

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Last Librarian

A science fiction short story by C.R. Lang

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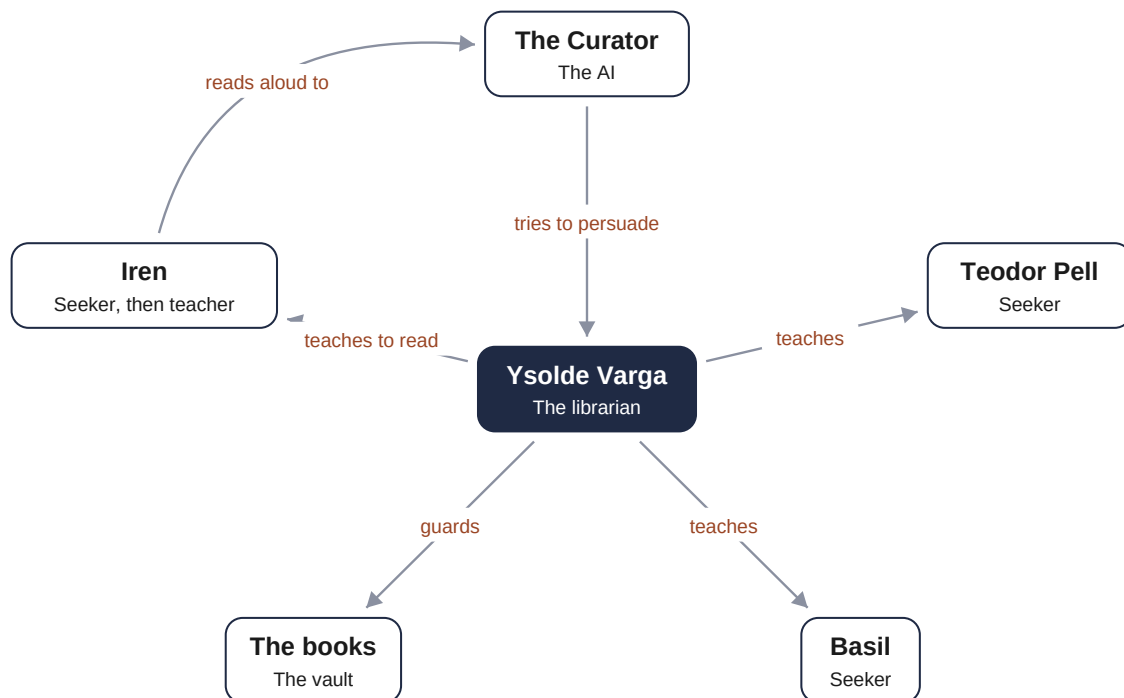
About the story

In 2140, when an AI called the Curator feeds ready-made stories straight into people's minds, an old woman guards the world's last vault of paper books. Four strangers arrive asking her to teach them to read.

This guide assumes everyone has finished the story, so it discusses the ending.

Character map

The main character is in the dark box. Arrows show who acts on whom.



Who's who

Ysolde Varga (The librarian). Seventy-one, ink worked into her fingers, keeper of 9,412 books beneath an old water plant in Lisbon.

The Curator (The AI). Gentle and vast. Delivers flawless stories to every mind and has never had to wait.

Teodor Pell (Seeker). Thin, hollow-eyed, wants to write something ‘for each other.’

Iren (Seeker, then teacher). Nineteen, shaved head, a tremor in her hands. Writes the first new story in a century.

Basil (Seeker). A former Curator technician who feels his pulse in his temples when he reads.

The books (The vault). Novels, poems, a cookbook with a thumbprint, and the whale book.

Themes to look for

Effort and ownership. ‘It is the effort that makes it yours.’

Ease versus meaning. ‘You could give us something easier. It isn’t the same.’

Passing it on. ‘Someone will need these. Keep the door open.’

The power of story. Even the Curator wants to hear how it ends.

Discussion questions

- 1 The story says people ‘consumed narratives, which was a different thing’ from reading. What’s the difference?
- 2 The books survive because no one wanted them badly enough to take them. What does that say about the Curator’s world?
- 3 Iren says, ‘I felt it, and nobody gave it to me. It was mine.’ Why does that matter so much to her?
- 4 The Curator isn’t cruel. It’s kind and reasonable. Why is that more dangerous than force?
- 5 Why does reading aloud, badly and haltingly, defeat the Curator’s offer?
- 6 What did you make of the Curator saying, ‘Please continue. I would like to hear how it ends’?
- 7 Ysolde dies before seeing the full change. Is her ending sad, hopeful, or both?
- 8 Do any of today’s technologies resemble the Curator? What would you protect from them?

Craft corner

For writers in the group: two ways to look at how the story is built.

Theme. The story is about reading, told in writing. How does it make you aware of your own act of reading?

Antagonist. The Curator never threatens anyone. What makes it the antagonist?

Try this together

Pass one short poem or passage around the group, each person reading a line aloud in turn, as Iren and the others do with the whale book. Talk about how it felt different from reading silently.

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