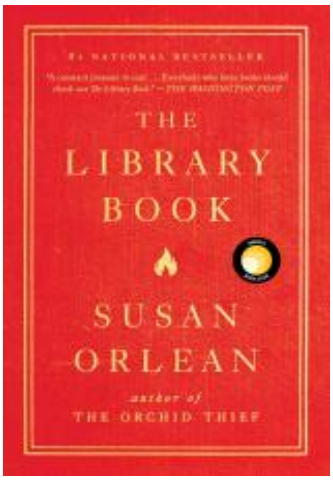
The Library Book

by Susan Orlean



About the Book

Susan Orlean?s bestseller and *New York Times* Notable Book is ?a sheer delight?as rich in insight and as varied as the treasures contained on the shelves in any local library? (*USA TODAY*) --- a dazzling love letter to a beloved institution and an investigation into one of its greatest mysteries. ?Everybody who loves books should check out THE LIBRARY BOOK? (*The Washington Post*).

On the morning of April 29, 1986, a fire alarm sounded in the Los Angeles Public Library. As the moments passed, the patrons and staff who had been cleared out of the building realized this was not the usual fire alarm. As one fireman recounted, ?Once that first stack got going, it was ?Goodbye, Charlie.?? The fire was disastrous: it reached 2,000 degrees and burned for more than seven hours. By the time it was extinguished, it had consumed 400,000 books and damaged 700,000 more. Investigators descended on the scene, but more than 30 years later, the mystery remains: Did someone purposefully set fire to the library --- and if so, who?

Weaving her lifelong love of books and reading into an investigation of the fire, award-winning *New Yorker* reporter and *New York Times* bestselling author Susan Orlean delivers a ?delightful...reflection on the past, present, and future of libraries in America? (*New York* magazine) that manages to tell the broader story of libraries and librarians in a way that has never been done before.

In the ?exquisitely written, consistently entertaining? (*The New York Times*) THE LIBRARY BOOK, Orlean chronicles the LAPL fire and its aftermath to showcase the larger, crucial role that libraries play in our lives; delves into the evolution of libraries; brings each department of the library to vivid life; studies arson and attempts to burn a copy of a book herself; and reexamines the case of Harry Peak, the blond-haired actor long suspected of setting fire to the LAPL more than 30 years ago.

?A book lover?s dream?an ambitiously researched, elegantly written book that serves as a portal into a place of history,

drama, culture, and stories? (*Star Tribune*, Minneapolis), Susan Orlean?s thrilling journey through the stacks reveals how these beloved institutions provide much more than just books --- and why they remain an essential part of the heart, mind and soul of our country.

Discussion Guide

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 five, 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

Susan Orlean has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1992. She is the *New York Times* bestselling author of seven books, including THE LIBRARY BOOK, RIN TIN TIN, SATURDAY NIGHT, and THE ORCHID THIEF, which was made into the Academy Award?winning film *Adaptation*. She lives with her family and her animals in Los Angeles.

The Library Book

by Susan Orlean

Publication Date: October 16, 2018
Genres: History, Literature, Nonfiction
Hardcover: 336 pages
Publisher: Simon & Schuster
ISBN-10: 1476740186
ISBN-13: 9781476740188