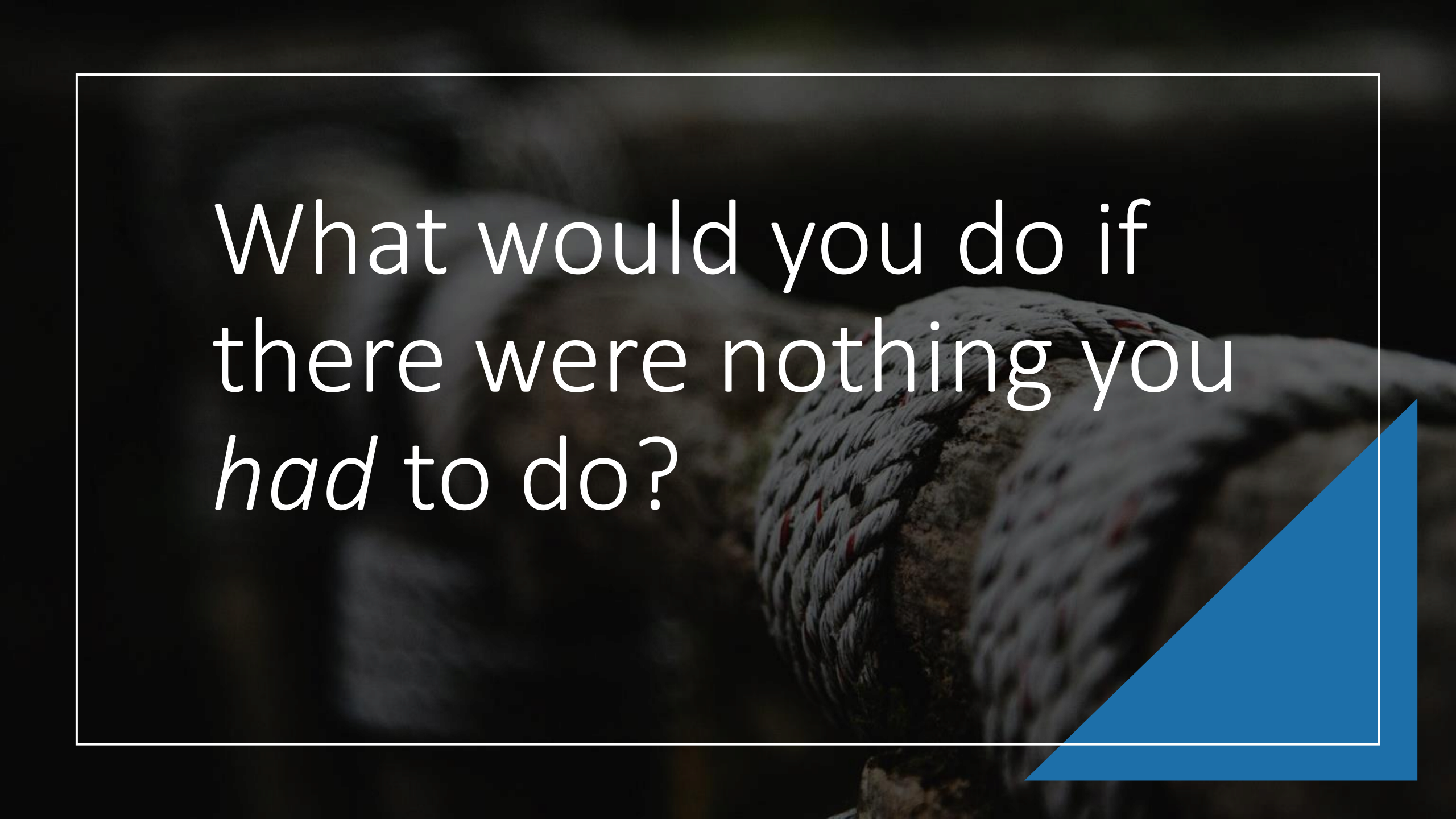
My guess:

**98% of us love
libraries, because we
are feel far more
empowered in a
library than we are in
a voting booth**



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2. Round 2: Quick Books
 1. Play as empowerment
 3. *Final Jeopardy*: Best Song Ever



What would you do if
there were nothing you
had to do?

QUICK BOOKS

QUICK BOOKS

\$200

21

From 2006, it's Cormac
McCarthy's title post-
apocalyptic byway

QUICK BOOKS

\$400

22

Dickens' only true mystery
novel dealt with this title
man's disappearance

QUICK BOOKS

\$600

23

Angie Thomas used "U" for
a pronoun in the title of this
2017 young adult page-
turner

