

Teaching guide

The Logic of Strangers: discussion questions and activities for each of its four countries

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This guide is for teachers of senior high-school English, philosophy, civics and politics, for first-year instructors in political theory and literature, and for anyone leading a book club. It covers *The Logic of Strangers*, Book One of *A Map of Other Laws*.

The guide is free. You may print and copy it for teaching and for book clubs without asking. It is on the series website at mapofotherlaws.com/teaching-guide, with a printable PDF of the same text.

How to use this guide

The Logic of Strangers is in four parts, one for each country the traveler crosses. Each part works as a unit of its own, a country and the one law it was founded on, with the people who live by it. You can teach the book a part at a time, or take a single country as a short unit.

The questions avoid endings. None of them gives away how a part ends or what becomes of anyone in it, so a class can use them mid-book. Each country's questions can be used once students have read the first few chapters of that part. Students who have read ahead can be asked to keep what they know to themselves until the class catches up.

The book is written plainly, in short chapters, by a narrator who explains each country's words as he meets them. It deals with grief, death, illness, debt and hunger, and with the slow harm that well-meant institutions can do. There is no explicit sex and no graphic violence. The paperback runs to 272 pages.

Before reading

These prompts work well as a short journal entry or a pair discussion before students open the book. There are no right answers.

1. Think of a rule at your school or workplace that is meant to treat everyone the same. Who does it work well for? Has it ever failed someone you know?
2. Have you ever filled in a form that had no box for you, or for someone in your family? What did you do, and who decided what happened next?
3. When someone does you a favor, do you feel you owe them? Would it be better or worse if your community wrote every favor down and set a fair price for paying it back?
4. Is it fairer to give every person exactly the same treatment, or to look at each person's situation? Give one example where each approach seems right to you.

Book One, country by country

The traveler at the center of the series has no name. He was a ledger clerk once, and he still counts what things cost and who ends up paying. Without warning, the ground carries him from one country to the next. Each country was founded after a disaster, on one law meant to make sure it never happens again, and each has its own way of deciding what a person is. None of them can decide what he is.

Part One · Tares, the Republic of Measure

The traveler wakes in a weighhouse in Tares, a grey city of brass scales where every citizen is weighed for what they deserve, and every kindness is written down and paid back at a fair rate. The great scale cannot weigh him, so while the Republic works out what to do with a man it cannot price, an assessor named Mirel Anz signs for him on her own account.

The law. No one should be treated arbitrarily.

DISCUSS

1. In Tares a blow is weighed by what is behind it as well as by how hard it lands, and a hungry person's hunger can be entered as evidence in court. Would you want either rule where you live? What would it take to measure them fairly?
2. When the traveler says that help doesn't need papers, Mirel answers that a gift is "Luck. Who happened to be standing where you passed." Who has the stronger case? Think of a favor that once left you owing someone.
3. Tares decided that "desert is the one currency that can't be lent," so no child inherits a parent's debt of standing. Cabel the wheelwright wept in front of the whole hall on the day he was weighed with no inherited debt. What do people in your own world inherit, good or bad, that they did nothing to earn?
4. A hungry nine-year-old is tried for taking a loaf, and when her hunger is weighed against the baker's loss, two grains of injustice are left over. Stop at the point in chapter 10 where the clerks start looking for somewhere to put them. Before reading on, list every place the two grains could go, and who would pay in each case.

ACTIVITY · DESIGN THE INSTRUMENT

Your school has adopted the law of Tares: no student should be treated arbitrarily. In small groups, design the instrument that will enforce it. It might be a scale, a scoring sheet, a points table or a panel. Decide what it measures, who reads it, where the results are posted and what each result entitles a student to. Then swap designs with another group, and write a short profile of one student the other group's instrument cannot read: someone it cannot score at all, or scores wrongly through no fault of their own. Finish as a class. Should the instrument be changed to fit that student, or should someone be given the power to say "this case is different"? Who should that someone be?

