

## Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1308895>

### About the Book

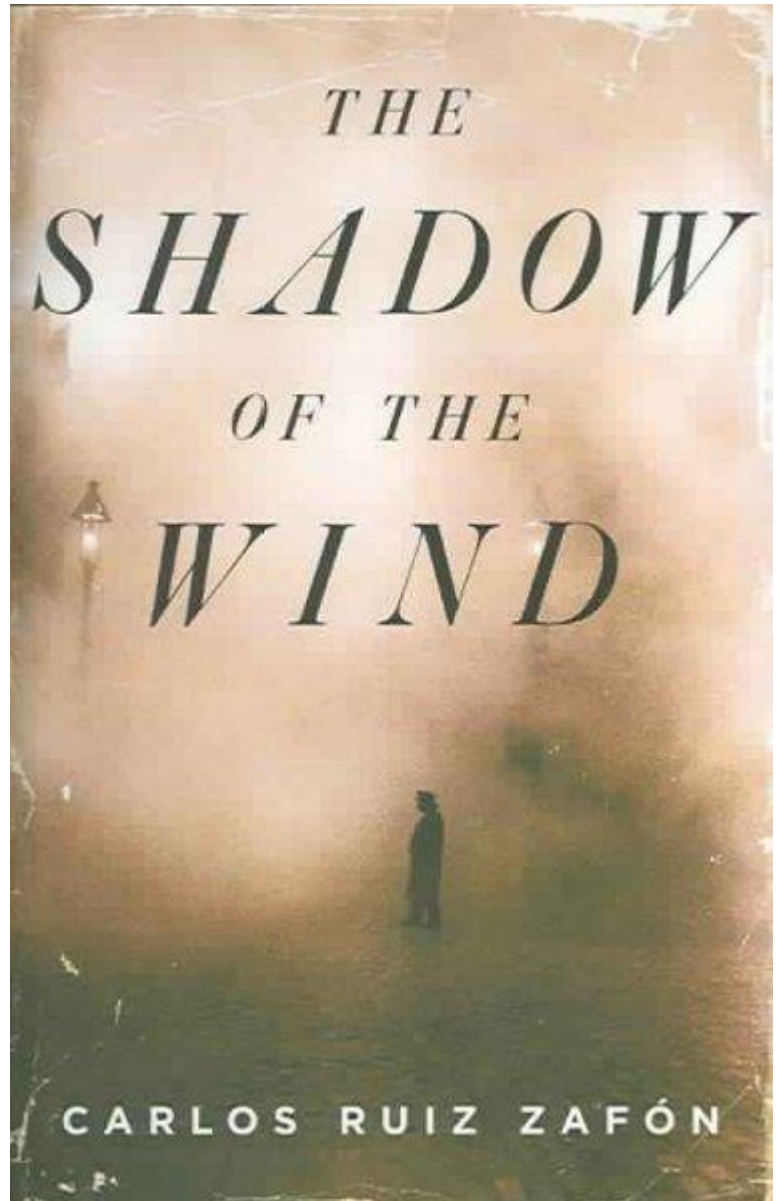
At the first light of dawn in postwar Barcelona, a bookseller leads his motherless son to a mysterious crypt called the Cemetery of Forgotten Books. This labyrinthine sanctuary houses the books that have lost their owners, books that are no longer remembered by anyone. It is here that ten-year-old Daniel Sempere pulls a single book—*The Shadow of the Wind*—off of the dusty shelves to adopt as his own. With one fateful turn of a page, he begins an adventure that will unravel another man's tragedy and solve a mystery that has already taken many lives and will shape his entire future.

When Daniel speaks with Gustavo Barceló, a local booktrader, to find out more about his new treasure, word begins to spread that he has uncovered a long-sought rarity, perhaps the only copy of any of Julián Carax's works in existence. Soon after, a mysterious stranger whom Daniel recognizes as Lain Coubert, the leather-masked,

cigarette-smoking devil from Carax's novel, propositions Daniel, offering to buy the book from him for an astronomical price.)

