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# Miss Morgan's Book Brigade

by Janet Skeslien Charles




## About the Book

**The *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author of the ?captivating, richly drawn? (*Woman?s World* ) THE PARIS LIBRARY returns with a brilliant new novel based on the true story of Jessie Carson --- the American librarian who changed the literary landscape of France.**

1918: As the Great War rages, Jessie Carson takes a leave of absence from the New York Public Library to work for the American Committee for Devastated France. Founded by millionaire Anne Morgan, this group of international women help rebuild destroyed French communities just miles from the front. Upon arrival, Jessie strives to establish something that the French have never seen --- children?s libraries. She turns ambulances into bookmobiles and trains the first French female librarians. Then she disappears.

1987: When NYPL librarian and aspiring writer Wendy Peterson stumbles across a passing reference to Jessie Carson in the archives, she becomes consumed with learning her fate. In her obsessive research, she discovers that she and the elusive librarian have more in common than their work at New York?s famed library, but she has no idea their paths will converge in surprising ways across time.

Based on the extraordinary little-known history of the women who received the Croix de Guerre medal for courage under fire, MISS MORGAN'S BOOK BRIGADE is a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit, the power of literature, and ultimately the courage it takes to make a change.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** MISS MORGAN'S BOOK BRIGADE was inspired by the real-life work of Anne Morgan, Jessie Carson and the women known as Cards (an acronym from *Le Comité américain pour les regions dévastées*). Were you at all familiar with this piece of history prior to reading the novel?

**2.** Anne Morgan, as the daughter of millionaire J. P. Morgan, and Jessie ?Kit? Carson, who actually draws a salary as part of her contract with the American Committee for Devastated France, come from very different backgrounds. How do the class differences factor in, if at all, to the stories of these two women?

**3.** Why do you think Janet Skeslien Charles decided to interweave dual narratives in this story? What does the narrative of Wendy in 1987 reveal about Kit and the women in 1918, and vice versa?

**4.** Wendy Patterson works in the Remembrance Department of the New York Public Library, where she is used to handling priceless documents and artifacts. What, if anything, is revealed about Wendy?s character when she takes the Card documents off-site? Was her coworker Roberto justified in his frustrations over that choice?

**5.** Many classic children?s books are referenced throughout the novel, from ANNE OF GREEN GABLES and THE WIZARD OF OZ to THE LITTLE PRINCE. Many of these are still widely read today. What is it about these stories that enables them to seamlessly cross generations?

**6.** When we first meet Kit, she frequently recounts the opinions of others in her head, such as those of her mother and her former boss at the NYPL. As Kit grows into her place in France, those voices matter less. Do you think Kit?s confidence in her ability to make a difference grows throughout the book? Can you pinpoint it to one experience?

**7.** We see Kit reach out to Sidonie, the village recluse, by reassembling her late husband?s book with a new binding. She lends local villager Jeanne a copy of ALICE IN WONDERLAND to help cope with the loss of her sister. These are two small acts of kindness involving books that have lasting effects on those characters. What does this say about the role of books in our lives? Have you ever used a book to reach out to someone?

**8.** We learn a lot about Kit?s relationships with Tom, her sister Mabel, and her mother through excerpts of her letters. From a distance, they experience Kit?s life in France, and she has a specific tone in communicating with each person. How do those relationships change, if at all, over the course of the book?

**9.** France could be considered its own character in the book, from the use of language to the descriptions of food and the characters? travels through northern France to Paris. What stands out the most about France in this time period? Did anything surprise you?

**10.** Wendy?s professor suggests that readers won?t be able to identify with the Cards if she presents them as perfect figures in her writing. Do you agree with that? What would you have done in Wendy?s shoes?

**11.** We learn that Kit chooses to leave her position with CARD and move on to another opportunity after she is denied a salary bonus. Was Kit correct in her decision to move on? Do you think it was just a matter of the money, or was there something larger there?

**12.** Why do you think the important work of these women, such as helping with evacuations, rebuilding communities,

and bringing hope and care to so many people, has been lost to time when compared to some of the other stories you hear from World War I? Would it be different if the work were done in, say, 1987, when Wendy?s story takes place? What about in 2024?

## Author Bio

Janet Skeslien Charles is the *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author of THE PARIS LIBRARY. Her work has been translated into 37 languages. She has spent a decade researching Jessie Carson (MISS MORGAN'S BOOK BRIGADE) at The Morgan Library, the NYPL and archives across France. Her shorter work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *LitHub* and the anthology MONTANA NOIR.

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