Part Two · Selm, the Kindly Census

The traveler arrives in Selm on a Voice-Day, when rings of neighbors gather in the square to describe each person aloud, one word at a time, and vote the words onto a card that hangs beside that person's door. Within the hour he has a card of his own, and he sets out to learn what the valley does with the strangers it keeps, and with the people it stops describing.

The law. No one should be forgotten, and no one should be the sole judge of what they are.

DISCUSS

1. Odel, the census-mother, gives the rules of a ring: nothing said in a person's absence, nothing said louder than they can plainly hear, and nothing entered on a card without the ring's hands up for it. Are these fair rules for talking about a person? Compare them with the ways reputations form at school or online.
2. A word put up in a ring stays up until it is argued down, and the only way to argue it down is to say it. Nesa the weaver hears the word "hard" nine times from neighbors who are in the act of refusing it. What does this suggest about public judgment, even when it is kind?
3. The rings voted Deeg the farrier "kind" while he was still a grudging man, and over seven years he became kind. He says it is "less work being the man on the card." Was the vote a gift to him, or a sentence he had to serve? Can a label make someone better, and should a community try?
4. Sula, who is twelve, wants to be a census-mother when she grows up. If she has to get somebody wrong, she says, she will "do the wrong part carefully, and keep checking it." What would it look like to make a necessary judgment about a person carefully, in a school or a workplace?

ACTIVITY · A VOICE-DAY FOR A CHARACTER

Choose a character from Tares whom the class knows well, such as Mirel Anz or Hods the baker. Never use a classmate or any other real person. Form rings of eight to twelve around an empty chair that stands for the character, and follow Odel's rules: speak in an ordinary voice, enter no word without a majority of hands, and remember that to argue a word down you have to say it. Each ring makes a card of the words that carried. Then compare the cards and talk it over. Which true thing about the character never made it onto any card? Which word would the character object to? Whose suggestions carried, and whose did not? How might it feel to stand in the middle?

Part Three · Velle, the City of Open Doors

The traveler comes down out of dry hills into Velle, a city whose people took down every door after a plague winter in which families died alone behind them. Velle asks him nothing and simply puts out another plate, and in the first country to take him in at once, he learns what it means to live where nobody is ever left alone.

The law. No one should suffer alone.

DISCUSS

1. Velle keeps every door it took down, tagged with the house it came from, in a warehouse by the old harbor, and once a year the whole city walks its aisles. A mother there tells her child that the people who bolted their doors "were frightened, is all." Why keep the doors instead of burning them? What do the memorials in your own community keep, and why?
2. Velle's founding verdict is that privacy is "the rehearsal of abandonment." Make the strongest case you can for that belief. Then make the strongest case against it.
3. For thirteen days the traveler counts how often he is touched, spoken to, fed or joined, and finds that it happens about once every quarter hour. He writes, "I have never in my life had less silence in which to hear myself," and means it as praise. A week later he reads it back and hears "the other thing in it." What is the other thing?
4. Once the long table learns that the traveler keeps a notebook, a place is made after supper for him to read his pages aloud, a few each night. Nothing is taken from him, and the city means it as its highest honor. The traveler calls it a seizure. Which is it? Where do you meet the same question in group chats, shared documents or social media?

ACTIVITY · REWRITE A RULE AS A FORM

Take a promise Velle would approve of: "No student should ever eat lunch alone." In pairs, turn it into the form a lunchroom monitor fills in each day. Decide what the form records, what counts as alone, what the monitor must do when a box is ticked and who reads the finished forms. Then test the form against two students: one who is lonely and would welcome company, and one who wants to spend lunch reading by herself. Does the form tell them apart? Add a box for the second student if you can, and discuss whether the new box weakens the promise or makes it kinder.

Part Four · The Province of Licensed Questions

In the Province, practical questions cost little or nothing, but a deep question needs a license from the Office of Inquiry, and the fee is one of the asker's own certainties, because the Province believes that asking too hard wears the world away. The traveler learns to speak as the country does, in statements set out for others to take up or leave, and finds his way to a mapmaker's workroom behind a green door.

The law. No one should be destroyed by doubt.

