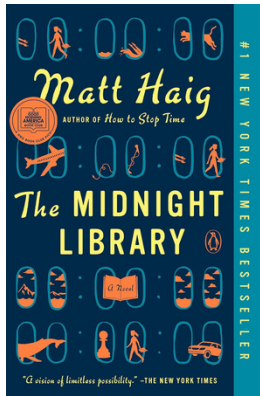


Winner, High School Category



Essayist: Tiffany, age 16, James River High School
Advocating for: *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig

Jean-Paul Sartre once said, “Life begins on the other side of despair”. On the median between life and despair, it is easy to wonder if making a different life choice would lead to a better outcome. *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig is a book that perfectly represents the crisis every human has once faced; “maybe in another life, things would be different”. Through the life of Nora Seed, we begin to see life from a glass half full perspective, rather than half empty. The themes introduced in this book resonate with not only youths, but with people of all ages and reminds us that hope is never lost, even when rock bottom is hit.

There is a place between life and death called the Midnight Library where Nora Seed explores all the possibilities of life. Before she died, she felt as if she made all the wrong decisions that led to her miserable ending. In the library, Nora explores her life as a mother, a glaciologist, rock star, and many more, only to realize at the end, she was still not happy. A deep realization approaches her that there will never be a perfect life where she is fully content. She returns to her life before, but with a newfound hope and understanding.

As a high school student, I have been told that every decision I make correlates with my future and that I can not afford to make the wrong decisions, or else the future is at stake. But as a child, I wanted to be everything—A vet, a lawyer, or even a ballerina.



However, growing up made me realize such a thing was impossible. In a way, I felt like my desire to be every occupation stems not from interest in the field, but from my curiosity of the world. I was in constant fear of making the wrong decisions that I might regret.

That was until I read this book, I had an awakening: maybe my idea of wanting to be everything was wrong. Maybe you don't have to do everything in order to be everything. You don't have to read every book or travel to every country to have a connection with the world. Rather, the world is already within us but in forms of love, curiosity, and passion.

The Midnight Library has gotten me through my fear of regrets. It showed me that there is no such thing as regretting because every decision you make leads you to where you're meant to be. I believe that is a crucial message everyone needs to hear. The lessons in this book can act as a guide for ones going through an unfamiliar journey called life. You learn about what makes life worth living, the significance of connection, and the power of resilience. For me, the biggest lesson I learned is that if we shift our perspective on regret, we can see what most overlook, the fact that regret exists because there was potential, because life had meaning and because it was worth living.