

PARIS LETTERS

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

Chapter 1: We Met at a Café in Paris

When Janice arrives in Paris, she says, *“Paris, it seems, was the beginning of letting go of who I was and grabbing hold of who I was to become.”*

- a. Have you ever had a similar moment when you consciously let go of who you used to be so that you could turn into the person you wanted to become?
- b. Janice struggles with the language barrier when she orders a coffee upon arriving in Paris. Would you live in a place where you didn't speak the language? If you have, how did you cope with the language barrier?
- c. Janice befriends Summer during her first week in Paris. They are unlikely travel mates, but as she says, of Summer *“had a loud, raspy roughness about her that made me wince, but even the ones you don't like, you like better in Paris.”* What do you think of Summer and Janice's friendship? What do you think about the other friends that Janice made (or failed to make) during her travels?
- d. Janice writes a letter to the butcher. Have you ever begun a romance by writing a letter? Do you think letter writing is old-fashioned, or do you wish more people wrote letters like Janice?

Chapter 2: How Much Money Does It Take to Quit Your Job?

A big question is revealed: *“How much money does it take to quit your job?”* This question changes the course of her journal-writing experiment from discovering a creative outlet to hatching an escape plan from her job.

- a. Have you ever created an escape plan from a job? If not, would you?
- b. How much money would it take to quit your job?

Chapter 3: Clean Out Your Underwear Drawer

Janice talks with her imaginary friend, Mr. Miyagi, in the car on the way to work. He becomes a mentor to her during the first year of her project to save up and pare down.

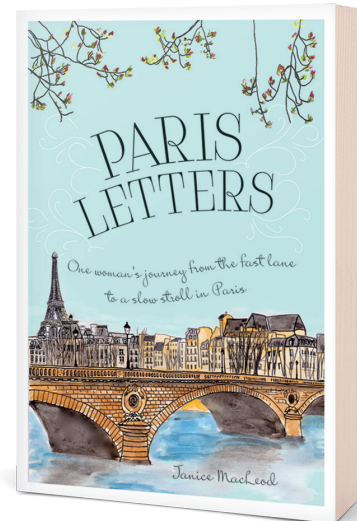
- a. Do you think that Janice has other mentors throughout the story? Have you had mentors in your life who have helped shape your future?
- b. Do you think Mr. Miyagi is real, a figment of her imagination, or a combination of the two?
- c. Is the manifestation of Mr. Miyagi a coping mechanism to help her deal with her life?
- d. Have you ever had a friend like Mr. Miyagi?

Janice loathes her daily status meeting. Her daily journal writing shifts her from a “status meeting” she loathes to a “status meeting” she loves inside the pages of her journal.

- a. Does Janice use this mind-set shift in other places throughout her journey?
- b. Are there any aspects of your life where could you shift something you loathe to something you love?

Janice says that after cleaning out her drawers, *“There is a certain freedom in not having so many choices.”*

- a. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?



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Chapter 4: Take Care of Unfinished Business

Money—Janice begins to “unclutter” her money habits through paying off credit cards, using up coffee cards, collecting and spending her spare change, and completing her taxes.

- a. How does Janice’s money situation shift when she moves to Paris?

Janice realizes that most of the stationery she finds in her home is French-themed. This gives her the idea to visit Paris.

- a. Do you have repeating themes in your life? If so, what do they say about your dreams and goals?

Religion—While in Rome, Janice goes to confession at the Vatican. She states, *“The priest went on to tell me all the things I didn’t know I needed to hear. He said there was a plan, and if I had what I thought I wanted, there could be problems. He said to trust, to assume my current circumstances were for my benefit. He said to be grateful both for what I had and what I didn’t have. If I didn’t have it, I didn’t need it.”*

- a. Do you agree with the priest? Why or why not?
- b. Were you ever sent to confession as a child? If so, what was your experience?

Chapter 5: Cut Down on Groceries

Janice embarks on a vegan lifestyle.

- a. Have you ever tried changing your eating habits? If so, what were your results?
- b. When traveling, do you adopt the culinary ideals of the culture you are visiting or do you try to find food similar to your culture and diet?

Chapter 6: Find an Accomplice

How is Ben different from Janice’s past romantic relationships?

