



The Paris Library: A Novel by Janet Skeslien Charles

Martin County Library System Book Club Kit:

The Paris Library: A Novel by Janet Skeslien Charles

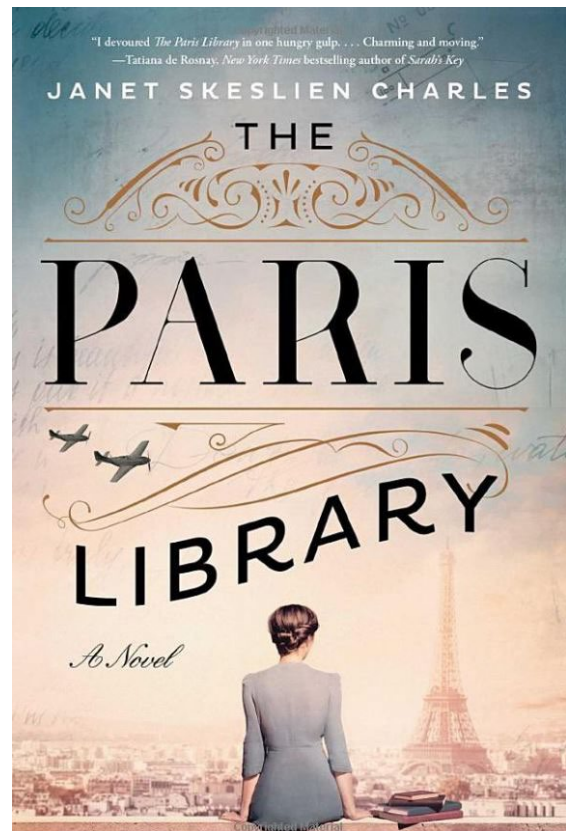
Included in the Kit:

- [Book summary](#)
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Book summary

An instant *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA TODAY* bestseller—based on the true story of the heroic librarians at the American Library in Paris during World War II—*The Paris Library* is a moving and unforgettable “ode to the importance of libraries, books, and the human connections we find within both” (Kristin Harmel, *New York Times* bestselling author).

Paris, 1939: Young and ambitious Odile Souchet seems to have the perfect life with her handsome police officer beau and a dream job at the American Library in Paris. When the Nazis march into the city, Odile stands to lose everything she holds dear, including her beloved library. Together with her fellow



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librarians, Odile joins the Resistance with the best weapons she has: books. But when the war finally ends, instead of freedom, Odile tastes the bitter sting of unspeakable betrayal.

Montana, 1983: Lily is a lonely teenager looking for adventure in small-town Montana. Her interest is piqued by her solitary, elderly neighbor. As Lily uncovers more about her neighbor's mysterious past, she finds that they share a love of language, the same longings, and the same intense jealousy, never suspecting that a dark secret from the past connects them.

“A love letter to Paris, the power of books, and the beauty of intergenerational friendship” (*Booklist*), *The Paris Library* shows that extraordinary heroism can sometimes be found in the quietest places.

Source: Simon and Schuster. (simonandschuster.com/books/The-Paris-Library/Janet-Skeslien-Charles/9781797104997)





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Meet the Author

Janet Skeslien Charles is the award-winning author of *Moonlight in Odessa* and *The Paris Library*. *Moonlight in Odessa* is her first novel. It was chosen as a top ten debut novel by *Publishers Weekly* and as book of the month by *National Geographic Traveler* magazine.

Janet first became interested in the incredible true story of the librarians who stood up to the Nazi “Book Protector” when she worked as the program’s manager at the American Library in Paris. Her novel *The Paris Library* was an instant *New York Times* Best Seller and named Most Anticipated Book of the Year by *Library Journal* and Goodreads.



The wit, empathy, and meticulous research that brings *The Paris Library* to life also brings to light a cast of lively real-life characters and a little-known chapter of World War II history: the story of the American librarian, Miss Reeder, who created the Soldiers’ Service to deliver books to servicemen, and who later faced the Nazi ‘Library Protector’ in order to keep her library open. She and her colleagues defied the Bibliotheksschutz by delivering books to Jewish readers after they were forbidden from entering the library.

Her shorter work has appeared in revues such as *Slice* and *Montana Noir*. She divides her time between Montana and Paris.