DISCUSS

1. A woman of sixty buys the right to ask whether her son, gone over the border twenty years, is still alive. She pays with her certainty that her late husband was faithful. Sef the mapmaker points out that people have always paid for answers with something they used to be sure of, and that the Office at least "writes it down, and gives a receipt." Is a society that keeps receipts for this trade better or worse than one that keeps none?
2. Sef's maps follow one rule: "Nothing is drawn harder than it is known." Where the survey is old, coastlines are dotted and labeled "shore, probably." Where would you like that rule applied, in the news, in science, in history or in the claims people make online? What would be lost if everyone followed it?
3. The Province explains its ruined places by an old age of questioning, and its school placards let more than one reading stand. Perhaps questions really did wear things away. Perhaps things failed for ordinary reasons and the story was laid over them afterward. Or perhaps it is a dream the country has about itself. Which reading do you find most convincing, and what in the text supports it? Does the book let you decide?
4. People in the Province set out statements "like saucers of milk" instead of asking: "A man might wonder where a stranger's sleeping tonight. And that man might have a barn." What does this way of speaking protect? What does it make harder, and for whom?

ACTIVITY · THE SAUCER HOUR

Hold a twenty-minute discussion of the book in which nobody may ask a direct question. Every contribution has to be a statement that leaves others free to take it up or let it lie, such as "A reader might wonder why Mirel signs for him," in place of "Why does Mirel sign for him?" Appoint two students as clerks to note any question that slips through. Afterward, each student writes a short reflection. What could you say in a statement that you could not have asked? Who spoke more than usual, and who spoke less?

Across the book

Big questions

1. The series asks one question throughout. When a rule is built to protect people, what does it cost the person it was never built to see? Choose one of the four countries. Who is that person there, and what does the law cost them?
2. Of the trial at the center of Part One, the traveler says that "nobody in the room was cruel." Where does harm come from in a country where everyone means well? When a fair rule, applied by decent people, does wrong, who is answerable?
3. Each country has an instrument for keeping its law: a great scale in Tares, rings of neighbors and their cards in Selm, a whole city's habit of never leaving anyone alone in Velle, and an assay of certainties in the Province. What does each one notice, and what does it miss? Compare one of them with a way your own world sorts people, such as grades, credit scores, references or follower counts.
4. The traveler notices prices and debts wherever he goes, and he keeps a list at the back of his notebook called "Words I have not found." The first is a word for the mourning that goes on after the official days of mourning run out. Is counting a cold way to see the world, or a fair one? Why might a book about laws care so much about missing words? Propose one word your own community lacks.

Written response

Choose one of the four countries. In 600 to 900 words, make the strongest case for its law in the voice of a citizen who believes in it, using details and at least two short quotations from the book. Then step out of that voice and name one person the law was never built to see, and what it costs them. Do not argue that the citizens are villains; the book never does. End with the change, if any, you would make to the law, and what that change would cost in its turn.

For college and workplace courses, an alternative: rewrite the law of one country as a one-page policy for a real school, workplace or app. Include its purpose, the rule itself, how it will be enforced, and a final section headed "Who this policy may not see."

Assessment idea

A fifth country. In pairs or small groups, students invent a country that could sit on the same map. Every country in the series follows four beats: a wound, the disaster it was founded after; a promise, its one law; an instrument, the way the law is kept; and a stranger, the person the instrument cannot read. Each group presents its country in five minutes and then answers questions from the class, who play its citizens. Assess four things: a promise a reasonable person would sign; an instrument that follows clearly from the promise; a stranger whose difficulty grows out of the law itself, with no villain needed; and a short written reflection that links the new country to one country in the book, with evidence.

