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WWKD? In Banned Books Week? He'd Celebrate Reading!

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In Waukegan, on the shores of Lake Michigan, there is a home that is sacred to free men. Books are sacred to free men for very good reasons, and that wars have been won because books were free. Books are sacred to free men, of course — to the extent that its freedom is beneficial. In the house that Kurt Vonnegut once called home, many papers and political positions under which he strode. 

Welcome to the Vonnegut Memorial Library, home of the Kurt Vonnegut Collection. This week, the library is celebrating Banned Books Week, an annual event that encourages people to read books that have been banned or challenged. The library is hosting a series of events throughout the week, including a reading by Vonnegut's friend Ray Bradbury.

In Vonnegut's handwriting, along with his signature and the phrase "for our kids," the library has placed a small plaque in honor of the author. This year, the library is dedicating the plaque to those who have fought for the right to read.

"I think we've come to a place in our society where we take the freedom of the press for granted. It's a right we've fought for, and we need to remember that it's not guaranteed," said Jennifer O'Brien, Serials and Government Documents Librarian for Western Connecticut State University.

Efforts have been made to keep content when, in 1985, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill halting the production of Braille copies of Playboy magazine. Jennifer O'Brien, Serials and Government Documents Librarian for Western Connecticut State University, cautions that this might represent a fraction of the censorship cases actually going on in the United States.

O'Brien feels parents may not want their kids exposed to things for which they aren't equipped. O'Brien can understand that. She's read books that were so upsetting that she didn't want to share them with others.

"There are times when parents may not want their children to read certain things," O'Brien said. "But that's their decision. It's not necessarily about content; it could be about the books perceived intent. O'Brien feels that parents have a role in determining what their children are reading and how much they should be exposed to.

"Children need to be taught to filter what they read," O'Brien said. "They need to learn how to read critically and to make their own decisions about what they want to read."
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