

| This guide assumes your class has read Book One. It mentions some of what happens in it.

A MAP OF OTHER LAWS · BOOK TWO

# Teaching guide

*The Company of Others: 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 Company of Others*, Book Two 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-two](http://mapofotherlaws.com/teaching-guide/book-two), with a printable PDF of the same text, next to the guide to Book One at [mapofotherlaws.com/teaching-guide](http://mapofotherlaws.com/teaching-guide).

## How to use this guide

*The Company of Others* 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 roughly the first half 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 leaves some things unexplained, among them how the traveler's crossings work, and so does this guide.

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, deaths from fever told after the fact, prison, a drowning, children moved from house to house, and a man who has waited nine years for his wife to come home. There is no explicit sex and no graphic violence. The paperback runs to 228 pages.

## If your class has not read Book One

*The Company of Others* follows *The Logic of Strangers*, but a class can start here. The book explains what a new reader needs as it goes.

The narrator has no name. He was a ledger clerk once, and without warning the ground carries him from one country to the next, never back. Before this book begins he has crossed four: Tares, where a great scale weighs what each person deserves and could not weigh him; Selma, where neighbors vote aloud on what each person is; Velle, a city that took down its doors; and the Province, where a deep question needs a license.

He carries a notebook he writes in every night, a bronze bell from Selm that was never given a tongue, and a debt of two grains he still owes in Tares. He also carries two things from Sef, a mapmaker in the Province. One is a map of the traveler's crossings, whose last line runs off the sheet. The other is a question sealed in plain wax, which the traveler is to open and ask aloud one day, in a country where questions are free. That is all a new reader needs.

## 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 someone whose troubles you would share if you could. Would you sign a law that made you share them, the bad luck along with the good? What would you want written into it?
2. When is a statement more trustworthy because many people stand behind it? When is one voice, speaking alone, worth more than a crowd?
3. What makes a household a family? Would it be fairer if nobody's start in life depended on the family they happened to be born into?
4. Is it kinder to know in advance that someone is leaving, or to find out afterward? Think of a goodbye at a move, a graduation or the end of a season. Did saying it help?

## Book Two, 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. In Book One nothing any country made could take hold of him. In Gemel something does. He is bonded by law to a clockmender named Sorel, and when a lamp glass burns Sorel's hand two streets away, the traveler feels the heat cross his own palm.

The book never says whether Sorel is a man or a woman, or whether Nix, the child of Part Three, is a boy or a girl. This guide follows the book, and you may want to as well.

### Part One · Gemel, the Republic of Pairs

The traveler crosses a pass into quarry country where every door frame holds two doors and every citizen is bonded by law to a counterpart, sharing property, reputation, the vote and even wounds. An unpaired man is not a whole legal person there, so the Registry of Two pairs him with the one person on its rolls it can lawfully offer: Sorel, a clockmender widowed two years, who has left thirteen months of reassignment notices unanswered.

**The law.** No one should face consequences alone.

#### DISCUSS

1. Registrar Olbe answers anyone who doubts the bond by turning the Widows' Ledger round to its second column, which records what became of the injured before the founding: "Left at the third bench, alive at noon, alone by dark." The founders' finding begins, "Solitary consequence is the root of cowardice." Can you answer Olbe? If not, what would you agree to share, and with whom?
2. When a slab of slate takes Halde at the shoulder at the quarry festival, Mur, a hundred paces off, goes down on one knee too, and a wound that would have broken one body becomes "a limp and a bad month." Mur calls life without a bond "deafness." What would you gain, and what would you give up, if you felt what happened to someone close to you?
3. Cassen serves half of a sentence for his counterpart's fraud, and a quarter of all he earns is taken at the shop counter, in front of the queue. Yet if the bond were cut and the record washed, he says, he would be "a man who ached twelve years for nothing." He adds, "I'd sooner have the weight." Why might someone prefer a burden that is counted to a release that erases it?
4. In the game of Two-and-Two each bonded pair bids without speaking, signaling or even looking at each other, so the game tests nothing but how well two people can guess each other's minds. The traveler and Sorel lose fourteen hands out of fifteen. Is being able to predict someone the same as understanding them? Is understanding someone the same as keeping them company?