Janice tells Ben, *“Somehow, my dream came true and it sucks.”*

- a. Have you ever had this happen to you? If so, how did you resolve it?
- b. If you’re currently in this situation, what could you do to resolve it?

Chapter 7: Turn What You’ve Got into Something You Can Sell

Unmet expectations—Janice cleans out her art supply closet and begins to paint. She writes, *“...when the goal changed from painting something wonderful to painting something just to use up the supplies and finish a canvas, I managed to create some art. Inspiration, it seemed, was not required.”*

- a. Do you agree with the statement that inspiration was not required?

Crows are often symbolized in literature as the death of something.

- a. How does this symbol play out for Janice in her life in California?

Chapter 8: Write Your Resignation Letter

Work/life balance—Janice states, *“without adequate recovery time between churning out these ads, my work/life balance went severely off-kilter.”*

- a. How is your work/life balance?
- b. Do you feel society places too much attention on the pursuit of the balance of the two?

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By now, it's December and Janice has successfully completed her New Year's resolution of writing in her journal every day.

- a. Have you ever successfully completed a New Year's resolution? Discuss.

Chapter 9: Or Should I Say Bonjour?

Janice leaves her job during what Suze Orman says are *"the big money-making years."*

- a. Could you do this? If so, where would you go? How would you do it?
- b. Do you think it was crazy for Janice to leave a good-paying job for a nomadic life with no income?

Janice begins to navigate the large Métro system of Paris.

- a. Have you ever had to master the trains and buses of a new city? What was your experience?
- b. Is it something you enjoy or something that creates anxiety?

Paris is a city made for those who love to walk. Luckily, Janice loves the chance to stretch her legs after years of sitting behind a desk.

- a. What city would you like to visit and how does it match your needs and desires?

Chapter 10: Gustav Who?

Many people dream of seeing the Eiffel Tower.

- a. Is there a monument in the world you would like to visit?

When Janice arrives in Paris, she has an insatiable appetite.

- a. Is it because she was walking so much or because she had deprived herself for so long?

Chapter 11: Try Something New

Religion—Janice's uncle says, *"Art is a spiritual practice. If it weren't for art, I'd have given up on God a long time ago."*

- a. Do you agree with the statement that art is a spiritual practice?
- b. Do you have a spiritual practice? If not, why? If so, what is it?

Janice begins her love affair with Christophe.

- a. Would you embark on a relationship with someone who doesn't speak the same language?

Chapter 12: Mona Lisa Smile

How does Janice alter her traffic pattern of always rushing (on the road or on the sidewalk) when she is walking around Paris with Christophe?

- a. How does this eventually affect other aspects of her life?

Chapter 13: Declare Nothing but Your Genius

Janice has a terrible hotel experience.

- a. Have you ever experienced something similar? If so, what did you do about it?

Janice experiences a shift from talking with Mr. Miyagi to talking to Percy Kelly, who is the artist behind the painted letters she finds in Yorkshire Dales.

- a. How does this shift help her on the road ahead?

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Chapter 14: There Is No Place Like Rome

Without her luggage, Janice spends her first few days in Rome with only a few pieces of clothing.

- a. Is this idea appealing to you, or would this create anxiety?

Marco explains that you can tell a lot about a person by the way they eat ice cream.

- a. What does it say about you?

Marco states that Janice is *“both a hero and a fool”* for quitting her job and traveling indefinitely.

- a. What do you think? Is she a hero and/or a fool?

Chapter 15: Bridge of Sighs

Identity—Janice struggles with her identity throughout this journey.

- a. Who has she become on this bridge? And when she returns to Paris, how does she identify herself on the bridge with the violin player?

Because of the language barrier, Janice could not attempt to alter her personality to suit Christophe's preferences.

- a. Have you ever contorted your personality in order to impress someone? What were the results?

Chapter 16: Unpacking in Paris

Moving to a new city can be exciting, but it also comes with a set of challenges.

- a. What do you think Janice's biggest challenges were when settling in Paris?

Chapter 17: The Paris Letter Project

How does her identity as a copywriter help Janice create the Paris Letters? Have you ever used what you thought to be a negative skill from your past to create something better?