Daniel refuses, in spite of the man's thinly veiled threats. With the help of his bookselling friends, Daniel discovers that Lain Coubert has cut a swath of destruction through two countries, methodically searching for and destroying all of Carax's books while erasing every trace of Carax's life. Source:

[http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/shadow\\_of\\_the\\_wind.html](http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/shadow_of_the_wind.html)



## About the Author *Source: NoveList*

Carlos Ruiz Zafón was born on September 25, 1964 in Barcelona, Spain and grew up under the shadow of Gaudí's Sagrada Família cathedral, just a block away from the family home. At the age of thirteen, he wrote a six-hundred-page science fiction novel; it was never published. After studying with the Jesuits of Sarria and attending university, he became one of Spain's most successful advertising writers.

Ruiz Zafón returned to his passion for writing novels in the early 1990s in the field of young adult literature. He debuted as a novelist with the publication of *The Edge of the Cloud* in 1993, a mystery that was awarded the Primero Edebe prize. Also published that year was *The Prince of Shadow*, about a diabolic prince who grants wishes at very high personal prices.

In 1994, he moved to the United States to reside in Los Angeles, where he began work as a scriptwriter. His work on young adult novels continued, however. *The Lights of September*, which came out in 1995, focuses on a toy maker who lives in a haunted mansion alongside mechanical creatures and ghosts from the past.

*The Shadow of the Wind*, his first novel for adults, was published in 2001 in Spain and became an international bestseller, including stays at number 1 in both Spain and Germany. It is the first of his books to be translated into English; released in the United States in April, 2004, it reached number 22 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

*The Shadow of the Wind* is actually the first of four novels about gothic Barcelona. Besides his novels and screenwriting, Ruiz Zafón also writes for the Spanish daily papers *El País* and *La Vanguardia*. He recently moved back to his apartment in Barcelona near the Gothic Quarter and the Portal de l'Angel, where the incarnation of the devil, Lain Coubert, first appears to Daniel in *The Shadow of the Wind*. He is working on his next novel, which is set in the city in the late nineteenth century.

Translator Lucia Graves is the author and translator of many works and has overseen Spanish-language editions of the poetry of her father, Robert Graves.

## Reviews

### *Booklist*

Call it the "book book" genre: this international sensation (it has sold in more than 20 countries and been number one on the Spanish best-seller list), newly translated into English, has books and storytelling--and a single, physical book--at its heart. In post-

World War II Barcelona, young Daniel is taken by his bookseller father to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books, a massive sanctuary where books are guarded from oblivion. Told to choose one book to protect, he selects *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Julian Carax. He reads it, loves it, and soon learns it is both very valuable and very much in danger because someone is determinedly burning every copy of every book written by the obscure Carax. To call this book--Zafon's *Shadow of the Wind*--old-fashioned is to mean it in the best way. It's big, chock-full of unusual characters, and strong in its sense of place. Daniel's initiation into the mysteries of adulthood is given the same weight as the mystery of the book-burner. And the setting--Spain under Franco--injects an air of sobriety into some plot elements that might otherwise seem soap operatic. Part detective story, part boy's adventure, part romance, fantasy, and gothic horror, the intricate plot is urged on by extravagant foreshadowing and nail-nibbling tension. This is rich, lavish storytelling, very much in the tradition of Ross King's *Ex Libris* (2001).

### *Publishers Weekly*

Ruiz Zafon's novel, a bestseller in his native Spain, takes the satanic touches from *Angel Heart* and stirs them into a bookish intrigue a la *Foucault's Pendulum*. The time is the 1950s; the place, Barcelona. Daniel Sempere, the son of a widowed bookstore owner, is 10 when he discovers a novel, *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Julian Carax. The novel is rare, the author obscure, and rumors tell of a horribly disfigured man who has been burning every copy he can find of Carax's novels. The man calls himself Lain Coubert - the name of the devil in one of Carax's novels. As he grows up, Daniel's fascination with the mysterious Carax links him to a blind femme fatale with a "porcelain gaze," Clara Barcelo; another fan, a leftist jack-of-all-trades, Fermin Romero de Torres; his best friend's sister, the delectable Beatriz Aguilar; and, as he begins investigating the life and death of Carax, a cast of characters with secrets to hide. Officially, Carax's dead body was dumped in an alley in 1936. But discrepancies in this story surface. Meanwhile, Daniel and Fermin are being harried by a sadistic policeman, Carax's childhood friend. As Daniel's quest continues, frightening parallels between his own life and Carax's begin to emerge. Ruiz Zafon strives for a literary tone, and no scene goes by without its complement of florid, cute and inexact similes and metaphors (snow is "God's dandruff"; servants obey orders with "the efficiency and submissiveness of a body of well-trained insects"). Yet the colorful cast of characters, the gothic turns and the straining for effect only give the book the feel of para-literature or the Hollywood version of a great 19th-century novel.