#### ACTIVITY · THE TERMS CARD

In Gemel a clerk reads the terms of a bond off a printed card: "Property in common. Reputation in common. Testimony joint. The vote joint. Wounds shared per the founding grammar. Dissolution by death or decree only." Your school has adopted Gemel's law and paired every student. In small groups, write the school's terms card. Decide what a pair shares, such as marks, detentions or praise, how pairs are assigned and how a pair can be

dissolved. Then swap cards and test the other group's against four cases: a partner caught cheating, a partner who wins a prize, a partner ill for a month, and a student who arrives mid-year when everyone else is paired. Finish as a class. Which case did the cards handle worst? Did any card treat the newcomer as a whole student?

## Part Two · Holm, the Choir State

The traveler and Sorel come down into a delta of dikes and reeds where no echo comes back off the water, and where speech has standing only when a licensed chorus of nine says it together. The courts sing their verdicts and the fish quay sings its prices. The line from the Registry of Two makes the traveler and Sorel one person in law, and a person cannot chorus with itself, so the port registrar writes in the margin of the file: TWO BODIES. ONE PERSON. NO VOICE.

**The law.** No one should have to speak into silence.

### DISCUSS

1. The Wardmother of the East Choir was a child with a stammer. "Alone I was a stopped pipe," she says. "Blow and blow, and no note." On her first morning in the choir, the nine sang the sentence she could not say. For her the law of standing was a rescue. Who else might a chorus rescue, and who might it silence? Has a group ever given you a voice you did not have alone?
2. At a boundary hearing the traveler notices that "a fact sung by nine is very hard to lie in," because nine voices must agree on every word before they can sing it. The farmer who loses ends by singing the verdict against himself, in one chord with the man who beat him. Would you trust a verdict more if both sides had to say it together? What else might the agreeing wring out, besides lies?
3. Holm calls speech by one person alone "weather," and its standing-book has no line where a single voice could be written. Yet the court notary keeps a drawer of unsigned slips, "Things one person said," among them a man's apology to a wife and a line a mother wanted read over a grave. Why keep words that no court can hear? Where do words like that go in your own world?
4. Vess has refused four offers to have her drowned brother's lullaby sung by ninety and "corrected where it wandered." The committee's eldest says that ninety years from now, either her brother is sung over that water every year "or he's nowhere." Vess says, "Some things are the size they are." Even Sorel sides with the committee. Who has the better case? Should a family's song be kept at its own size, or handed on to be changed?

### ACTIVITY · A SENTENCE IN NINE

Choose a moment from Part One that the class knows well. Each student first writes one sentence, alone, saying what happened. Then, in groups of nine, or as near to nine as the class allows, agree word by word on a single sentence that every member can say aloud, and say it to the class in unison. Set the group sentences beside the solitary ones. Which details survived the agreeing? Which true ones were wrung out along with the mistakes? Who gave way most often? To finish, each student writes on a slip the sentence one character from the book never got to say aloud. Collect the slips unsigned and keep them unread, as the notary keeps his drawer, or read a few aloud only if the class agrees.

## Part Three · Rondel, the Country of Borrowed Families

The traveler and Sorel come down into an orchard country on a Moving Day, when the whole plain moves house by lot. Households are dealt anew each month, and every house must stand open to whoever it is dealt. The Lot Office cannot post a pair with no birth record and no lot number, so it enters the pair as a household on one line, under a blank name-board, and deals that household its share of the commons: Nix, nine years old and a hundred households deep, who arrives on the morning cart with one bag, a bedroll and a name-board.

