

One County, One Book | Ventura County Library

The Library Book by Susan Orlean

Thank you for facilitating a One County, One Book discussion group at your library! We've put together some discussion pointers as well as questions for *The Library Book* to help you hold a successful discussion. Good luck and have fun!

Book Discussion Tips

- Before you begin, lay down a few ground rules such as “please let everyone finish their thoughts without interruption,” “be open to different interpretations,” and “silence or turn off personal devices.”
- Remember these questions are suggestions. It isn't necessary to get through all, or ask them in order. Feel free to use your own questions as well.
- Keep on topic, but allow conversation to grow organically. Participants may want to talk more about one aspect of the book. Some questions prompt more responses, or lead to an interesting tangent. Go with it!
- Allow participants time to answer. Be prepared to offer your own response to get things going, but don't be afraid to be silent for a while. Some groups need more prompting or time to gather their thoughts.
- Be aware of individuals who monopolize discussions. This can be difficult to handle, but find ways to help quieter participants join in, either by directing questions to them specifically, or by prefacing a question by saying “let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet.”

Questions

- Were you at all familiar with the Los Angeles Library fire? Share your memories.
- How would you describe the fire's impact on the community? The employees? Did it remind you of other disasters that personally affected you or your community? How did the LA community heal? How did your community heal?
- Libraries today are more than just a building filled with books. How has your library changed with the times? How do you feel about these changes? How do you gauge their success?
- Share some memories of your relationship to libraries. Why do you believe so many people have memories of their experiences with libraries? How has your relationship to libraries changed with time?
- The issue of street people using the library comes up in *The Library Book*. Discuss the notion of inclusion. How does it impact your library?
- What was your impression of Harry Peak? How did that impression change as you read the book?
- What were your impressions of the history of the library? Was the history surprising? Every person who worked with the library impacted it in different ways. What ideas and initiatives did you find worthwhile? Interesting? Did you disagree with any? Who was your favorite “character”?
- How did the Los Angeles Library's ups and downs reflect the city's ups and downs? Do you think libraries are always reflective of their cities? Are they a good way to judge a community?
- Share your reactions to the book's structure. Did you enjoy the way Orlean put together the narrative? What of the conclusions about possible arson?
- Have you been to Los Angeles' Central Library? What was your impression? Do you think it is a building worth preserving?

Further Exploration

Sometimes a way to jump-start discussions while you wait for people to gather is to provide something related to the book that they can look at together. Consider printing out some of the pictures from the Library's sites listed below, and creating a poster board showing the library's features. Or, have laptops open to the sites available, so participants can browse the sites for themselves.

<https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/art-architecture>

<https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/art-architecture/goodhue-building>

<https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/art-architecture/sculpture>

<https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/art-architecture/iconography>

<https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/art-architecture/painting>

Alta magazine recently published an article regarding the Well of the Scribes, which was lost during construction of a parking lot in the 1960s. You might want to discuss this, and also the library's wealth of art and sculpture.

<https://altaonline.com/whatever-happened-to-the-well-of-the-scribes-los-angeles-public-library-cold-case/>

There are some interesting YouTube videos about the fire. You might want to play one of them as people come in for the discussion.

<https://www.lapl.org/collections-resources/blogs/lapl/video-firsthand-accounts-central-library-fire>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMaw-TbtmXc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4AamZu9PkI>