### *Library Journal*

This complex, Byzantine, at times longwinded work, which spent more than 60 weeks on Spain's best sellers list, throws together mystery, romance, and crime into one big mix like an olla podrida. Set in Franco's Spain, it revolves around the remarkably sophisticated 18-year-old Daniel Sempere. After visiting the Cemetery of Forgotten Books, which recalls Borges's labyrinthine Library of Babel, he decides to entrust to his care a tome by Julian Carax called *The Shadow of the Wind*. He soon discovers not

only that he probably has the last extant copy of this work but that someone wants desperately to eradicate all the author's books and will resort to any means necessary, including murder. Daniel meets a wide range of well-developed yet eccentric characters as he wanders throughout Barcelona attempting to ascertain the truth. Zafon's fifth novel follows a traditional narrative; what is outstanding is the metaphysical concept of books that assume a life of their own as the author subtly plays with intertextual references (e.g., a pair of cockatoos named Ortega and Gasset make cameo appearances). Even the plot and characters of Carax's fictitious work are interwoven into this meticulously crafted mosaic. Recommended primarily for public libraries and especially for readers who lead double lives as bibliophiles.

### *Kirkus* \* Starred Review \*

The histories of a mysterious book and its enigmatic author are painstakingly disentangled in this yeasty Dickensian romance: a first novel by a Spanish novelist now living in the US.

We meet its engaging narrator Daniel Sempere in 1945, when he's an 11-year-old boy brought by his father, a Barcelona rare-book dealer, to a secret library known as the Cemetery of Forgotten Books. Enthralled, Daniel "chooses" an obscure novel, *The Shadow of the Wind*, a complex quest tale whose author, Julian Carax, reputedly fled Spain at the outbreak of its Civil War, and later died in Paris. Carax and his book obsess Daniel for a decade, as he grows to manhood, falls in and out of fascination, if not love with three beguiling women, and comes ever closer to understanding who Carax was and how he was connected to the family of tyrannical Don Ricardo Aldaya? And why a sinister, "faceless" stranger who identifies himself as Carax's fictional creation ("demonic") "Lain Coubert" has seemingly "got out of the pages of a book so that he could burn it." Daniel's investigations are aided, and sometimes impeded, by a lively gallery of vividly evoked supporting characters. Prominent among them are secretive translator Nuria Monfort (who knows more about Carax's Paris years than she initially reveals); Aldaya family maid Jacinta Coronada, consigned to a lunatic asylum to conceal what she knows; Daniel's ebullient Sancho Panza Fermin Romero de Torres, a wily vagrant working as "bibliographic detective" in the Sempere's bookstore; and vengeful police inspector Fumero, a Javert-like stalker whose refusal to believe Carax is dead precipitates the climax?at which Daniel realizes he's much more than just a reader of Carax's intricate, sorrowful story.

*The Shadow of the Wind* will keep you up nights, and it'll be time well spent. Absolutely marvelous.

### **Literary Criticism**

*Goodies and baddies galore*

Carlos Ruiz Zafon's novel has won a clutch of literary prizes in Spain. Its sales, when it came out in 2001, were greeted in the country's broad-sheets as 'a publishing phenomenon'. What is even more remarkable is its reception in Germany. No less a notable than foreign minister Joschka Fischer has declared, 'You'll drop everything and read the whole right through.' This reflects the fact that German writers have long enjoyed a special relationship with Spanish literature.