**The law.** No child should be unwanted, and no one should be owned by their luck.

### DISCUSS

1. Grane, once a crippled third son put away in a back room, wears a cord of wooden beads, one for each of the two hundred and eleven households he has lived in, and forty of those households wept when he left. "Show me the fortune in any country of your map," he says, "that buys a man forty weepings." Can you answer Grane? What does his cord leave out?
2. Within an hour of arriving, Nix has read the house and become "the child each of us was easiest with," and the traveler calls it a performance. Then one evening Nix laughs the real laugh, "too loud and half a beat late, with a snort in the middle of it." What have a hundred households taught Nix? Have you ever fitted yourself to a new place, and when did you stop?
3. Rondel holds that "the draw is holy because it cannot see whose names it is drawing." Yet in the district archive the traveler finds that siblings land in the same village four times as often as chance would put them there. The Lot-Clerk tells him, "I do not choose. I steer. It is not the same thing." Is she breaking Rondel's promise or keeping it? If a blind rule needs someone who can see, who checks that person?
4. The Ostlers, a married couple, have petitioned every month for eleven years to be posted to the same house and have been granted it four times. A Lot Office clerk says the Office sees what its rule costs. Let one household keep Nix, he argues, and "the household down for Nix next lot goes without." Is the clerk right? How should a country weigh one family's wish to stay together against a rule that is fair to everyone?

### ACTIVITY · STEERING THE DRAW

Your school assigns lab partners each term by a blind draw, trusted because nobody can steer it. In small groups, write the rules: who is in the draw, how often it is held, what a student may petition for and who reads the petitions. Then work through four case cards: two siblings who want to stay together; a student with a medical condition who needs a calm partner; two friends who have petitioned every term for a year; and a student who joins mid-term and is in no record at all. For each card, decide whether the draw stays blind. If you allow steering, say who may do it and who, if anyone, may check their work. Finish as a class with the Lot-Clerk's claim. Is steering a different thing from choosing?

## Part Four · Vale, the Country Without Farewells

The passage sets the traveler and Sorel down in beech woods, on a lane that heals itself with moss behind every step. Vale keeps no census and licenses nothing. Its one law makes a single crime, the spoken farewell: anyone may leave anyone, at any hour, forever, but no one may say goodbye. Every household keeps one clock, wound each week by the same hand, and its ticking says one thing: *Still here*. In such a country a clockmender holds an office, as a priest does, and the town has been without one since the spring.

**The law.** No one should be made to grieve in advance.

### DISCUSS

1. Idre's mother was given seven days to live and spent them saying goodbye, one child at a time, "watching your face to see what it did." When Ard went out the fog door fourteen years ago, Idre says, "he did it right. Not a word said. Coat gone, boots gone, bread cut on the board." Which kind of leaving would you rather live through? Is a goodbye for the one who leaves, or for the ones who stay?
2. Nine years ago Ferrin's wife went to a sister's two valleys over, expected back within the week. "In Vale nothing distinguishes a leaving from a delay," and the country will build no instrument to tell the two apart, since to want to know for certain why somebody went "is to want to have been told." So Ferrin sits facing his green door. Is Vale right about that? What, if anything, does the parish owe him?
3. Torv the roadmender says aloud what everyone in Vale knows and nobody says: "We didn't abolish the pain. We abolished the appointment." What is the difference? Where does your own community give grief or leaving an appointment, such as a last day at work or a farewell assembly? Is the appointment part of the harm, or part of the help?
4. A child in the inn yard asks the traveler Vale's question for strangers: "What do you wind?" It means, which house are you still here for? A mender who lets a clock fail through neglect has forged a goodbye, which Vale does not forgive. What are the wound clocks in your own life, the small regular signs that tell people you are still with them? What happens when one stops by accident?

### ACTIVITY · LETTERS WITHOUT ENDS

In Vale a letter starts without a greeting, wherever the thought was when the pen found paper, and the first one the traveler receives opens with the word *furthermore*. Choose two characters from earlier in the book, such as the Wardmother and Vess, and write a letter from one to the other in the Vale manner, with no greeting and no sign-off, stopping the way rain stops. Swap with a partner and write the reply the same way. What did the missing greeting and farewell take away? Was anything easier to say without them? To finish, design in pairs a wordless weekly sign that a club or team could use to say "still here," and describe its false telling: how the sign could fail by accident, and what it would wrongly tell people when it did.

## 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 is called *The Company of Others*. Each of its countries makes sure, in its own way, that no one is left alone: with a counterpart, a chorus, a household dealt by lot or a clock that says "still here." Which country offers company without understanding, and which offers understanding without company? Is understanding someone the same as keeping them company?
3. In Gemel the bond takes hold of the traveler. Holm writes NO VOICE in the margin of his file, Rondel enters his household on one line under a blank board, and Vale keeps no census at all. What does each country's way of recording people notice, and what does it miss? Compare one of them with a way your own world records relationships, such as emergency contacts, joint accounts or school forms.
4. Vess tells the traveler, "You count like you've got somewhere to be." He still keeps his list at the back of the notebook called "Words I have not found," and at the end of Part Two he adds a word for "a thing that was truly said and has no standing anywhere. Not a lie. Not a secret. Said, heard, and unenterable." Propose a word for it. Why might a book about laws care so much about things no record can hold?

