

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

A MAP OF OTHER LAWS · BOOK THREE

Teaching guide

The Weight of Witness: 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 Weight of Witness*, Book Three 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-three, 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 Weight of Witness 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. Some things in the series are never explained, and this guide does not explain them either.

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, including the deaths of children, with preventive custody and with cruelty that leaves no mark. One character learns that as a boy he was read as at risk of taking his own life, and a massacre a century before the story is mentioned; neither is described. There is no explicit sex and no graphic violence. The paperback runs to 240 pages.

If your class has not read the earlier books

The book can be taught on its own. The narrator, called only the traveler, was a keeper of accounts before the ground began, without warning, to carry 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 an instrument for deciding what a person is. None of them can decide what he is. He has crossed nine borders before this book opens, and he names the earlier countries in passing.

Through the four countries of Book Two he traveled with Sorel, a clockmender. Sorel is no longer with him, and in each country of this book he asks the officials for news of Sorel. Students need no more than that.

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. Suppose a test could show which students might one day do something harmful. Should a school use it? What should it tell the student?
2. Would you rather be judged by what you meant to do or by what came of it? Give one example where each seems right to you.
3. Some places let old offenses drop off a person's record after a set number of years. Should every wrong be allowed to fade in time? Is there one you think never should?
4. Think of a time someone was unkind in a way no rule could punish, by a tone of voice or a joke made with the right people listening. Should a community try to prevent that kind of harm?

Book Three, country by country

The traveler at the center of the series has no name. For two books he has crossed impossible countries as a witness, writing down what each law costs and who ends up paying. In this book the countries stop letting him stand aside. Each one asks something of him as a witness, and each has its own way of counting what a witness says, and what a witness keeps back.

Part One · Morrow, the Court of Possible Selves

On a high plateau where the sun never stands higher than a man on a wall, every citizen casts a fan of shadows: a dark stroke for the life being lived, and fainter ones for the lives that might yet be lived. Umbrists read the fans and head off the harms they find there. The traveler casts a single stroke, as the country's founding nightmare did. He lodges where Cade, about seventeen and very funny, carries water up the stair, and has been read every month since the age of twelve.

The law. No one should be lost to a preventable self.

DISCUSS

1. Each entry in Morrow's Registry of the Unhappened has a line for a harm as it was read and a line for what was done about it, and "there is no line at all for what came after." How would anyone know whether a prevention worked? Think of a rule in your own world that is praised for what did not happen.
2. The young umbrist was read at eleven as a boy at risk, and for ten years the people around him were quietly kind without telling him why. "Nobody saved my life," he says. "That life on the rope, forty people leaned on it, an ounce at a time, until it bent away from the beam." Should he have been told? Is kindness aimed at a reading still kindness?
3. Cade cannot eat on reading days. "Each reading frightened Cade, the fright sharpened the fan, and the next reading found it sharper and frightened Cade more." The traveler calls the readings "the weather the shadow grows in." Can being watched for a fault help to make it? Where have you seen a label shape the person it describes?
4. Stop at the end of chapter 15. The Court of Possible Selves wants the traveler to say what Cade is like, because he is the one person in Morrow who sees Cade without seeing the fan. He has known Cade a little over five weeks. Before reading on, write what you would say in his place and what you would refuse to say. What might each choice cost Cade?

ACTIVITY · THE REGISTRY OF THINGS THAT DID NOT HAPPEN

Your school decides to look for students who seem headed for trouble, such as failing a course, and step in early. In small groups, design the reading. Decide what signs it looks for, who does the looking, how often, and whether the student must agree, the way every reading in Morrow begins with "More light, with your consent." Write four entries for the school's registry, each with a line for the risk as read and a line for what was done. Swap registries with another group, and write one paragraph in the voice of each student you receive. Finish as a class. What can the registry never record? What might it cost a student to be read every month?

