

A Teacher's Guide for

ASH AND QUILL



Volume 3 of the Great Library

by

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This third volume about a world where the Great Library of Alexandria never burned finds Jess Brightwell and his friends trapped inside the city of Philadelphia ... but one we wouldn't recognize. The United States doesn't exist; what we know as America is divided up in English and Spanish territories. Philadelphia, like many other American cities, still has that rebellious attitude, though, and especially Philadelphia, which was taken over a hundred years ago by Burner forces. The Burners are rebels against the Great Library ... and terrorists, who carry on a guerilla campaign in Library-friendly cities.

Jess and his friends are prisoners. They have to play a dangerous game with their Burners captors, giving just enough to keep themselves safe, while all around the city, Library forces wait for the signal to destroy the town. They need to escape, and make their way to safety ... but at what cost? And once they've managed that, they face a whole new challenge: eluding Jess's own family, and finding a way to take the fight, finally, back to the Archivist for the freedom of all.

This entry into the Great Library series addresses themes that are very current to our time ... the ownership of information, censorship, terrorism, and the price that sometimes must be paid for both freedom, and justice.

You can download READ posters and the booktrailer at the Great Library website:

<http://www.enterthelibrary.com>



CONTENT

This book contains intense scenes of violence, war and death, and may be upsetting to younger readers.

There is some moderate romantic content, with some implied sexual situations.

ALTERNATE HISTORY

This book fits the definition of *alternate history*, which is a brand of science fiction; it describes a world in which history proceeded on a different course, normally from a single important event. In this world, the Great Library of Alexandria was saved by a common accord between (first) Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, who agreed that it should be always sacred, even in war, as a great resource to all nations. This agreement spread to include almost all nations over time, and while the Library did experience periods of trouble, the formation of their army (the *High Garda*, a term adapted from the Irish) assured the survival of not just the Great Library itself, but other libraries it annexed and put under its protection, one by one. Because of this, there has been remarkably little information lost.

However, there is one great truth about the Library that is *also* drawn from history: it was not, as one might assume today, a totally altruistic organization. In fact, many of the first volumes placed within the Library were done so by Pharaonic orders—confiscated from owners and visitors, and placed into the collection by force. In addition, the Great Library's vast resources were *not* available to the general public, but to a select group of scholars. The development of the *Serapeum*, the daughter library that became open to the public (though, again, a select few), came later.

With that in mind, and the fact that *any* organization, no matter how originally pure, develops internal politics and an entrenched mindset over time ... the Library becomes a nation-state of its own, much like the Vatican. That requires it to engage in politics and self-preservation of the status quo.

The development of the printing press would have meant the death of the Library's stranglehold on power and knowledge ... and so, it was suppressed, the knowledge destroyed or hidden away. But it's a development that is so logical and important that it keeps surfacing, and forcing the Library to defend itself again and again against a purely good thing ... which makes the Library itself the evil in the world.

This is a book about the nature of information, ownership, and guardianship of heritage. It's a book about books and e-books, the Internet and print, rigid beliefs and violent revolution.

I think there's a lot in it that speaks to our modern world.

RESEARCH AND INFORMATION

Part of creating the world of the Great Library led to many fun and interesting discoveries, so here is a partial list of classroom resources you can use to discuss the novel, history, and other fun and fascinating topics.

The Great Library

- Here's a great, brief summary of the history and end of the Library: http://www.serageldin.com/ancient_Library.htm
- Bede's Library online has another great summary: <http://www.bede.org.uk/library.htm>
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Lost Libraries

- A great list of 11 lost libraries, with descriptions (or at least estimates) of what was destroyed: <http://www.strangehistory.net/2014/04/29/12-burning-libraries-book-lovers-beware/>
- Wikipedia has a great list of lost and destroyed libraries from ancient times to modern, and it's a staggering number: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_destroyed_libraries
- Listverse has a fascinating record of great works (mainly books) that only narrowly avoided being lost forever: <http://listverse.com/2014/08/20/10-priceless-cultural-works-we-nearly-lost-forever/>
- And to bring it home, here's an article on the fire that destroyed two-thirds of the Library of Congress in 1851: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fire-ravages-library-of-congress>

Automata

- There's plenty of evidence that the ancient Greeks were amazingly advanced in engineering that wouldn't be rediscovered for a thousand years or more ... lots to delve into here on the Ancient Wisdom site: <http://www.ancient-wisdom.com/greekautomata.htm>

I've also linked many resources at the Great Library website:

<http://www.enterthelibrary.com>

CHARACTERS

The key to writing interesting and engaging characters, whether they are to be seen as heroes or villains, is to believe that each of them, in their mind, is the hero of his or her own story. Their actions are driven by what they think is good – either for themselves, or for others.