### 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, such as Registrar Olbe, the Wardmother, Grane or Idre, 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. Vale refuses to build an instrument at all, so a group may leave one out if it can show what keeps its law instead. 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, or the lack of one, 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 passage. The book never explains how it works.
- **Rules of the passage.** The few things the traveler has noticed about his crossings, numbered in his notebook and tested in every country.
- **The manifest.** The traveler's word for the full list of what he carries.
- **Gemel, the Republic of Pairs.** A quarry country where every citizen is bonded by law to one other.
- **Counterpart.** The one other person a citizen of Gemel is bonded to. The bond takes in property, reputation, testimony, the vote and the body itself.
- **The Registry of Two.** The office that assigns counterparts and enters every pair on one line of its ledgers.
- **The Widows' Ledger.** The Registry's roll of those injured in the quarries and in the war over the passes before the founding. Its second column records what became of them.
- **The founding grammar.** Gemel's name for the founders' rules for how a bond works.
- **Lesser copy.** What a counterpart feels of the other's wound: the same hurt, only weaker.
- **Two-and-Two.** An evening game for two bonded pairs, in which each pair bids without speaking, signaling or looking at each other.
- **Holm, the Choir State.** A delta country where speech has standing only when nine voices say it together.
- **Standing.** The right to be heard in law.
- **A nine.** A licensed chorus of nine voices, the smallest thing Holm's law will hear.
- **The standing-book.** The book of the ward rolls, with a column for the chorus and a column for the ward, and no line for a single voice.
- **Weather.** Holm's word for speech by one person alone, which no court can hear.
- **Unbanked inheritance.** A song left by the dead and kept by a family to itself. To bank a song is to give it to the choirs, copied clean into their ledgers.
- **The notary's drawer.** The court notary's drawer of unsigned slips: things one person said.
- **Rondel, the Country of Borrowed Families.** An orchard country where households are dealt anew by lot each month.
- **The Inheritance Wars.** The old age before Rondel's founding, when bloodlines hoarded land and unwanted children were farmed out for their work.
- **Moving Day.** The monthly day when the whole plain moves house by lot.
- **The Lot Office.** The office that draws the lots and posts each month's assignments on the eve of Moving Day.
- **Name-board.** A pale wooden board with a name burnt into it, carried from house to house and slid into the rack by the door.

- **The commons.** The people the Lot deals out.
- **Vale, the Country Without Farewells.** A wooded hill country with one law, against the spoken farewell.
- **Moss.** In Vale, a lane where a goodbye has been spoken closes over with moss.
- **The household clock.** The one clock each household in Vale keeps, wound each week by the same hand. A wound clock says "still here."
- **The telling.** The moment a household clock runs down, and the house learns that someone has gone.
- **The false telling.** A telling that nobody sent, when a clock fails through a mender's neglect.
- **"What do you wind?"** Vale's question for strangers, asking which house they are still here for.
- **Words I have not found.** The traveler's list, kept at the back of his notebook and begun in Book One, of words no country has for the things he keeps meeting.
- **A woman in a green coat.** She passes once in this book, on the box of a coach. 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 sets down what he saw and admits what he cannot decide, and characters who say little and must be read through what they do.
- **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 terms, rules and letters, and structured discussion, including speaking as a group.
- **Ethics.** Shared responsibility and shared punishment, voice and testimony, belonging and chance, and what is owed to those we leave and those who leave us.
- **Civic reasoning.** Collective responsibility, who has standing to be heard in court, lotteries and discretion in public allocation, consent and the ending of legal ties, and the records that decide who belongs where.
- **First-year political theory and literature.** Obligation and community, trust in testimony, luck and fairness, and speculative fiction as a way of testing institutions on paper.

## The rest of the series

Book One is out now, and the three books after this one 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 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](mailto:hello@mapofotherlaws.com).