QUICK BOOKS

\$800

24

His "Midnight's Children" is
set in places like Kashmir &
Delhi

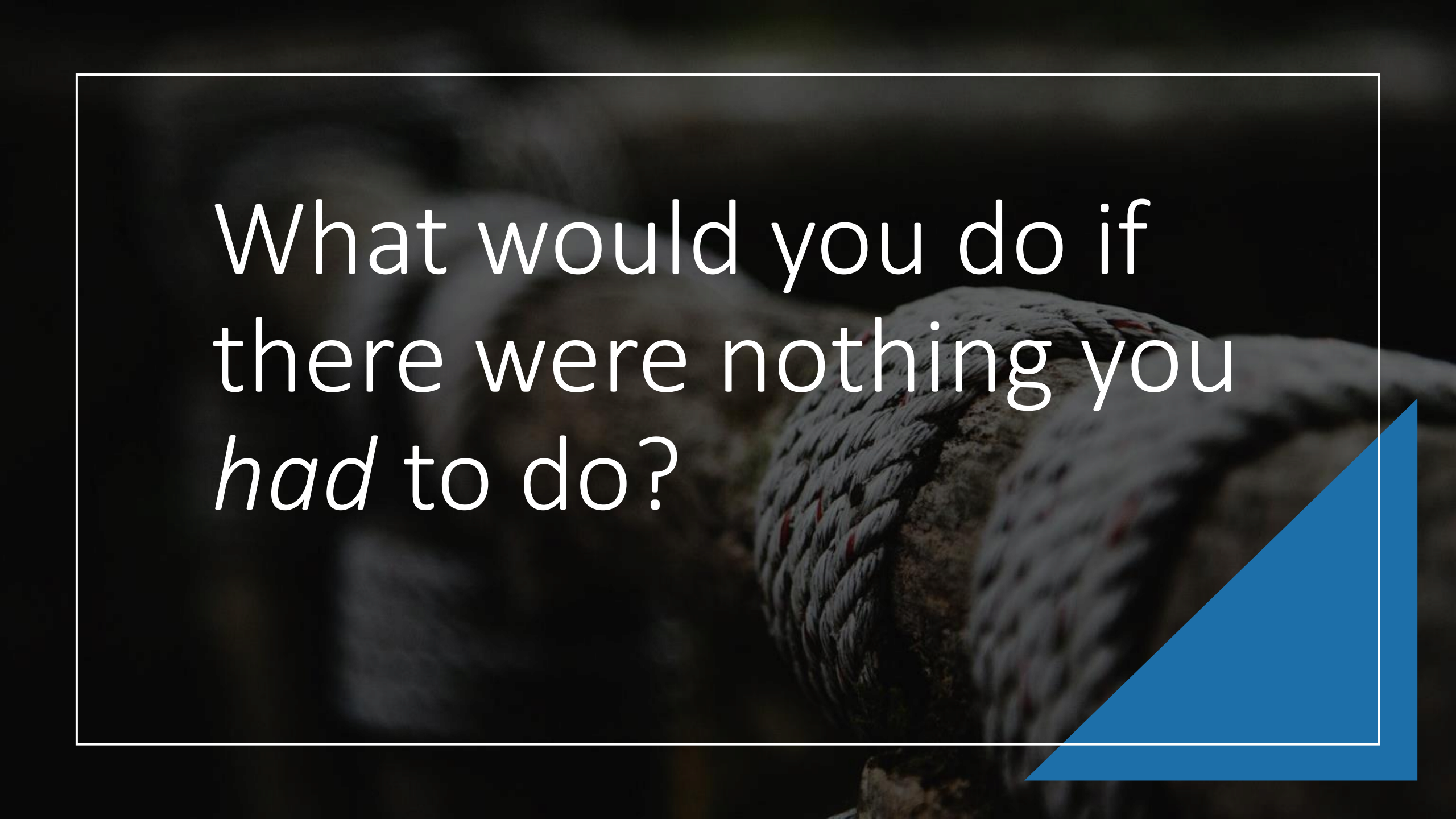
QUICK BOOKS

\$1000

25

"The Awakening" is by this woman with a composer's surname

QUICK BOOKS



What would you do if
there were nothing you
had to do?



Play as the highest form of human activity (Stephen Asma)

“Play is a *way of being* that resists the instrumental, expedient mode of existence. In play, we do not measure ourselves in terms of tangible productivity (extrinsic value), but instead, our physical and mental lives have intrinsic value of their own. It provides the source from which other extrinsic goods flow and eventually return.”

What *is* Wisconsin? Four playful ways that *Jeopardy* has 'answered' that question

1. Sheboygan in this state is known as the "bratwurst capital of the world"
2. This state's name originally began with "Ou" until Congress changed it to a "W"
3. Orson Welles' birthplace of Kenosha is in this state
4. According to *The Onion* Its people "have slimmed down... by adhering to a strict diet of just one basket of cheese curds at every meal"



“Play is a *way of being* that resists the instrumental, expedient mode of existence. In play, we do not measure ourselves in terms of tangible productivity (extrinsic value), but instead, our physical and mental lives have intrinsic value of their own.”
(Stephen Asma)

So the reason I love libraries even more than I love *Jeopardy!*...

There is nothing you *have* to do to enjoy a library.

Libraries are not *for* any goal.

- not even for creating a better-informed electorate

Libraries are *for* us

Best Song Ever

It was originally dedicated
to a Midwest football
team; it's said that Sousa
called it the best college
song he'd ever heard

Best Song Ever

What is “On, Wisconsin!”?