

Sam Hiner, 10th grade, South Iredell High School, NC-13

The Burj Khalifa. Piercing into the sky, it is a great symbol of wealth and power. Standing at over 2,700 feet, it reaches far taller into the sky than any other manmade structure. A picture of the structure could be easily mistaken for a background for a movie set in the far future. This architectural wonder is a testament to what humans can achieve. What could possibly match its magnificence?

To answer this question, I submit the humble library. And not necessarily a great library such as the Library of Congress, but any library. Most do not look like much, usually being a simple brick rectangle. Inside, however, there are wonders as great as your imagination. Pick up a book and you will no longer be limited by the laws of reality. Take part in the Crusades, solve a murder case, or witness the beauty of an intergalactic megastructure to which the Burj Khalifa is but a speck. This is the true power of a library.

Some may not be convinced, arguing that these experiences are not *real* in the same way that a great tower is. But from a practical standpoint, what will matter in 100 years? The library, where our next great leaders were educated, not another skyscraper that will soon be beaten in height. For instance, Abraham Lincoln is often regarded as the greatest president in American history. His total formal schooling amounted to less than a year, but his love of learning and a law book he found in the bottom of a barrel inspired him to become lawyer, eventually becoming one of the best in Illinois. If a single book that Lincoln happened upon ended up bringing so much prosperity to America, imagine how much prosperity a libraries must bring to North Carolina by giving motivated people the opportunity for education.

This impact is enlarged by the fact that libraries have expanded their capabilities to remain an important part of the world. This includes free WiFi, so that anyone can connect to the world's largest knowledgebase. This is an especially important impact of libraries. As more and more information moves onto the internet, it is important that people who may not traditionally have access to the internet be able to use it through a public resource like a library. This means that the importance of libraries will continue increasing over time.

I have personally seen how the expansion of libraries beyond just books is important. I have been lucky to be a part of an effort by my school's robotics team to create a day dedicated to teaching kids about robotics. This same group is working on creating a robotics team for my community as well. Both of these would be based in our local library. This is because the library acts as a perfect community center, as I described above. Having a place where anyone can be introduced to robotics, and even compete whether their school has a robotics program or not is very valuable. Being a part of robotics has given me an idea of what real-world engineering is like. I have no doubt that this program will inspire at least one person to pursue a career in engineering.

These examples show that libraries have been an important part of their communities in the past, and will become even more important as we move into the future.