To its first English readers, the fantastic adventures of *Don Quixote* were the creation of Cervantes' comic genius. Three hundred years later German Romantics turned the don into the hero of a spiritual battle against bourgeois materialism. They have a lot to answer for. A taste for what may be called fantasies with moral--even political--messages has become one of the stocks in trade of Spanish novelists.

I feared the worst when I opened this book. Its narrator Daniel, son of an antiquarian bookseller, visits the vast, cavernous Cemetery of Forgotten Books. He takes from its miles of shelves a book by Julian Carax. But what looked like a prelude to an amateur version of Kafka or Borges turns out to be a complex and absorbing detective novel as Daniel, obsessed by Julian, sets out to unravel the unexplained mysteries of his life.

Here is a vastly abbreviated version of the plot. Julian is the son of a wife-beating hatter, in whose shop he meets Don Ricardo Aldaya, a bottom-pinching tycoon. Ricardo takes a fancy to the boy, paying his fees at an expensive private school where Fumero, the school's caretaker's son, likewise gets a free education. He becomes chief of the Barcelona criminal police. Julian and Don Ricardo's daughter, Penelope, fall deeply in love. Julian is the fruit of an old affair of Don Ricardo with Julian's mother. Penelope and Julian plan to elope to Paris. But Don Ricardo imprisons Penelope in the now derelict Aldaya mansion where she dies giving birth to Julian's stillborn child. Both are buried in the crypt where Daniel discovers their coffins.

Julian goes alone to Paris, surviving as a pianist in a brothel. He is believed to have been killed in the massacres of the early days of the civil war. In fact, he returns to Barcelona intent on burning all his writings. He is horribly disfigured in a fire in the warehouse where his surviving, unsold books are stored. He is the mysterious, faceless figure who haunts Daniel in the streets of Barcelona.

Daniel, Julian and Fumero meet in the pitch-dark, gloomy mansion where Fumero, consumed by vengeance inspired by Julian's easy successes as a schoolmate, hopes finally to kill Julian. In an awful struggle, Fumero is strangled by Julian's now burnt, claw-like hands and his corpse thrown into one of the ruined fountains of the mansion's park. The detective novel ends as a Gothic horror tale.

It is a tribute to Ruiz Zafon's skills as a Hollywood scriptwriter that he can create stunning set-pieces and bring to life a host of eccentric figures. It is understandable that the young radical writers of his generation should wish to remember the victims of

Francoist repression in the sordid, sleazy society of the 1940s. In this novel, postwar Barcelona is a drab city where it always rains. I was often in Barcelona some six years before Ruiz Zafon was born and it did not always rain.

What emerges is a society of goodies and baddies. Fumero is a brutal sadist who puts the skills learnt as a communist executioner at the service of the Francoist regime. To be rich in such a regime is to be corrupt; the poor and the outcasts are paragons of virtue.

Golden-hearted tarts abound while stony-hearted Catholic nuns starve to death the inmates of an old-age home.

The Manichaeian anti-Francoist novel (the creation of the progres of the 1960s) threatened to turn its characters into cardboard figures. This was partly because it was a recreation of a period which the writers had not experienced themselves as had the older generation such as Miguel Delibes, the greatest Spanish novelist. Ruiz Zafon avoids the trap by a whisker, thanks to the vigour of his writing, just as the descriptions of Daniel's love affairs in the novel, with the delights of undressing one's adolescent lover, just escape becoming sentimental stuff. Even those who do not share Joschka Fischer's progressive sentiments may well, like him, read *The Shadow of the Wind* at one go.

Source: Carr, Raymond. "Goodies and baddies galore." *Spectator* 7 Aug. 2004: 33. Literature Resource Center. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

### **Discussion Questions** Source:

[http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/shadow\\_of\\_the\\_wind.html](http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/shadow_of_the_wind.html)

1. Julián Carax's and Daniel's lives follow very similar trajectories. Yet one ends in tragedy, the other in happiness. What similarities are there between the paths they take? What are the differences that allow Daniel to avoid tragedy?
2. Nuria Monfort tells Daniel, "Julián once wrote that coincidences are the scars of fate. There are no coincidences, Daniel. We are the puppets of our unconscious." What does that mean? What does she refer to in her own experience and in Julián's life?
3. Nuria Monfort's dying words, meant for Julián, are, "There are worse prisons than words." What does she mean by this? What is she referring to?
4. There are many devil figures in the story—Carax's Laín Coubert, Jacinta's Zacarias, Fermín's Fumero. How does evil manifest itself in each devil figure? What are the characteristics of the villains/devils?

