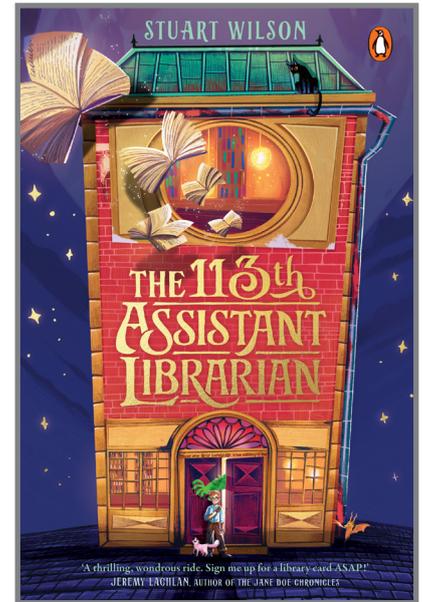


The 113th Assistant Librarian

AUTHOR

STUART WILSON



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

Oliver Wormwood is sure his new job in the library will be boring. Until he learns that books hold great power—and danger.

By the end of his first day, Oliver has witnessed a death, been frozen by a book, met a perplexing number of cats and fought off a horde of terrifying creatures.

With only a mysterious girl called Agatha to show him the ropes, Oliver needs to learn fast . . . if he wants to live longer than the 112 assistant librarians before him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Wilson lives in Naarm/Melbourne with his wife and son. He is the author of the Prometheus High books and *The 113th Assistant Librarian*. While he has never been lost in a library, he did get lost on a plane one time.

THEMES

- Belonging and identity
- Family and friends
- Libraries, books and imagination

STUDY NOTES

- Have you read any of the books the author notes as a favourite below?
 - *The Wump World* by Bill Peet
 - *Harry's Mad* by Dick King-Smith
 - *The Sheep-Pig* by Dick King-Smith
 - *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien
 - *The Book of Three* by Lloyd Alexander

Research one of the books Stuart mentions above. Does this book sound like one you would like to read?

- Can you think of books you've read that feature 'ordinary, inconsequential folk', or books you've read that are about books or libraries?
- Do you have any favourite books? Ones that you consider worthy of re-reading? How would you describe these books? What genre are they?

- Stuart says that libraries are special places to him. Do you feel the same way? What does a library mean to you?
- What do you think about Stuart's comment, 'Do librarians focus on titles people *want* to read, or do they also stock books they think people *should* read?'

BEFORE READING

- Look at the cover. What do you think this book will be about? What elements are there on the cover to make you think this?
- How has the designer used the typography, placement of illustrations and colours to communicate what the book is about and what genre or category it might fit into?
- Do you think the cover would be as effective with a different font? Why or why not?
- Look at the quotes on the front and back cover of the book by Jeremy Lachlan and Amie Kaufman. Based on their quotes, what do you think the book will be like? Does it sound like a book you would enjoy? Why or why not?

WHILE READING

Writing Style

- How would you describe Stuart's writing style?
- Why do you think Stuart chose to write this story in third person and past tense?
- Look at p 146 of the novel. How has the author used different font sizes and forms (capitalisation and lower case) to create variety in the narrative? Do you think this is effective? Can you find other places in the story where this is used?
- How has the author used sound throughout the story? Find a section of text where he's made good use of sounds that Oliver is hearing. How has this been emphasised in the text?

Key Study Topics

Belonging and Identity

- Look at the names the author has used for his characters. (For example: Oliver Wormwood, Simeon Golightly or Hieronymus Finch-Thackeray.) Do you think these have been carefully chosen? Do their names reflect who they are as characters? Why or why not?
- Oliver really wanted to end up apprenticing for one of the 'heroic' trades. Why do you think this was so important to him? Do you think Oliver is at peace with his lot in life by the end of the story? What has changed in his attitude?
- Were you surprised to learn about Oliver's mother's past? Do you know about your parents' lives before you were born?
- If you could choose a Trade from the story, which would you choose and why?
- In small groups, share what you'd like to do when you grow up. Have you been inspired by anyone in your family, or outside your family, to pursue this profession? Now choose one of these activities:
 - Draw a poster that will inspire others to want to join that profession. Write a biographical profile of someone who inspires you.
 - Research the pathway to joining that profession, such as education and skill requirements, and list three activities you could do during your schooling to help you achieve your goal.
- What do you think about the Calling system and how applicants are chosen? Create a job ad that demonstrates various different Trades that an apprentice could be 'Called' to. Don't forget to include skills a person might need, or any special requirements. How will you make the Trades sound appealing to prospective apprentices?
- Look at the differences between the lamplighters' guild (where Oliver's friend London is apprenticed), the apothecary (where Oliver's new friend Ember is apprenticed) and the library. Make a spreadsheet or table to list the rules, benefits and training provided to apprentices at each workplace. Now, write up a charter for the librarians' guild on how to train and treat apprentices. (Things you could include are: working hours including breaks, payment, training, annual leave and career progression.)
- Create a job description for Meredith, Oliver's mum. Use the information given in the text about Umbra agents, but feel free to add in extra information using your imagination.

