

| This guide assumes your class has read the earlier books. It mentions some of what happens in them.

A MAP OF OTHER LAWS · BOOK FIVE

Teaching guide

The Unfinished Country: discussion questions and activities for each of its four countries

T.R. WREN · MAPOFOTHERLAWS.COM

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 Unfinished Country*, Book Five and the last book 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/book-five, with a printable PDF of the same text. The guide to Book One is at mapofotherlaws.com/teaching-guide.

How to use this guide

The Unfinished Country 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. A few ask students to stop at a given point and predict before reading on. Students who have read ahead can be asked to keep what they know to themselves until the class catches up.

If your class has not read the earlier books. Book Five can be taught on its own. When the traveler remembers an earlier country, he names it and explains it in a line or two, and people who return from earlier books are introduced again. Students need only the paragraph that opens "Book Five, country by country" below, and one more fact: he carries a notebook and a few objects from the countries behind him, among them a sealed question from Sef, a mapmaker in the Province, which he has never opened. Bear in mind that Book Five refers plainly to things that happen in the earlier books, so a class that means to read those later will meet some of their turns here first.

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 and death, exile and displacement, a custody case over a bereaved child, and old age, and with the slow harm that well-meant institutions can do. There is no explicit sex and no graphic violence. The paperback runs to 236 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 two groups you belong to that want different things from you, such as two sides of a family or two sets of friends. What would it mean to choose neither?
2. If you were in a dispute, would you rather be judged by someone who knows you and your family, or by someone who has never heard of either? What could go wrong each way?
3. How much should people alive today give up for people who will live two hundred years from now? Name one thing you would give up for them, and one you would not.
4. Imagine a town that votes every evening and wakes to new streets every morning. What would you be glad to lose in a place like that, and what would you bury to keep?

Book Five, 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. Before this book opens he has crossed sixteen, each founded after a disaster on one law meant to make sure it never happens again, and most of them have tried to decide what he is and failed. In Book Five the first country has a word ready for him, the second wants him because nobody knows what he is, the third runs him through its engines, and the last asks him to help it decide what it should be.

Part One · The Federation of Contradictions

The traveler comes into Concourse at market hour, in a country put together by people the other countries could not hold. Every citizen declares one law at majority, and the law follows the body, so two people in one room can live under two laws. For the first time a country has a word ready for him: undeclared, the standing the children hold until they choose. A household of four parents, each declared under a different law, asks him what is owed as their child comes of age, and the Seam Judge recruits him to stand where two laws meet.

The law. No one should have a law chosen for them.

DISCUSS

1. In the first sale the traveler understands, a fishwife declared for measure and a buyer declared for mercy turn to a bystander declared for candor, who begins by declaring his own position: "I've no money on this fish and no liking for either of you, and I ate this morning." Should people who give evidence or advice have to say first what they stand to gain? Where is this asked of people now?
2. A citizen may refile once, at forty, and choose another law. Four or five a year do it, out of about a hundred thousand. When someone concludes that people mostly pick right, the old notary answers, "They mostly *stay*. Not the same thing." What is the difference? Think of a choice made at eighteen that is hard to change later.
3. Cade, whom the traveler once taught in Morrow, has grown up and declared quiet, the law of being let alone. A quiet household "files nothing and permits nothing to be filed against it." Cade says, "Here I picked the law that couldn't see me." Is being unseen by the law a protection, a loss, or both? Compare the choices people make about privacy online.
4. At supper Lule, who is fifteen, translates the four parents to one another "in about nine seconds without appearing to do anything," and none of the adults notices. Who does this kind of translating in families or classrooms you know, and what does it cost them? Then stop at the end of chapter 12. Before reading on, write down what you think Lule will declare, and what each parent stands to lose.

ACTIVITY · SEW A SEAM

In groups of four, draw lots so that each student declares measure, mercy, candor or company. Give every group the same seam, a dispute where two laws meet over one fact. A class trip comes in under budget, and measure wants the money returned to each family to the penny while company wants a meal together. The students declared for mercy and candor sit as the Court, under its one rule: "A seam is not decided. It is sewn. The thread must be got from both sides of the cloth." No group may find for one law against the other. Each must find the narrow place, "where

each law could be brought to describe the same next morning in a version people could live with." Groups read out their stitches, and the class checks each for thread from both sides. Finish by asking what was left over, and who is holding it.

