

The Lost Library

REBECCA STEAD & WENDY MASS

ISBN 9781922790477

RRP AU\$16.99

Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 10+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rebecca Stead is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *When You Reach Me*, *Liar & Spy*, *First Light*, *Goodbye Stranger*, *Bob*, and, most recently, *The List of Things That Will Not Change*. Her books have been awarded the Newbery Medal, the *Boston Globe*/Horn Book Award for Fiction and the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize. Rebecca lives in New York City, where she is always on the lookout for her next story idea.

Wendy Mass is the *New York Times* bestselling author of twenty-two novels for young readers including *The Candymakers*. Wendy lives in New Jersey.

SYNOPSIS

Evan is an eleven-year-old boy who loves mysteries. Mortimer is a large, six-toed, ginger cat who wouldn't hurt a mouse and would guard the library with his life. Al is a ghost librarian with no library (yet).

Martinville hasn't had its own library since the fire. It happened before Evan was even born, but the tragedy of the fire still haunts the town – several people died in the fire that destroyed the library, and nobody wants to talk about it. But when Al decides to build a little free library one night, the books she places inside ignite a curiosity in Evan and his best friend, Rafe, that leads him closer to uncovering the truth about what really happened the night of the fire, as well as solving some mysteries a bit closer to home.

Using his newfound guidebook – *How to Write A Mystery Novel* – Evan sets his mind to uncovering the mysteries around him. Like, why won't his dad tell him about the fire? And why do all the mice keep coming back from the forest? Who put the little library up? And who burnt the original library down? Evan is determined to find answers, but then the clues start pointing towards his own dad. Rebecca Stead and Wendy Mass's second collaborative novel is a sweet, optimistic story about the power of stories and the people who share them.

BEFORE READING

1. *The Lost Library* could be called a mystery story. What are some mystery stories you've read? Make a list of things might you expect to happen in a mystery story. Return to the list for discussion or to add to the list as you read.



2. Read the blurb aloud and look at some of the details on the cover of the book. What clues do they provide about the story?

WHILE READING

1. What is Evan supposed to write in his journal? What does he end up using the journal for?
2. Why do you think Mortimer refuses to leave his position outside with the library?
3. Why isn't Rafe allowed to cross the road?
4. What is so interesting about the names on the library cards in the back of the books Evan finds in the little library?
5. Who built the little library and why?
6. Ms Scoggin keeps telling Al to 'take her place in the world'. What does she mean? When does Al finally 'take her place'?
7. What does Mr O'Neal give Evan's dad when they get back from the middle-school excursion?
8. What has Mr Brock been waiting all of this time for?
9. What is significant about the polaroid picture Evan finds?
10. How does Mortimer describe the feeling of listening to poetry. Is this what hearing poetry feels like for you?
11. Why is it so hard for Evan's dad to talk to him about the library?
12. Discuss how the little library brings people in the community together.
13. What is Mortimer really guarding?
14. Who is H. G. Higgins? How does Evan feel when he finds out?
15. What do you think of the end of the story? Have Al, Evan and Mortimer each got the ending they deserve?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. What are three unusual things about Mortimer, the cat? Why does he feel so guilty about the fire? Is it really 'all his fault'? (p. 5)
2. Who do you think the 'dear boy' in the library is? What clues give away his identity? Why do you think the writers don't tell you who he is at the beginning of the story?

3. What do you think Al is afraid of? Why would she rather people think she's a ghost than go out into the world?
4. Evan describes Rafe as 'brave'. (p. 117) Do you agree? What does Rafe do that's brave and what gets in the way of his bravery? How do his parents feel about his bravery?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

Multiple points of view

When we talk about point of view (POV) we're talking about who is telling the story, to whom, and how they're telling it. There are three main points of view: first person (I/me/we), second person (you) and third person (he/she/they). You can find out more about point of view, and some of the ways you can use each one, here:

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/point-of-view>

Sometimes writers use multiple points of view to tell a story (not at once!) and in *The Lost Library*, Rebecca Stead and Wendy Mass use three characters—Mortimer, Al (the ghost librarian), and Evan—to tell the story.

As you're reading, note which point of view each of the characters uses to tell their part of the story. Is it the same throughout, or does each character have a different POV? How does their POV affect what they know and what they don't know?

THEMES

Navigating change

1. How does Evan feel about middle school? Does everyone else feel the same way? Why/why not?
2. Why are the ghosts finding it harder and harder to hold onto reality? What change has sparked their transition? What finally sets them free?
3. What does Demetri say to Evan that makes him feel a bit better about middle school?
4. What do you think the story ultimately says about change? Is it a good or a bad thing?

Mysteries

1. What does H.G. Higgins say about antagonists in *How to Write A Mystery Novel*? Who or what do you think is the antagonist of the novel? Is the antagonist the same as the 'bad guy'? Why/why not?
2. Evan thinks he's solving the mystery of the library fire, but he uncovers a lot of other



mysteries along the way. What do these mysteries teach him about himself and his family?

3. Mr O'Neal tells Evan that 'all of life is a mystery, in a way'. (p. 53) Do you agree? Why do you think it's useful to be open to life's mysteries?

The power of stories

1. Books have changed the lives of many characters in the story. Choose one and discuss how books have changed their life?
2. Ms Scoggin describes reading as having the power to create rooms in her mind. What kind of rooms does Al build in her mind through the books she reads?
3. Al describes the boy as 'a Great Reader'. (p. 95) What does it mean to be a Great Reader? She also says that he took some of the books 'straight into his heart'. (p. 96) What does she mean by this? What does the boy decide to do when he reads the story of the mouse? Has a book ever changed the way you see something?

RESPONDING

1. Choose an important scene from the story and rewrite it from the point of view of a different character. How does this help you to understand them better?
2. Each person that adds a room to the little library brings their own special story to contribute. Draw a room that you would add to the little library. What book would you put in there?
3. 'Take a book. Leave a book. Or both.' Make a little library for your school community. Design and build it carefully and consider what books you'll put inside. Come up with a special event to launch your little library.
4. What are the elements of a mystery story that Evan discovers in the book, *How to Write a Mystery Novel*? Can you use them to plot and start writing your own mystery story?
5. An epilogue is an extra scene (or three!) at the end of a story that jumps forward in time to show the reader what has happened to each of the main characters. In *The Lost Library*, the epilogues show us what has happened to the three main characters. Choose another character in the book and write an epilogue for them.