Family and friends

- How has Oliver's relationship with his family affected his dreams for his future?

- How do different members of Oliver’s family feel about his new job? How do they show they care about Oliver?
- What does Oliver learn about his parents and sisters during the story that changes the way he sees them and interacts with them? Do you think their relationship and behaviour will be different in future?
- Oliver’s life really changes once he becomes the 113th assistant librarian. One of the biggest changes is that he has to leave home and sleep in the library. Do you think you’d be able to do that at the age of twelve or thirteen? What evidence is in the text that Oliver’s family are thinking about him and perhaps missing him now that he lives at the library?
- Who do you think Agatha considers to be her family? Where do you think her family are now?
- Agatha keeps a big secret for most of the book. At any point in the story, did you suspect that she had a secret? Can you find signposts in the text now that you know the truth?
- Draw Oliver’s family tree and list the professions of his parents and siblings.
- Write a short scene in play format showing a conversation between Meredith, Oliver Senior and one of his sisters discussing Oliver’s new apprenticeship. (Choose a location and time of day for the scene.)

Libraries, Books and Imagination

- Oliver is surprised that a library membership is free (p 104). Why do you think it’s important that everyone can have access to the resources at their local library?
- Agatha says that there isn’t a map for the library because the library ‘shifts too much due to the influx of new books.’ (p 53). Do you think the library shifts and changes in other ways when Oliver isn’t looking?
- Once you’ve finished reading the story, think about the way the general community of Blackmoor-upon-Wyvern uses and talks about the library. Do you think they value the service it provides? What evidence in the story supports this?
- Do you think it is okay that the library has rules about things like the dates to return the books by and not allowing firebrakes inside? Can you think of any other rules a library might have? What other rules or guidelines could Oliver put in place so that library patrons behave better and have respect for the library and its staff?
- Books about magical books, magical libraries and bookshops are always popular. Have you read other books that are set in a library or bookshop, such as *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*, *Escape from Mr Lemoncello’s Library*, *Inkheart* or *The Grandest Bookshop in the World*?
- Why do you think these books are popular? Why do you think authors are inspired to write this kind of story?
- Agatha and Oliver discuss how libraries are organised on pp 53 to 55. Agatha asks: ‘Should you place works of fiction in alphabetical order according to title? Or by author? . . . Would you also put them in publication order? . . . And if an author wrote the books out of order, narratively speaking? Should they be in publication order or story order?’ What would your answers be to these questions, and why? How do you organise your books at home?
- At the end of the book, there is a note saying: ‘Oliver’s next adventure as The 113th Assistant Librarian is coming soon!’ What do you think his next adventure will be? What type of direction do you think Stuart will take the characters in? What are the obvious (or less obvious!) plotlines or story threads that might be picked up again next time around?
- Look up the website for your local library and make a list of all the services it provides that help people in the community.
- Visit your school or community library and interview the librarian about their job and the services they provide.
- Research jobs you could get in a library. What type of study does it take to become a librarian?
- Are there different types of librarians? Why do you think this is so?
- Research how libraries are usually organised. What is the Dewey Decimal Classification and how does it classify books?
- There are many famous or beautiful libraries around the world. Choose one of the below (or find one of your own) to research and write a report on this library’s origins, founders, history, type of collection or specialty, architecture, and three other interesting facts about it (such as rare books or manuscripts it holds).
 - New York Public Library
 - National Library of Australia
 - Wren Library at Trinity College, Cambridge
 - Trinity College Library, Dublin
 - Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt
 - The Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA
 - The Admont Monastery Library, Austria

- Bodleian Library, Oxford, England
- The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, USA
- State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
- Vatican Library, Rome, Italy.
- Oliver has some dangerous encounters with books when he first starts working at the library. Create your own magical book. Give it a title and author name. What is the magical component about your book?
- Windows—in particular stained-glass windows—are important to the story. Research how stained-glass windows are created. When were they most popular in history? What type of building commonly still has stained-glass windows?
- ‘My dear boy, books are powerful . . .’ The librarian paused to cough with a horrible chesty rattle, wincing as he did. ‘They are more than simple bound pages. Books may record the past, predict the future, or hold the darkest of secrets. At their best, they are societal equalisers. At their worst . . . well! Words can teach the truth as easily as they can spin a lie. And that’s not even considering that which lurks between the lines. The knife of interpretation is paper-thin, yet it cuts through minds with the slightest of pressure. Underestimate books at your peril.’ (p 32). Do you agree with Hieronymus Finch-Thackeray’s opinion about books? Can you think of any books that have affected or changed history? Or any that have been so controversial at the time that they were ridiculed or challenged, but are now respected? Do you think that the value of words remains the same throughout history?
 - Can you think of examples of people in power using words to achieve their own ends? What do you think Hieronymus means by ‘that which lurks between the lines’?
- “‘No one values the spoken word anymore,” Simeon explained. ‘Libraries herald the death of verbal storytelling. If everything’s written down in books, there’s no need to remember anything. And our memory is like a muscle – if we don’t flex it, it wastes away.’ (pp 132-133).
- Simeon (a wandering storyteller) is worried that libraries will put him out of a job. Do you think his concern is justified? Can you think of times in history when other technologies have made people worry about their job or industry being made obsolete? Have there been times when books have been threatened by technological advancements? Do you think Simeon is right when he says our memory is like a muscle? How do you think technology has changed the way we use our brains? Do you think we ‘flex our memories’ like we used to twenty years ago?
- Why do you think Ember looks so different in her working environment? Can you find evidence in the text in this chapter as to why she might be feeling this way?
- ‘Power recognises power.’ (p 216). What do you think Oliver means by this? Do you think it could be applied to situations other than those involving magic? (Think of the different types of ‘power’ that can exist in the real world.)