5. Discuss the title of the novel. What is "The Shadow of the Wind"? Where does Zafón refer to it and what does he use the image to illustrate?
6. Zafón's female characters are often enigmatic, otherworldly angels full of power and mystery. Clara the blind white goddess ultimately becomes a fallen angel; Carax credits sweet Bea with saving his and Daniel's lives; Daniel's mother is actually an angel whose death renders her so ephemeral that Daniel can't even remember her face. Do you think Zafón paints his female characters differently than his male characters? What do the women represent in Daniel's life? What might the Freud loving Miquel Moliner say about Daniel's relationships with women?
7. Daniel says of *The Shadow of the Wind*, "As it unfolded, the structure of the story began to remind me of one of those Russian dolls that contain innumerable ever-smaller dolls within" (p. 7). Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* unfolds much the same way, with many characters contributing fragments of their own stories in the first person point of view. What does Zafón illustrate with this method of storytelling? What do the individual mini-autobiographies contribute to the tale?
8. The evil Fumero is the only son of a ridiculed father and a superficial, status-seeking mother. The troubled Julián is the bastard son of a love-starved musical mother and an amorous, amoral businessman, though he was raised by a cuckolded hatmaker. Do you think their personalities are products of nature or nurture? How are the sins of the fathers and mothers visited upon each of the characters?

## Multimedia

### ***Carlos Ruiz Zafon: The Angel's Game vs. The Shadow of Wind* (Video Clip)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xYzsCtuKII>

## Further Reading

### ***The Angel's Game* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon**

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1329695>

(Call number: Fiction Ruiz Zafon)

From master storyteller Carlos Ruiz Zafon, author of the international phenomenon "*The Shadow of the Wind*," a dazzling page-turner about the perilous nature of obsession, in literature and in love. In the turbulent and mysterious Barcelona of the 1920s, David Martin, a young novelist obsessed with a forbidden love, receives an offer from an enigmatic publisher to write a book like no other before-- a book for which "people will live and die." In return, he is promised a fortune and, perhaps, much more. Once again, the author of "*The Shadow of the Wind*" takes us into the gothic universe

of the Cemetery of Forgotten Books and creates a breathtaking adventure of intrigue, romance, and tragedy, and a dizzyingly constructed labyrinth of secrets where the magic of books, passion, and friendship blend into a masterful story.

**Author's official website**

<http://www.carlosruizzafon.co.uk/>

Information on the author and his novels.

**Read-Alikes** Source: *NoveList*

***The Name of the Rose*** by Umberto Eco

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1022546>

(Call number: Fiction Eco)

The year is 1327. Franciscans in a wealthy Italian abbey are suspected of heresy, and Brother William of Baskerville arrives to investigate. When his delicate mission is suddenly overshadowed by seven bizarre deaths, Brother William turns to the logic of Aristotle, the theology of Aquinas, and the empirical insights of Roger Bacon to find the killer. He collects evidence, deciphers secret symbols and coded manuscripts, and digs into the eerie labyrinth of the abbey ("where the most interesting things happen at night") armed with a wry sense of humor and a ferocious curiosity.

***The Club Dumas*** by Arturo Pérez-Reverte

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1329713>

(Call number: Fiction Pérez-Reverte)

A provocative literary thriller that playfully pays tribute to classic tales of mystery and adventure. Lucas Corso is a book detective, a middle-aged mercenary hired to hunt down rare editions for wealthy and unscrupulous clients. When a well-known bibliophile is found dead, leaving behind part of the original manuscript of Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, Corso is brought in to authenticate the fragment. He is soon drawn into a swirling plot involving devil worship, occult practices, and swashbuckling derring-do among a cast of characters bearing a suspicious resemblance to those of Dumas's masterpiece. Aided by a mysterious beauty named for a Conan Doyle heroine, Corso travels from Madrid to Toledo to Paris on the killer's trail in this twisty intellectual romp through the book world.

