

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

THE GLASS ROOM by Simon Mawer

- Who is the main character of the novel?
- Did the fact that the novel was based on real people and a real place affect your reading experience?
- What did the Glass Room represent to Liesel & Viktor in the beginning? Were their hopes realized and realistic? What did the architect, Abt, mean when he told Viktor and Liesel, “I will design you a life”?
- The Glass Room is described as embodying reason and rationality in contrast to the irrationality of human beings. Are there characters who strive to remove themselves from any emotion/irrationality? Are they successful? Is there a character who seems more balanced in terms of emotion & rationality than the others?
- Why did Viktor get involved with Kata? How was that relationship different than his relationship with Liesel? Also compare Tomas & Zdenka and Tomas & Eve.
- Describe the relationship between Liesel and Kata. Did your opinion of Liesel change when she confronted Kata? Why did she tell Kata that of course she would be taken with them to America? Did Liesel's outburst at the train station surprise you?
- Describe the relationship between Hana and Stahl. How do you think the author wants us to feel about Stahl?
- There is much female sexual attraction as well as close friendship in the novel. Is this a realistic reflection of the time when the novel takes place? What is Zdenka's attraction for Hana?
- What purpose did Lanik and his sister's story have in the novel?
- How did various characters change in the course of the novel? Were there some youthful illusions lost?
- Is this a Holocaust novel? Why did Mawer not tell us the fate of all the characters?
- Why do both Hana and Liesel withhold parts of their stories from each other in the end?
- The author uses much imagery in describing the house – water, fish tank, cats' lapping tongues—and many references to light & space. There is also much reference to music and the myth of Ondine. Did the imagery and mythical reference enrich your reading experience? How does the Ondine myth help develop the characters of Tomas and Zdenka?
- Is Liesel's blindness significant?



Skokie Public Library

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- One of the main themes of the novel is history, and “the incessant pressures of the past and the future” (p.354). Tomas wants to live “in ignorance of both the past and the future, forever at the pinnacle of time, the eternal present” (p. 328). Liesel thinks memory and dream are similar (p. 305), yet at the end of the novel she remembers everything held in the timelessness of the house (p. 342). What do you think the author is trying to say about history, as shown in the characters and as symbolized by the Glass Room?
- Another theme is openness and deception. What are some examples of how this theme is played out in the novel, and specifically in the glass house?