Chapter 18: Our First Fight

Beauty—Janice writes, *“In Paris, insistence on beauty has seeped into the culture so much that Parisians become offended by having to look at something that isn't lovely.”*

- a. What has seeped into your culture?

Chapter 19: How Would You Like Your Eggs?

Janice's pregnancy scare puts into perspective just how much love exists between her and Christophe.

- a. Have you and a loved one been in a scary situation that put your relationship into perspective?

Chapter 20: Rosé-Colored Glasses of Summer

Janice writes in her letter, *“We all must find our place in this world. Here in Paris, I believe I've found mine.”*

- a. Can you name a specific situation in which you felt you had settled into your real life?

Chapter 21: Franglish

Janice's language skills force her to think before she speaks, which is a benefit to the relationship, as she cannot let slip anything she may regret.

- a. Do you feel this is a benefit or a hindrance to effective communication with a partner?

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Chapter 22: Haunted by Hemingway

Janice writes of when Hemingway was reunited with his papers many years after he left them in a trunk at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, *“What a magical moment that must have been. To find his daily musings from the time in his life he loved most, like lost love letters from a bygone day.”*

- a. Do you wish you had an old trunk that was found many years later? If so, what do you wish you would find in that old trunk?

How does Janice’s life in Paris relate to Hemingway’s life in Paris?

Chapter 23: Guests Galore

Janice finds it difficult to link friends from her old life to her new life.

- a. Have you had similar experiences linking friends from your past to your new life?

Chapter 24: The Etsy Quit Your Day Job Article

Chapter 25: Yellow Flip-Flop Summer

Janice introduces the first of her two grandmothers.

- a. How is Janice similar to her gardening grandmother?
- b. How do lessons in the garden from the past inform Janice’s life in the present?
- c. How does her other grandmother, who is introduced later in the story, also inform her choices?

Revelation—What do we learn of Janice’s integration in French society as we watch her go through her market day?

- a. What do you think the fern in her courtyard symbolizes?
- b. As she dices vegetables in her kitchen, what does she realize about her journey?

Chapter 26: Nightmares...*Les Cauchemars*

In Janice’s nightmare, a group lunch is suggested. Do you think she was overreacting?

Chapter 27: Paris Revealed Itself to Me in Layers

Janice discusses how she sees more beauty in Paris the longer she is there.

- a. Have you had a similar experience in a place where you have lived for an extended period of time?

How had Janice’s nomadic circumstances informed Christophe’s decision to invite her to return to Paris?

Chapter 28: Beautiful Old Ladies

Janice receives a letter from her one of her grandmothers. In what ways are their lives similar in this moment in time?

Chapter 29: Potatoes and Proposal

Christophe’s proposal isn’t similar to a traditional proposal.

- a. In what ways do Janice and Christophe not have a traditional relationship?
- b. Have you ever been in a nontraditional relationship?

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Chapter 30: A Baffled Bride

Janice states that binders made her shudder.

- a. Why? What do you think the binders represent?

When shopping for her wedding dress in Belgium, Janice states that adding the time limit of 24 hours helped her make decisions.

- a. Where else in this story does she add a time limit to get done what needed to get done?
- b. Do you have a similar method for getting things done?

Janice's friends give her advice for her marriage.

- a. What advice would you give a bride?
- b. If you've been married, what was the best (or worst) advice you were given?

Chapter 31: A Wedding in Paris...and Beyond

When Milena presents the heirloom necklace, Janice realizes that after getting rid of most of her material possessions back in California, some mementos do matter and are worth keeping.

- a. What is your view on material possessions and mementos?
- b. Do you lean more toward minimalism, hoarding, or somewhere in between?

Chapter 32: How to Be an Artist

Janice reflects back to her life in California and realizes that it was good that she didn't have what she wanted back then because she got something better in Paris.

- a. Have you ever had a similar situation, where you became grateful for something you didn't have because it worked out better than you could have imagined in the end?

Janice finds a greeting card that says, *"Write to learn what you know."*

- a. Is this good advice for you?

She writes, *"The longer I painted, the more I realized so much of my life had been in training for this moment in time."*

- a. Do you feel you have been in training for a certain time in your life? What training and for what purpose?

Chapter 33: Paris Letters

Where do you think the adventures of Janice and Christophe will lead?