Source: Authors Unbound. (authorsunbound.com/janet-skeslien-charles)



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Discussion Questions

1. Chapter 1 begins with Odile noting that “numbers floated round my head like stars” (p. 3) as she runs through the Dewey Decimal system in her head. What does this opening say about her?
2. When Odile is first introduced as Mrs. Gustafson, Lily notes that she “donned her Sunday best—a pleated skirt and high heels—just to take out the trash. A red belt showed off her waist. Always” (p. 10). What does the red belt represent? And why, at the end of the novel, does she replace “her tatty red belt with a stylish black one” (p. 344)?
3. Miss Reeder “was adamant that there was a place here for everyone” (p. 3) at the Library. How do she and others like Boris and the Countess prove that throughout the Occupation?
4. Odile and Lily come from very different backgrounds, different countries, and different eras. Where do they find common ground?
5. Among the Library’s subscribers and habitués are many fascinating and eccentric characters, such as Professor Cohen and Mr. Pryce-Jones. Who is your favorite, and why?
6. Consider Odile’s Aunt Caroline, and how Caro’s experience informs Odile’s decisions regarding Paul and Buck. Do you believe Odile’s assertion that her mother would “cast me out, just like Aunt Caro” (p. 332)?
7. Why do you think Janet Skeslien Charles decided to interweave Lily’s story, set in Montana in the 1980s, with Odile’s story in Paris during World War II? What do the dual narratives reveal, and how do they reflect on each other?
8. How is Lily’s adolescence in Montana similar to Odile’s own coming-of-age in Paris? How do books and learning the French language serve as a refuge for Lily?
9. Odile refers to Bitsi as her “bookmate” (p. 50) and later reflects on their experiences by noting that “coming face-to-face with Bitsi is like looking in the mirror” (p. 166). How does their friendship develop over the course of the novel?



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10. When Professor Cohen finishes her manuscript, she knows she cannot publish it, and she entrusts it to Odile, saying, “Books and ideas are like blood; they need to circulate, and they keep us alive. Without you, I couldn’t have continued this long. You’ve reminded me that there’s good in the world” (p. 240). What does this speech mean to you? Does this serve as greater motivation for Odile to continue her work?
11. Odile discovers the “crow letters,” letters and “denunciations...from black-hearted people who spy on neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Even family members” (p. 283) in her father’s office. Lily, too, finds the letters at Odile’s house. What do these letters, signed by “one who knows,” show? Why do you think the author includes them?
12. Toward the end of the novel, after the Liberation, we see the insidious cycle of violence as Paul and his colleagues attack Margaret, stating, “She wasn’t a woman to them, not anymore. They’d been beaten and humiliated. Now it was their turn to beat, to strike, to slash” (p. 312). How does this event change the course of the novel? How do these men perpetuate the cycle of violence? Would you have reacted as Odile does, or what would you have done differently?
13. At the end of the novel, Odile says that “it seemed that life had offered me an epilogue” (p. 342). How does Lily and Odile’s intergenerational friendship provide them both with a safe place to grow?

Source: Author's website. (jskesliencharles.com/book-clubs)



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Recipes

Brown Butter Financiers

- 1 cup (140g) almond or hazelnut flour
- 3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons (180g) sugar
- 5 tablespoons (45g) flour
- Generous pinch salt
- 4 large egg whites, at room temperature
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla or almond extract
- 2 1/2 ounces (75g) brown butter, slightly warm (liquified)



Preheat the oven to 375°F/180°C and butter the insides of 24 mini muffin tins generously with softened, not melted, butter, making sure the butter the upper rims of the indentations. In a medium bowl, mix the almond or hazelnut flour, sugar, flour, and salt. Stir in the egg whites and vanilla or almond extract, then the browned butter. Fill each indentation of the mini muffin tins almost to the top. Rap the tins sharply on the counter to level the tops, then bake for 13 minutes, until nicely browned. Let the financiers cool in the tins, then remove them, using a sharp knife to help release them, if necessary.

Source: Author's website. (jskesliencharles.com/book-clubs)



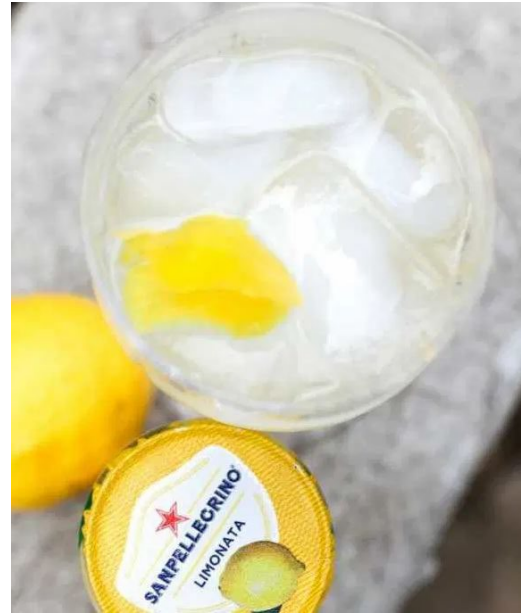
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French 75 Mocktail Recipe

- 2 oz. lemon juice
- 2 oz. simple syrup
- Sparkling Water
- San Pellegrino Limonata Soda
- Ice
- Lemon Twists

Mix lemon juice and simple syrup in a glass. Pour in ice and stir. Top with equal parts sparkling water and San Pellegrino Limonata Soda. Mix once more. Garnish with a lemon twist + rub a lemon peel around the rim of the glass. Enjoy!



Source: JCPeats. (jcpeats.com/recipes/french-75-mocktail-recipe)

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