

Woman in the Library Discussion Questions

by Sulari Gentill

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction)

Sulari Gentill is an Australian author, also known under the pen name of S.D. Gentill. She initially studied astrophysics before becoming a corporate lawyer, but has since become a writer.



Characters:

- **Leo Johnson:**
 - Real Life – Aspiring writer. Corresponding with Hannah Tigone, a successful author.
 - Character in Story - From Alabama. Living as a writer in residence in Boston. Working from the Boston Public Library.
 - **Hannah Tigone** – “Real Life” published successful author. Australian. Corresponding with Leo.
 - **Alexandria Gainsborough** – Agent who turned down “Real” Leo’s manuscript. Died.
 - **Agent Michael Smith** – “Real life” FBI agent in charge of a string of murders in Boston.
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- **Winifred “Freddie” Kincaid** – Australian living in Boston. Female aspiring writer at Library. Sinclair scholarship Writer-in-Residence in Boston. Has a year to write her book. Had a younger sister, Gerry, who died when she was 11.
 - **Cain McLeod** – Handsome man in library. Published writer. (Abel Manners). Was incarcerated for the murder of his stepfather when he was 16.
 - **Marigold Anastas** – “Freud Girl” – Has tattoos and a nose ring. Studying psychology at Harvard/ library. Is romantically interested in Whit Metters.
 - **Whit Metters** – “Heroic Chin” – Law student who wants to fail. Used to be a reporter at *The Rag*. Parents are successful lawyers.
 - **Boo – Shaun Jacobs** – Homeless man who hits Cain with a bottle. He is later murdered.
 - **Isaac Harmon** – Homeless man who once knew Cain when he was young and homeless. Was killed 5 years ago. Stabbed.
 - **Frank Metters** – Whit’s father. Attorney. Easy going.
 - **Jean Metters** – Whit’s mother. Attorney. Strict.
 - **Caroline Palfrey** – Murder victim in the Boston Public library. Body found in the Chavannes Gallery. Reporter for a tabloid called “The Rag”.
 - **Lauren Penfold** – Reporter at *The Rag* who worked with Caroline Palfrey and Whit Metters.
 - **Detectives David Walker & Justine Dwyer** – Police officers in charge of Boo’s murder inquiry.

- **Mrs. Weinbaum** – Older woman who lives in same building as Freddie. Pretended to be a doctor while stitching Cain’s injury. Lent Leo her SUV.
- **Katerina Wolanski & Dr. Briton Ibe** – Two additional writers-in-residence in Boston due to fellowships/scholarships.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The main story (currently being written by Hannah Tigone) is told from Freddie’s point of view. There was also a second story being told through the letters from “Real life” Leo Johnson to the author Hannah Tigone. Did you like the book within a book setup? Did you find it confusing or right on point? Why?
3. Thanks to the emails, we are regularly reminded that Freddie’s story is fiction. Did that change your experience of the mystery at all?
4. When Freddie, Whit, Cain, and Marigold get coffee together for the first time, Freddie mentions that it was the start of her friendship with a killer. Who did you suspect in that moment? Did reading the story make your assumption change? Why?
5. Freddie, Whit, Marigold, and Cain become close friends very quickly. Have you ever made friends in a similar way? What circumstances (besides manufactured peril) lead to these types of sudden, intense friendships?
6. Marigold insists to the others, “A scream is supposed to bring help, and we heard her scream.” Do you think of yourself as being responsible for strangers? How effective is bystander intervention?
7. What do you think about the “fictional” Leo Johnson? Is he dangerous to Freddie or just interested? Why do you think that?
8. Leo says that all stories (Mysteries, Sci Fi, Political Thrillers, Historical Novel, etc.) are Romances. Do you agree? Why or why not?
9. Do you think the other characters took Marigold’s stalking behavior seriously? What would you do if your friend was acting like Marigold?
10. In chapter 25, the author asks, “Does being in love compromise judgement?” Does it? Why or why not?
11. Freddie questions herself for trusting Cain several times but never really changes her mind. Where do you think her loyalty comes from?
12. In his emails, Leo insists that Hannah specify the races of her characters, pointing out that it could drastically change their experiences and perspectives in a story set in America. What does a story gain by making race explicit? What are the potential drawbacks?

13. Caroline and Whit planned to test whether they could goad Cain back into a life of crime. If they had executed their plan as they originally intended, what do you think would have happened? What does their experiment reflect about our attitudes toward convicted criminals?
14. Did you think there was something wrong with “Real” Leo Johnson before the letters to the FBI appear in the book? Why or why not? What clues did you have?
15. The “real part” of the novel is set during the Pandemic. Did that time/setting help or hurt the novel for you? Why?
16. Did you know who the killer was before it was revealed? What clues were given?
17. Leo appears at the hospital at the very end of the book. Why did the author have him show up? What purpose did it have?
18. In the “real life” portion of the book, Leo Johnson ends up in jail, but is still writing to Hannah Tigone. Do you think he’s a stalker/serial killer? Does he deserve to be in jail? Why or why not?
19. Sulari Gentill has written other books. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/g/sulari-gentill/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56803179-the-woman-in-the-library>
- Jo Linsdell – <https://www.jolinsdell.com/2022/09/book-club-kit-woman-in-library-by.html>
- Novelist – <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=3&sid=c394a0bf-f816-4b2f-8b83-6cdf56ced22d%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=11063748&db=neh>

Sulari Gentill’s Books

Series:

Rowland Sinclair

1. A Few Right Thinking Men (aka A House Divided) (2010)
2. A Decline in Prophets (2011)
3. Miles Off Course (2012)
4. Paving the New Road (2012)
5. Gentlemen Formerly Dressed (2013)
6. A Murder Unmentioned (2014)
7. Give the Devil His Due (2015)
- The Prodigal Son (2016)
8. Dangerous Language (2017)
9. Shanghai Secrets (2020)
10. Where There's a Will (2020)

Stand-Alone Novels

- After She Wrote Him (aka Crossing the Lines) (2017)
 - The Woman in the Library (2022)
 - The Mystery Writer (2024)

If you liked Woman in the Library, try...

- The Verifiers – Jane Pek
 - Magpie Murders – Anthony Horowitz
 - Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone – Benjamin Stevenson
 - Yellowface – RF Kuang
 - Any Among the Serial Killers – Jincy Willett
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