Key terms

- **The traveler.** The narrator. He has no name, and he was a ledger clerk before the crossings began.
- **Crossing.** Being carried from one country to the next. The traveler also calls it the tide. The book never explains how it works.
- **Tares, the Republic of Measure.** A city where a great scale weighs what each citizen deserves.
- **The Great Balance.** The working scale in the Hall of Equity in Tares, the size of a watchtower.
- **Desert.** In the old sense of the word, what a person deserves. It is what the Great Balance weighs.
- **Balance-book.** The leather book every grown citizen of Tares carries, recording what they owe and what they are owed.
- **Unassayable.** Unable to be valued. To assay a thing is to test what it is worth.
- **Surety.** A pledge to answer for another person's debts, signed in one's own book.
- **Table of rates.** The public list in Tares that sets a fair price for every kindness and every kind of work.
- **Remainder.** An amount left over when an account will not close at zero. Somebody has to hold it.
- **Grain.** The smallest weight a scale in Tares is marked in, and the unit wrongs are weighed in.
- **The Favored Centuries.** The long age before the Republic, when the great houses ruled by keeping private books of favors.
- **Selm, the Kindly Census.** An orchard valley where neighbors describe each person aloud and vote on the words.
- **Voice-Day.** The weekly day when the rings of Selm meet in the square.
- **Ring.** About forty people who know someone well, standing around that person to describe them.
- **Card.** The words a ring has voted, written out and hung beside the door of the person they describe.
- **Sayable.** Selm's word for a person the valley has found words for, and says.
- **Census-mother.** The keeper of the Census Hall in Selm and its wall of boxes, one box to each citizen.
- **Velle, the City of Open Doors.** A city of doorways with no doors in them.
- **The Quiet Winter.** The sickness, three generations back, when the families of Velle died behind locked doors.
- **The Unhinging.** The yearly festival when the warehouse of stored doors is opened and the city walks its aisles.
- **The Long Table.** The public house in the largest courtyard of the lower city, less a tavern than a supper that never ends.
- **The Province of Licensed Questions.** A terraced country where a deep question needs a license.
- **The Interrogatory Age.** The time, remembered in the Province, when nothing was left unasked. Shepherds call it the Asking.
- **Asked.** Said of a place or thing worn away by questions, as in "that mill was asked."
- **The Office of Inquiry.** The felt-floored building in the town of Ferre that issues licenses for questions.
- **Certainty.** In the Province, something a person has always been sure of. A deep question is paid for with one.

- **Saucer.** The traveler's image for a statement set out for someone else to take up or leave, in a country where asking is rationed.
- **Words I have not found.** The traveler's list, kept at the back of his notebook, of words no country has for the things he keeps meeting.
- **A woman in a green coat.** She turns up more than once. The book does not explain her, and neither does this guide.

Curriculum connections

The guide supports broad strands found across senior English, philosophy, and civics and politics courses, and across first-year university courses in political theory and literature. Check the wording against your own course outline.

- **Reading for meaning.** Inference and point of view in a first-person narrator who admits what he cannot remember, and the way invented countries let readers test real ideas.
- **Critical literacy.** Whose voices an institution hears and whose it misses, and how fairly the book presents the believers in each law.
- **Writing and oral communication.** Argument from evidence, reflective writing, functional writing such as forms and policies, and structured discussion.
- **Ethics.** Desert and need, gratitude and debt, mercy and privacy, and what is owed to a stranger.
- **Civic reasoning.** The rule of law and the place of discretion, consent, majority votes and the people they outvote, public records, and scores and ratings that decide what people receive.
- **First-year political theory and literature.** Justice as desert, community and privacy, the limits of free inquiry, and speculative fiction as a way of testing institutions on paper.

The rest of the series

Book One is out now. The four books that follow complete the series. Each line below comes from that book's own description.

- **Book Two.** *The Company of Others*, out 21 October 2026. In the Republic of Pairs, no one faces consequence alone. That is the law.
- **Book Three.** *The Weight of Witness*, out 15 November 2026. Here, silence is entered as evidence.
- **Book Four.** *The Mercy of Systems*, out 6 December 2026. Mercy, on a schedule.
- **Book Five.** *The Unfinished Country*, out 1 January 2027. At the edge of the map there is a country that refuses to finish itself.

Teachers and book-club leaders are welcome to write with questions or suggestions at hello@mapofotherlaws.com.