Part Two · Candor, the City of Pure Intentions

In Candor, a city of brick and canals, a citizen files the intention behind any act of consequence at the Motive Office, which assays it. An act found to be well meant is immune, and whatever harm comes of it is weather, which the city repairs at public cost and nobody owns. At the visitors' window the assay finds nothing in the traveler at all. Then Alba of the Board of Waters, as kind an official as he has met, shows him her great works, and the fifth of them is drowning a poor quarter of the city.

The law. No one should be punished for an honest mistake.

DISCUSS

1. The surgeon's grandmother trained under a man who was hanged when a patient died. After that she did only limbs and teeth, and when a belly came in she packed it and sent for the family. "She lost more that way than he ever lost cutting, and she knew it." What does fear of blame do to people whose work carries risk? Where do you see people choosing the safe act over the right one?
2. When a bargeman is hurt at the locks, two runners go out, one for the theater and one for the Motive Office, and the surgeon will not begin until her intention is assayed. That quarter hour, the traveler writes, "was what the certificate cost." Then her hands "did not hedge." Was the quarter hour worth it? Who paid for it?
3. A lamp-maker's widow, with water at her own step, defends the diversion that is drowning her street: "Nobody lied and nobody got a thing out of it." Her neighbor can lawfully find no one to blame. "I curse the water. At night, when there's nobody to hear it." When a harm has no author, where does the anger go? Name a harm in your own world that nobody intended and nobody owns.
4. In the game called Plaques, players read the motive on each public thing and invent a reason it is a lie. The traveler calls it "the closest thing to blasphemy the country permits." Two dock clerks play it for eleven plaques and stop, both at once, at the twelfth, a hospital. Why there? What does your own community joke about, and where does the joking stop?

ACTIVITY · FILE AN INTENTION

In pairs, choose a real decision a school might make, such as a new phone rule. Write the intention as Candor would file it, one paragraph saying what you mean to do and why. The class acts as the Motive Office and assays only the motive. If the class finds it honest and kind, issue a certificate. Then pass each certified intention to another pair, who write what followed a year later: one good result and one harm nobody planned. Set them in two columns, the intention on the left and what followed on the right. Under Candor's law the harm is weather. Who should own it? Would the first pair have acted differently without the certificate?

Part Three · Sessa, the State of Expired Grievances

In Sessa, limestone country where rivers go underground and come up under new names, every grievance may be spoken freely for its lawful term. When the term runs out, its words go to what Sessans call the quieting: the names and the details leave every mouth, and inscriptions heal over mid-word. That is how the country ended the Long Feud, and the peace holds. But on his first evening the traveler reads a war memorial aloud, gaps and all, because words lawfully dead in every Sessan mouth stay alive in his. Then he meets Vida, whose daughter drowned nineteen years ago this autumn.

The law. The dead quarrel should not govern the living.

DISCUSS

1. Sessa tried forgiveness for two hundred years, and it failed, "because forgiveness keeps the books open. A forgiven debt stays written in the book; the creditor only agrees not to collect the interest on it." Is forgetting kinder than forgiving? Think of places in your own world where records are sealed or wiped after a time. Who gains, and who loses?
2. In the village school the war of the pass is taught as dates and a single count of the dead, until the chalk reaches the words that have expired and the slate reads HERE THE ACCOUNT IS CLOSED. "Not learning it is the schooling too," the mistress tells a boy who asks. In Morrow every schoolchild can recite its founding nightmare. What does a country owe its children about its worst day?
3. The form for renewing a term has been printed four times in sixty years, and not one has been granted. "You renew for a widow," a district clerk explains, "you've opened the door the Feud came in by." Is a rule with no exceptions fairer than one with a few? Think of a zero-tolerance rule you know. Who is it hardest on?
4. Stop at the end of chapter 16. Imre, who has spent thirty years quietly taking down grievances in their last season, asks the traveler to carry one bundle out of the country, "To keep. Off this country's calendar, somewhere no term runs." The farmer of the shared wells asks him to leave it shut: "We paid to shut it." Before reading on, set out each case as strongly as you can, in two columns. Which would you answer?