AFTER READING

- By the end of the story, Oliver has met seven of the nine cats who live in the library: Arawn, Grey Reaper, Harmony, Sentinel, Clod, Fennec and Tailless. Draw the two cats that are still to be revealed. (Use the descriptions given in Chapter 19.) Give them names and personalities.
- Create a Personnel File for some of the previous assistant librarians. List their names, experiences while working in the library, and how they came to end their tenure as assistant librarian.
- Write a short script about Hieronymus’s interview to be assistant librarian when he was a boy.
- Draw or paint a stained-glass window design featuring aspects of the world and story elements in *The 113th Assistant Librarian*.
- Oliver has a few ‘tools of the trade’ to help him do this job: the bookmark, the stamps, etc. Do you think there could have been other tools that would have been helpful for him to have? Create your own tool for the assistant librarian. Draw a picture of it as well.
- Choose one of the books that are mentioned in the story, listed below on the following page, and write a back cover blurb for this title describing what it is about or why people should read it. Make up a ‘praise quote’ from an author (of your own creation) who has read and reviewed the book, like the quotes Stuart has received from authors including Jeremy Lachlan and Amie Kaufman.
 - Write the opening paragraph of that book. What writing style would suit that book?
- Look at the list of books below and work out which section of the library each book would likely be shelved in. What advanced Dewey Decimal Classification might it be shelved under?

- In pairs, choose a book from the list—decide which of you will be the ‘author’ of the book, and which will be the journalist interviewing the author about their book. Write a script for this interview including five journalist questions and author responses, and perform it for the class.
 - The Highwaywoman of Nightshade Forest by C. L. Longvist
 - The Migration of Woodlice During the Warmer Months, a Detailed Treatise by Theodotus Crepuscular
 - Journey Across the Northern Ice Floes by Dame Amelia Poleglaze
 - And All That Has Been: A Cataloguing of Time
 - The Adventures of Duchess Marigold in the Tortuous Tundra
 - The Mysterious Affair of the Velvet Morning Star
 - The Somewhat Unsettling and Mostly Malodorous Voyages with the Spiteful Pirate Hookbeard by Anonymous
 - The Book of Lives by J. S. Webber
 - The Nonapod Horribilissimus
 - Bolinger’s Theory of Adhesion
 - A Collection of Children’s Tales Both Fae and Frightening (Translated from the Original Alcest)
 - Huntress of the Lake by Lucy Esquire
 - The Peach-Loving Orangutan’s Lament, a Comedy in Three Acts by Aloysius Dutch
 - The Dragon’s Obsession
 - Halley’s Cornucopia of Fruits
 - Wrath of the Serpent King.
- Look at the list below of some of the different library categories that the Blockmoor-upon-Wyvern library uses. Do you think all these categories would be used in your local library? Why or why not?
- What do you think the difference is between ‘Firsthand accounts of Past Events’, ‘Accounts of Past Events that Probably Never Happened’ and ‘Scried Accounts of Past Events’?
- Pick two of the categories that you are not familiar with and research them. Try to find two examples of published books that might fit that category. Do you think they deserve a separate section in the library? Or do you think they could be filed under a more general or overarching category?
 - Accounts of Past Events that Probably Never Happened
 - Atlases
 - Autobiography
 - Biography
 - Cartography
 - Crime fiction
 - Cryology
 - Cynology
 - Drama
 - Ethics of Philosophy
 - Eschatology
 - Fables
 - Firsthand accounts of past events
 - Gemmology
 - Genealogy
 - Geography
 - Geology
 - Humorism
 - Illuminated Manuscripts
 - Incunabula
 - Lepidopteroology
 - Necromancy
 - Pictorial Humour
 - Philosophy of Ethics

- Political Science
- Scried Accounts of Past Events
- Travel
- True Crime.