Part Two · Hosten, the Country Governed by Visitors

The road out of the Federation runs down into a green valley so well kept that the traveler mistakes prosperity for peace. The border examiners read the file that travels ahead of him and are delighted by it. Hosten was founded after generations of captured courts, and its remedy allows no exceptions: no native may rule. Every judge is a foreigner recruited at the border and rotated home after two years and eleven months. Inside the week the traveler is robbed and seated as a magistrate, with a native Chief Clerk at his left and a docket whose last case asks who should raise a child.

The law. No one should be judged by someone with something to gain.

DISCUSS

1. A carter shows the traveler a ruling by a foreign magistrate who had been in the valley "not a fortnight." "He got the culvert wrong," the carter says, and then, "The rest he got right, and I'd not have had it right off anybody who knew me." What mistakes does a judge who knows you make, and what mistakes does a stranger make? Where does your world use strangers on purpose?
2. A young woman at the eating-house has "read more law than the last four of them put together," and will never sit on a bench. "They don't seat us," she says. What does Hosten's law cost the natives best fitted to judge? Can you think of a rule against favoritism that also shuts out the people who know most?
3. The Chief Clerk sends the traveler to a builder's new wall, which ended a feud of three generations ("My son will inherit a wall"), and then to a farm ruined by a visiting minister's irrigation reform, where "there was nobody to sue." Rulers who acquire no stake in the valley are never still there to answer for what they leave behind. Could a country keep the first and avoid the second?
4. The native clerks prepare the briefs and put the local facts in an order that produces the ruling they think just. The Chief Clerk calls it "the price of peace. Paid in comprehension." Without it, he says, "it would be cousins on the bench again inside two rotations." Who really governs Hosten? Where in your world do the people who prepare information shape a decision?

ACTIVITY · DRAFT THE ORDER

Stop at the end of chapter 13, when the court's order is due. A boy of nine lost both parents, a bonded pair from Gemel, in one rockfall. A displaced woman from Rondel, his month-mother by that country's custom, has kept him the year since, with no law behind it any more. A displaced Gemel pair, named by their Registry as successors to the dead bond, claim him under their own law. Neither law governs in Hosten. The boy has said he wants the month-mother, and wants not to be asked again. In groups, sit as the stranger on the bench and write the order in no more than five clauses, stating what evidence it leans on and what the court does not know. Swap orders and write a short reply from one of the parties, or from the boy at nineteen. Whose loss does each order name, and whose does it leave unspoken? Only then read on.

Part Three · Venir, the Republic of the Unborn

On a cold plateau the traveler watches a crew plant oak saplings in a pattern that, once the crowns close, will spell a greeting to descendants two hundred years off. Venir was founded after one comfortable generation burned its forests and left the Ash Belt, and now the vote belongs to the unborn, who outnumber the living ten thousand to one. Their wants are found through the Dream Registries, the engines of the Chancery of Projection and the rituals at the boundary-stones, and every present pleasure is audited against them. The traveler's own projection is to be run in his twelfth week.

The law. No one should inherit a ruined world.

DISCUSS

1. The Dream Registries rate each dream by a schedule. "A dream repeated is entered once. A dream that flatters the dreamer counts for less. A dream that matches what the dreamer already wanted counts for almost nothing. A dream that strangers share counts for more." The traveler looks for "the soft place," the rate that favors whoever wrote it, and finds none. Why might each rule make the count more honest? Could the same rules weigh petitions or online reviews?
2. The traveler calls Venir "the only country on my whole map that has plainly and measurably kept its founding promise." Some citizens hold that messages come backward through the boundary-stones. A projectionist believes the engines hear only what the living feed in, and runs them anyway, "Because the forests are back." The book does not settle it. If the results are this good, does it matter where the votes come from?
3. The pastry-cook made things "meant to be eaten within the hour and remembered by nobody," until the audits brought her down to keeping-bread. Late one night she says what she minds: that in two hundred years "nobody will know there was a woman here who could do *this*," and that "they'd be *right*." What do we owe to things that do not last, such as a meal or a performance?
4. An envoy of the Curtailment, not much past twenty, has every figure right and says, "Mercy toward the present is cruelty toward the many who come after." The traveler answers that the children being counted "will have evenings of their own when they come," with somebody across a table telling them "the evening doesn't count." Make the strongest case for each side. Where do you hear this argument now?