- **Jess** is an adventurer—and a boy with a genuine love of books. In this book, Jess has grown accustomed to his role as both smuggler and soldier ... but not to making difficult and costly decisions. Trapped in Philadelphia, he'll have to endure great hardship, and deceive people who trust him. Later, when he realizes that his father plans to betray them, he'll have to make a very hard choice ... will he allow his friends to be taken, or will he betray his own family to save them? Questions for students could include:
 - What other choices could Jess have made in Philadelphia?
 - Do you think he was right to switch places with his twin and take Wolfe and Morgan to Alexandria?
 - What do you think Jess intends to do now?
- **Thomas** started as a pure believer in the Great Library, but his faith has been heavily tested; the Library arrested and tortured him. But now Thomas is determined to weaken the Library's hold on the world with the construction and distribution of his printing press.
 - What qualities does Thomas possess now that he hasn't in previous books? How do you think he's changed?
 - How do you think his printing press will change the world?
- **Morgan** has gone from someone still uncertain about her power to an Obscurist with real potential to do both good and harm, as we see in Philadelphia ... she can heal, and without proper control, she can also kill. Power has a price.
 - Do you think that Morgan's power is going to be an asset, or a liability, to the team in the future? How might she influence the fight to come?
 - Do you think Morgan has the same goals as the others?
- **Khalila** is also coming into her own; she has an extraordinary mind, and now, she's starting to be an extraordinary diplomat as well.

- Khalila's religion doesn't define her as a person ... do students find that strange? Or does it make her more realistic?
- Dario's character takes on additional dimensions here, too ... developing from a bully into a real ally, and a worthy foil for Jess to move their planning forward.
 - Do students find Dario to be more or less sympathetic now? Do they believe that he intends to double-cross everyone, again? Or is he using his powers for the good of the group now?

These five are the prime movers of this particular novel, and each has a unique perspective that *could* be written as the main character ... yet it would be a very different book from each perspective.

Ash and Quill, and all books in this series, can be a way to illustrate to students how every character in a book, no matter how incidental, can take on depth and life if allowed their own stage and perspective.

Sample class exercise



Choose a character from *Ash and Quill* and write a short scene that doesn't occur in the book ... maybe between Dario and Khalila, or Khalila and Glain while they are in Willinger Beck's office working. Try identifying the essential nature of each character and writing a scene to enhance that trait.

Write a scene from the perspective of one of the Philadelphia characters ... how do they view the Library newcomers? How do they react to them when they meet them? This allows you to switch point of view and discover the world from another perspective.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the world of the Great Library, books are seen as quite valuable and revered objects. Are there any books you can think of that our current world sees the same way?
 - *Sample discussions could include religious books or texts, rare books, autographed books, and comics ... Action #1, the first comic with Superman, sold two years ago for \$2.5 million! Collectors of rare and valuable books do exist in our world, and black market does as well. Fun fact: actor Nicolas Cage is a comic collector, and his Action #1 was stolen from him, recovered, and recently sold for over \$1.5 million.*
- Why do you think the Burners have been allowed to remain in possession of the city of Philadelphia for so long? What might have held the Library back from destroying them earlier?
 - *Historically, some towns have endured sieges for up to thirty years that we know of ... in mythology, some have gone even longer. A good example (and one that could surprise students) is the siege of Philadelphia ... which was an ancient city in Turkey that was under siege from 1378 to 1390.*
 - *Part of the reason the Library didn't destroy the city completely was for the public relations value of surrender and capture. They were afraid that destroying the city would create more resistance elsewhere. Does that sound familiar? We see the same debates in how to conduct operations against modern-day terrorists.*
- Were you surprised that Jess and Dario had a plan to get the team safely out of England, in anticipation of Jess's family's betrayal? Why or why not?
 - *Jess and Dario talk about playing chess and the long game ... Jess knows his "opponent" -- his father -- and knows that at a certain point, it will be in his family's best interests to appease the Library and sell his friends back to the Archivist. Dario sees it because he doesn't trust Jess's family at all.*
- When Jess trades places with his brother, what do you think his ultimate plan is? Did you expect him to do that?

- *In future books, Jess will be playing a dangerous game as an ally to the Archivist, facilitating damage that his friends do from inside the Library.*
- **Ultimately, who would you guess becomes the new Archivist in Alexandria? It could be any of our main characters. Which would be the best?**
 - *Scholar Wolfe is an obvious choice ... but does he have the personality necessary to lead the Library forward?*
 - *Captain Santi might take the job, but as a soldier, is he qualified to make decisions about the future of the Library?*
 - *Jess probably wouldn't even consider taking the job, though he might be good at it. Why wouldn't he? Think about his reluctance to follow his family's business and inherit that responsibility.*
 - *Thomas would be a good choice: he's thoughtful, responsible, and smart. But he'll always be drawn to inventing more than administration.*
 - *Glain would reject it from the start, though she'd gladly end up the Commander of the High Garda if she could.*
 - *Morgan has a horror of being trapped, and she might see the position of the Archivist as a lifelong burden.*
 - *Dario is ambitious enough, and smart enough; he might be a very good choice for Archivist. He also has political connections through his family.*
 - *Khalila, however, is a great choice. She's brilliant, courageous, brave, and inspiring. She might be just the right person to lead the Library into the future.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel is the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and #1 internationally bestselling author of more than fifty novels, including the popular Morganville Vampire young adult series, and the critically acclaimed novel *Prince of Shadows*.

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She does not charge speaking fees for schools or libraries as a matter of policy, but may request defrayment of expenses for lodging and transportation.

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