

# The Library Book

## Discussion Questions



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1. What has your relationship with libraries been throughout your life? Can you share some library memories from childhood to adulthood?
2. Were you at all familiar with the Los Angeles library fire? Or any library fire?
3. How would you describe the fire's impact on the community? How about the community's rebuilding efforts?
4. In chapter 5, Orlean writes that books "take on a kind of human vitality." What role do books play in your life and home, and do you anthropomorphize them? Have you ever wrestled with the idea of giving books away or otherwise disowning them?
5. What is your impression of John Szabo? How does his career inform and shape your understanding of what librarians do?
6. Libraries today are more than just a building filled with books. How has your local branch evolved? Are you able to chart these changes and gauge their success within the community?
7. *The Library Book* confronts the issue of street people patronizing the library. Is this an issue in your hometown? How do you feel about the L.A. library's involvement, handling of the issue, and the notion of inclusion?
8. Andrew Carnegie is perhaps the most famous supporter and benefactor of libraries. Can you name a modern equivalent who is using his or her largesse to underwrite public works? Is it more important for the public sector to have big benefactors or overall community support?
9. What was your initial impression of Harry Peak? Did it change throughout the investigation?
10. What was your reaction to the Mary Jones and Charles Lummis saga? Can you cite any similar examples from history or the present?
11. Each of the head librarians discussed in *The Library Book* brought certain qualities to the position. What ideas and initiatives did you like? Did you disagree with any?
12. *The Library Book* chronicles the history of the Los Angeles Public Library from its origins to the present day. How were the library's ups and downs reflective of the city's ups and down? Are libraries a fair barometer to judge the mood of a city or town?
13. Chapter 30 discusses a range of initiatives undertaken by international libraries and librarians. Do you have a favorite example that you would like to see replicated at your local library?

# Author Bio

- Birth: 1955; Cleveland, OH
- Education: B.A., University of Michigan
- Currently: Lives in upstate New York

Susan Orlean is an American journalist. She has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 1992, and has contributed articles to *Vogue*, *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, and *Outside*.

After graduating from the University of Michigan, Orlean was a staff writer at the Portland, Oregon, weekly *Willamette Week*, and soon began publishing stories in *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, *Vogue*, *Outside*, and *Spy*.

In 1982 she moved to Boston and became a staff writer for the *Boston Phoenix* and later a regular contributor to the *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*. Her first book, *Saturday Night*, was published in 1990, shortly after she moved to New York and began writing for *The New Yorker* magazine. She became a *New Yorker* staff writer in 1992. Orlean was also a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University in 2003.

Orlean is the author of several books, including *The Orchid Thief*, a profile of Florida orchid grower, breeder, and collector John Laroche. The book formed the basis of Charlie Kaufman's script for the Spike Jonze film *Adaptation*. Orlean (portrayed by Meryl Streep in an Oscar-nominated role) was, in effect, made into a fictional character; the movie portrayed her as becoming Laroche's lover and partner in a drug production operation, in which orchids were processed into a fictional psychoactive substance.

She also wrote the *Women's Outside* article, "Life's Swell" (published 1998). The article, a feature on a group of young surfer girls in Maui, was the basis of the film *Blue Crush*.

In 1999, she co-wrote *The Skinny: What Every Skinny Woman Knows About Dieting (And Won't Tell You!)* under her married name, Susan Sstrom. Her previously published magazine stories have been compiled in two collections, *The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup: My Encounters with Extraordinary People* and *My Kind of Place: Travel Stories from a Woman Who's Been Everywhere*.

She also served as editor for *Best American Essays 2005* and *Best American Travel Writing 2007*. She contributed the Ohio chapter in "State By State" (2008).

In 2011 she published a biographical history about the dog actor *Rin Tin Tin*, followed by *The Ghost Flower* in 2016, and *The Library Book* in 2018. (Adapted from Wikipedia. Retrieved 10/21/2018.)