ACTIVITY · FILE A DREAM

Choose a real proposal for your school or town, such as paving a playing field for parking. Each student files one dream in the four lines the Registry clerks use: *The dreamer. The date. The descendant. The want.* The descendant must live about two hundred years from now; a filing without one is turned away. In groups, act as weighers and rate the filings by Venir's schedule, counting a want for more when two students filed it without talking it over. Total the wants for and against. Then the class votes as the living, one token ballot each, and the two counts are set side by side. Which way did the future vote, and what present pleasure would it cost? Where could a weigher who wanted a particular result have bent the count?

Part Four · The Unfinished Country

Off the end of the survey, the traveler comes at dusk to a hillside where a few hundred people are voting by a show of hands, some with spoons still in them. That night the ground moves under the whole camp, as it does every night, and by morning the streets have rearranged themselves around what the hill decided. Its people are the displaced of the entire map, and it has no name that holds: the Yard, the Camp, the Draft, Unfinished. Nix, a child the traveler knew in Rondel, is grown and runs the committee that houses each day's arrivals. A motion to finish the country is due in about a month.

The law. No morning should be allowed to tell you what you are.

DISCUSS

1. The young of the camp "have never known a law older than their shoes." The old are seasick, and bury keepsakes so that something will stay where it was put. The motion to finish would fix the law for good. Before the hill votes, hold your own vote. Should a country keep changing so that no one is settled by it, or stand still so that people can find what they buried?
2. The placement committee asks every arrival two questions, and only two: *What do you carry.* and *Who could you not bear beside you tonight.* Its ledger has no column for reasons, left out "at the start, on purpose." What can you learn about a stranger from those two questions? What does leaving out the reasons protect? Compare the forms newcomers fill in at schools, clinics, shelters and borders.
3. Stop in chapter 6 at the point where the assembly asks the traveler for a founding principle. "You've lived in every one of our countries," the eldest says, so "you'd know which of them got it right." He calls it "the warmest and most reasonable temptation the whole map ever set before me." Before reading on, argue it out. Should he write them one? What would be lost if he did, and what if he did not?
4. Verra, a debtor from Tares, proposes measure again, with one new line on her slate for the remainder: "It's carried, it's not owed. The country carries it, not whoever it happens to land on." The traveler admits he had grown sure "that people a country has hurt will build the same country again when they get the chance." Do they? Where in your world could a line for the remainder go?

ACTIVITY · THE PLACEMENT TABLE

In groups, invent eight arrivals, never a classmate or any other real person, and give each an answer to the committee's two questions. Swap lists with another group, chalk up a table of six households, and place every arrival over two nights by the committee's rules. No household takes new people on two nights running. Nobody is placed twice with a household that has once asked for them to be moved. When the table will not close, the hardest case goes first. Enter each match in a ledger with three columns, household and arrival and date, and no column for reasons. Then compare ledgers with the group that wrote the list. Where did you place the same person differently? Which reason did you most want to write down, and what might writing it have done to the person it described?

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? Two of the countries in this book were founded by people other countries could not hold. Do people who have been left out build fairer countries? Choose one of the four and find the person its law was never built to see.
2. In the Federation the traveler adds to his list of words no country has "a word for the feeling of being accommodated by a country, given a drawer and a form that fit. It is not the same as being held." What is the difference? Where have you been given a form that fit by a place that did not hold you?
3. In the earlier books the traveler mostly watched other people judge. Here he writes that "for the length of a docket-day I *was* the law," and remembers that "when I declined to decide, the machinery decided against whoever was smallest in the room." When you stay out of a decision at school or online, who decides instead?
4. At the edge of the Ash Belt the traveler writes, "A country is a way of deciding what must never be allowed to happen." Each country in this book is built on a never-again. Write your own community's never-again in one sentence. What instrument would keep it, and whom might it fail to see?

