



## Hazel Schuiling

**Congratulations** for winning the Friends of the Library 2026 \$1,000.00 Scholarship. We wish you the best of luck as you leave high school to attend college in the fall.



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What does the Ripon Memorial Library mean to you? That was the prompt of this essay, and led me to think more deeply and honestly about my connection to this place that I have spent hours reading and delving into topics that I still find interesting to this very day. How can I summarize succinctly how many books, magazines, and audiobooks from these very shelves, have contributed to my education and brought me to where I am today as a high school senior about to graduate and go into the world for the first time to try and navigate this complexity we call life. Moving here as a six-year-old in 2014, I was scared that I would never have as good of friends, or have as much fun as I did back in Idaho. But I soon found that there still were more friends to be made and more experiences to be had, beyond what I had before.

In this Library, I attended my first book club. Being nervous at first, I was scared to share what my thoughts were on the books we read because I believed that people might think what I had to say wasn't worth listening to. I soon found out that this wasn't true. Thanks to encouragement from one of my favorite librarians, Ms Kopp, I found a group of people that were willing to talk to me about all things literary, fantasy, and history, and people who were just as enthusiastic about it as I was. In our little book club, we talked about books like *Savvy*, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, *Restart*, and *The Inquisitor's tale*. Though many of you may not know what these books are, they will remain ingrained in my mind as the beginning of a lifelong love for reading.

Besides the book club, my family and I constantly went to the regular events held at the library. I got to see magic tricks, snakes taller than my dad (which, at the time, was beyond belief) and a Greek myth storytelling performance accompanied by ukulele. The latter influenced me to this day, as I still harbor a great enthusiasm for Greek mythology and culture, and the very songs played in that performance still haunt my favorite playlists on Spotify.

For me, the library gave me a leaping off point to develop my community of friends and people I could trust. I still regularly go to the library to check out books on my school reading lists, or to simply peruse the shelves for my next World War novel, mystery thriller, or Victorian-era tragedy. So, in the end, what does the library mean to me? The library is my place for comfort and learning and new experiences. What does the library mean to you?