ACTIVITY · SET THE TERMS

Sessa gives a broken engagement seven years, a swindle ten, a war forty and a death a generation. As a class, list eight kinds of grievance that come up at school, from a borrowed book never returned to a cruel post online. In groups, give each a term in months or years, and defend it. Compare the tables. Which got the longest terms, and why? Then each student writes a few sentences about one invented grievance, never about a real person, and underlines the words the quieting would take, the names and the place. Read some aloud with those words left out. What is left? Should your country print a renewal form, and who should grant one?

Part Four · Lenis, the Bureau of Harmlessness

Lenis is the pleasantest country on the traveler's map, a garden lowland where every corner is rounded and nobody asks a question, because a question implies a doubt and a doubt discomforts. It was founded against lawful cruelty, the kind that leaves no mark. Harm there is discomfort caused, and the Bureau of Harmlessness mediates it and punishes none of it, though a person complained of again and again slowly becomes harder to perceive. Then Osk, a filing clerk who stands too close and laughs at the wrong moments, finds the traveler, and turns out to be extremely good company.

The law. No one should be a casualty of someone else's temperament.

DISCUSS

1. A customs officer examines the traveler for an hour without asking a single question. He praises instead, starting with "What good boots," though they are the worst thing the traveler owns. Each compliment "was a question with the doubt taken out of it." Try it in pairs for five minutes. What could you find out this way, and what could you never ask?
2. The traveler's landlady was raised by a father whose cruelty was lawful at every point. "There's no court anywhere for the tone of a voice," she says, and when she hears him about to call Lenis thin, she answers, "I call it the first air I could breathe." Who has the stronger case? What would you give up to live where nobody is ever mocked?
3. The traveler finds that in Lenis "the discomfort in a room is never destroyed. It is reassigned." A hedge quarrel is softened beautifully in an hour, and at the end the unease is wearing the face of a young apprentice, who offers that the mistake was likely his. Where have you seen a conflict smoothed over by moving it onto the most junior person in the room?
4. A woman with a basket of oil flasks tells the traveler that she once filed a complaint on the man at the omnibus halt whom everyone's eyes now slide past. "It was a very small one." She will never know whether hers "had been lost among a hundred others or had been the one too many." Have you ever added one small thing to a weight you could not see?

ACTIVITY · A MEDIATION IN LENIS

Invent a small conflict, such as two students who both claim the same library seat, never a real dispute from your class. Work in groups of five, with two parties, two observers and a mediator. The mediator follows the Bureau's manner: both parties are thanked and nobody is told they are wrong. Seats may be moved and schedules changed, and nobody may be punished. The observers stay silent and track the discomfort, noting where it starts and who ends up holding it. Run it for ten minutes, then swap roles. Finish with the observers' notes. Was the conflict solved, or only moved? As Osk says of the Bureau, "at the end somebody's holding it." Who was it?

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. The book's own description asks, "When does silence become a vote?" Find one moment in each country where the traveler could speak or keep quiet. What would each choice cost, and whom? Is a witness who says nothing still taking part?
3. Each country has an instrument for keeping its law: the fan and the mirror in Morrow, the plate under the lamp in Candor, the calendar of terms in Sessa, and the softening in Lenis. What does each one notice, and what does it miss? Morrow's Chief Umbrist no longer believes the shadows are destiny and reads them anyway, because "The instrument is wrong and the posture is right." Compare one instrument with a way your own world sorts people, such as risk scores, references, expiring records or complaint forms.
4. The traveler keeps a list in his notebook called "Words I have not found." In this book it runs from Nine to Twelve. Ten is "a word for a harm with no author," and Eleven "a word for a thing that is true and has no mouth left that can say it." Why might a book about witnesses care so much about missing words? Propose one word your own community lacks.

Written response

Choose one of the four countries. Each gives the traveler someone who believes in its law: the young umbrist in Morrow, the surgeon in Candor, the farmer of the shared wells in Sessa and the landlady in Lenis. In 600 to 900 words, make the strongest case for the law in that believer's voice, 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: in Morrow, a woman held for eleven years asks the traveler what he sees, and he describes the mends on her cuff. Write a one-page plain account of a public event you attended, giving only what anyone standing where you stood could check. Name no motive and offer no verdict. Then write a paragraph on what the account could not hold, and whether leaving it out made the account fairer.