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 proposal to the hill. In the Unfinished Country, the displaced stand up on the slope one after another and propose a law, each carrying the value from home they think worth keeping. In pairs or small groups, students do the same, each group speaking for people from one country in the book. 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 proposal in five minutes and then answers questions from the class, who play the hill. 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 proposal 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.
- **The unassayable man.** The rumor-name that runs ahead of the traveler down the refugee roads. To assay a thing is to test what it is worth.
- **The file.** The official dossier every country adds to and passes on, which travels ahead of him in the official pouches.
- **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.
- **The Federation of Contradictions.** A country of declared laws, with its capital at Concourse.
- **Declaring.** Choosing a primary law aloud at majority, the age at which the law counts a child as grown.
- **Measure, mercy, candor, company, quiet.** Some of the laws a citizen may declare. Measure prices a thing at its true weight, mercy carries what cannot be paid, candor says plainly what is so, company gathers people in, and quiet forbids anyone to ask the quiet-declared anything.
- **Undeclared.** The legal standing of children before they declare, and of the traveler.
- **Seam.** Any place where two people's laws meet over one fact and disagree about it.
- **The Seam Court.** The Federation's one shared institution, which arbitrates wherever two laws collide.
- **Hosten, the Country Governed by Visitors.** A farming valley where no native may rule.
- **Rotation.** A magistrate's term of two years and eleven months, one month short of the three years a stranger needs to begin to be a neighbor.
- **Brief.** A written summary of a case, prepared by Hosten's native clerks.
- **Docket.** The list of cases waiting to be heard.
- **Month-mother.** In Rondel, where children are posted to households by lot, the woman of whichever house holds a child's posting for the month.
- **Venir, the Republic of the Unborn.** A plateau where the vote belongs to descendants not yet born.
- **The Spendthrift Age.** The time when one comfortable generation burned Venir's forests for fuel and light, leaving the Ash Belt, a scar two hundred years wide.
- **The Dream Registries.** The offices where citizens' dreams of their descendants are taken down each morning and weighed.
- **The Chancery of Projection.** The hall of brass engines that work out what the not-yet-living would want, run by projectionists.
- **Boundary-stones.** The stones where, some in Venir hold, messages come backward from those still to come.
- **Audit.** The charge every present pleasure adds to a citizen's debt to the unborn.
- **Keeping-bread.** The dense grey bread that keeps, baked for the granaries.

- **The Curtailment.** A young movement in Venir that would abolish all unnecessary present pleasure.
- **The Unfinished Country.** The country past the end of the survey, also called the Yard, the Camp and the Draft. Its name does not hold.
- **The seasick.** The old of the camp, worn out by waking in houses the night has reshaped.
- **The placement committee.** The committee that matches each day's arrivals to households before the ground moves.
- **The ledger of not-forgetting.** The book Nix kept as a child in Rondel, recording every person who ever promised Nix not to forget, now the committee's founding document.
- **What do you carry.** The first of the committee's two questions, and the way people on that hill say good evening.
- **The water cart.** It comes round once a week. The motion to finish is to be taken after four more rounds.

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 remembers earlier countries and admits what he has lost of them, and the way invented countries let readers test real ideas.
- **Critical literacy.** Whose voices an institution hears and whose it misses, who prepares what decision-makers read, and how fairly the book presents the believers in each law.
- **Writing and oral communication.** Argument from evidence, reflective writing, functional writing such as court orders and policies, and structured discussion.
- **Ethics.** Choosing one's own values, impartiality and its costs, what the living owe to people not yet born, and what is owed to a stranger.
- **Civic reasoning.** Pluralism and the coexistence of different laws, conflicts of interest and the independence of judges, the unelected staff who shape decisions, and majority votes and the people they outvote.
- **First-year political theory and literature.** Legal pluralism, impartial judgment, justice between generations, the founding of new political communities, and speculative fiction as a way of testing institutions on paper.

Teaching the whole series

A unit can follow the series by taking one country from each book, a week to a country. Each country is one part of its book, so students read that part and no more. Ask the same four things of every country: the wound it was founded after, the promise it made, the instrument that keeps the promise, and the stranger the instrument cannot read.

- **Week one. Book One, *The Logic of Strangers*.** Tares, the Republic of Measure. "No one should be treated arbitrarily."

- **Week two. Book Two, *The Company of Others*.** Rondel, the Country of Borrowed Families. "No child should be unwanted, and no one should be owned by their luck."
- **Week three. Book Three, *The Weight of Witness*.** Sessa, the Country of Expired Grievances. "The dead quarrel should not govern the living."
- **Week four. Book Four, *The Mercy of Systems*.** Salve, the Country Without Bad News. "No one should be broken by the manner of knowing."
- **Week five. Book Five, *The Unfinished Country*.** Hosten, the Country Governed by Visitors. "No one should be judged by someone with something to gain."

The [Book One guide](#) has questions and an activity for Tares. Finish with the written response or the assessment, with each group speaking for one of the five countries.

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