

The Lost Library

AUTHORS

REBECCA STEAD AND WENDY MASS



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

When a mysterious little free library (guarded by a large orange cat) appears overnight in the small town of Martinville, eleven-year-old Evan plucks two weathered books from its shelves, never suspecting that his life is about to change.

Evan and his best friend Rafe quickly discover a link between one of the old books and a long-ago event that none of the grown-ups want to talk about. The two boys start asking questions whose answers will transform not only their own futures, but the town itself.

Told in turn by a ghost librarian named Al, an ageing (but beautiful) cat named Mortimer and Evan himself, *The Lost Library* is a timeless story from award-winning authors Rebecca Stead and Wendy Mass. It's about owning your truth, choosing the life you want, and the power of a good book (and, of course, the librarian who gave it to you).

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.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- *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.
- 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

- What is Evan supposed to write in his journal? What does he end up using the journal for?
- Why do you think Mortimer refuses to leave his position outside with the library?

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

AFTER READING

Character

- 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)
- Who do you think the 'dear boy' in the library is? What clues give away his identity? Why do you think the authors don't tell you who he is at the beginning of the story?
- What do you think Al is afraid of? Why would she rather people think she's a ghost than go out into the world?
- 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

- 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). In *The Lost Library*, the authors, 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

- How does Evan feel about middle school? Does everyone else feel the same way? Why/why not?
- Why are the ghosts finding it harder and harder to hold onto reality? What change has sparked their transition? What finally sets them free?
- What does Demetri say to Evan that makes him feel a bit better about middle school?
- What do you think the story ultimately says about change? Is it a good or a bad thing?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- Books have changed the lives of many characters in the story. Choose one and discuss how books have changed their life?
- 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?
- 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?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- 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?
- 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?
- '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.
- 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?
- 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.