Assessment idea

A country on the same map. 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. In this book the stranger is also asked to bear witness, so each group adds a scene in which the stranger must choose whether to speak. 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 witness scene in which speaking and silence both have a price, 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 book never explains how it works.
- **Morrow, the Court of Possible Selves.** A high plateau country where every citizen's shadow is read.
- **Fan.** The spread of shadows a citizen of Morrow casts in the right light.
- **Penumbrae.** The fainter shadows in a fan, the lives that might yet be lived. The dark stroke at the center is the life being lived.
- **Umbrist.** A reader of shadows. The umbry is the reading office, and all the umbrists in it.
- **Preventable self.** One of the lives in a fan that can be seen coming and turned aside.
- **The Registry of the Unhappened.** The hall where the umbry enters the harms it has read in people's fans and headed off.
- **The Massacre of the Mild.** Morrow's founding wound, a century old. A gentle man everybody knew did what nobody had seen coming, and that morning his shadow had no fan at all.
- **The still house.** The everyday name for shadow hold, where Morrow keeps people whose fans are read as too dangerous to walk free.
- **The Court of Possible Selves.** Morrow's highest court. It rules on what is to be done with anyone whose fan is sent up to it.
- **Candor, the City of Pure Intentions.** A city of canals where every act of consequence must first have its motive certified.
- **The Motive Office.** The office where intentions are filed and assayed.
- **Assay.** A word from the metal trade, for testing how much of a coin is true silver or gold. In Candor, motives are assayed.
- **Weather.** In Candor, harm that comes of an intention certified as benevolent. The city repairs it, and nobody owns it.
- **Perjury of intent.** Lying about one's own motive, the one crime in Candor that is never forgiven.
- **The Lantern District.** The old lamp-makers' quarter, poor and slowly sinking.
- **Unattested.** The finding when the assay shows nothing at all. It is not a finding against a person.
- **Sessa, the State of Expired Grievances.** A limestone country where grievances run out by law.
- **Term.** The lawful length of time a grievance may be spoken of, the way a lease has a term.
- **The quieting.** What happens when a term runs out. The words for the grievance go out of every mouth.
- **Smooth place.** The gap left in a story or an inscription where expired words used to be.
- **The Long Feud.** Three centuries of war between the Upper valley and the Lower, fed by perfect memory.
- **The Office of Terms.** The office that schedules the terms and rides its circuit each autumn to certify what has gone.

- **Renewal.** An extension of a term. The form exists, and none has ever been granted.
- **Lenis, the Bureau of Harmlessness.** A garden country without corners, founded against cruelty that leaves no mark.
- **Discomfort caused.** The Bureau's unit of account. In Lenis, harm is discomfort.
- **The softening.** The Bureau's instrument. Nobody will explain how it works.
- **Attenuated.** Thinned, worn faint. Said of a person complained of so often that others find them harder to perceive.
- **Words I have not found.** The traveler's list, kept in 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 corrects his own memory as he goes, and the way invented countries let readers test real ideas.
- **Critical literacy.** Whose testimony an institution hears and how it writes it down, and how fairly the book presents the believers in each law.
- **Writing and oral communication.** Argument from evidence, plain factual accounts, functional writing such as filings and forms, and structured discussion.
- **Ethics.** Prevention and liberty, intention and outcome, forgetting and forgiving, kindness and candor, and what a witness owes.
- **Civic reasoning.** Preventive detention and risk assessment, legal immunity and responsibility for harm, amnesty and the expiry of records, and complaint procedures and the people they wear down.
- **First-year political theory and literature.** Responsibility without fault, the politics of memory after civil conflict, the regulation of civility, and speculative fiction as a way of testing institutions on paper.

The rest of the series

Book Three is out 15 November 2026. Two books come before it and two follow, and together the five complete the series. Each line below comes from that book's own description.

- **Book One.** *The Logic of Strangers*, out 1 October 2026. Every kindness has a price. He cannot be charged.
- **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 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.