***Ex-Libris*** by Ross King

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1174108>

(Call number: Fiction King)

Responding to a cryptic summons to a remote country house, London bookseller Isaac Inchbold finds himself responsible for restoring a magnificent library pillaged during the English Civil War, and in the process slipping from the surface of 1660s London into an underworld of spies and smugglers, ciphers and forgeries. As he assembles the fragments of a complex historical mystery, Inchbold learns how Sir Ambrose



Plessington, founder of the library, escaped from Bohemia on the eve of the Thirty Years War with plunder from the Imperial Library. Inchbold's hunt for one of these stolen volumes -- a lost Hermetic text -- soon casts him into an elaborate intrigue. His fortunes hang on the discovery of the missing manuscript but his search reveals that the elusive volume is not what it seems and that he has been made an unwitting player in a treacherous game.

**Codex** by Lev Grossman

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1223496>

(Call number: Fiction Grossman)

About to depart on his first vacation in years, Edward Wozny, a hotshot young investment banker, is sent to help one of his firm's most important and mysterious clients. His task is to search their library stacks for a precious medieval codex, a treasure kept sealed away for many years and for many reasons. Enlisting the help of passionate medievalist Margaret Napier, Edward is determined to solve the mystery of the codex-to understand its significance to his wealthy clients, and to decipher the seeming parallels between the legend of the codex and an obsessive role-playing computer game that has absorbed him in the dark hours of the night. The chilling resolution brings together the medieval and the modern aspects of the plot in a twist worthy of earning comparisons to novels by William Gibson and Dan Brown, not to mention those by A. S. Byatt and Umberto Eco. Lev Grossman's *Codex* is a thriller of the highest order.

**The Rule of Four** by Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1223577>

(Call number: Mystery Caldwell)

An ivy league murder, a mysterious coded manuscript, and the secrets of a Renaissance prince collide memorably in *The Rule of Four* --a brilliant work of fiction that weaves together suspense and scholarship, high art and unimaginable treachery. It's Easter at Princeton. Seniors are scrambling to finish their theses. And two students, Tom Sullivan and Paul Harris, are a hair's breadth from solving the mysteries of the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili--a renowned text attributed to an Italian nobleman, a work that has baffled scholars since its publication in 1499. For Tom, their research has been a link to his family's past--and an obstacle to the woman he loves. For Paul, it has become an obsession, the very reason for living. But as their deadline looms, research has stalled--until a long-lost diary surfaces with a vital clue. And when a fellow researcher is murdered just hours later, Tom and Paul realize that they are not the first to glimpse the Hypnerotomachia 's secrets. Suddenly the stakes are raised, and as the two friends sift through the codes and riddles at the heart of the text, they are beginning to see the manuscript in a new light--not simply as a story of faith, eroticism and pedantry, but as a bizarre, coded mathematical maze. And as they come closer and closer to deciphering the final puzzle of a book that has shattered careers, friendships and families, they know that their own lives are in mortal danger. Because

at least one person has been killed for knowing too much. And they know even more. From the streets of fifteenth-century Rome to the rarified realm of the Ivy League, from a shocking 500 year-old murder scene to the drama of a young man's coming of age, *The Rule of Four* takes us on an entertaining, illuminating tour of history--as it builds to a pinnacle of nearly unbearable suspense.

***The Eyre Affair*** by Jasper Fforde

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1186098>

(Call number: Mystery Fforde)

In Jasper Fforde's Great Britain, circa 1985, time travel is routine, cloning is a reality (dodos are the resurrected pet of choice), and literature is taken very, very seriously. England is a virtual police state where an aunt can get lost (literally) in a Wordsworth poem and forging Byronic verse is a punishable offense. All this is business as usual for Thursday Next, renowned Special Operative in literary detection. But when someone begins kidnapping characters from works of literature and plucks Jane Eyre from the pages of Bronte's novel, Thursday is faced with the challenge of her career.

***The Thirteenth Tale*** by Diane Setterfield

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1271183>

(Call number: Fiction Setterfield)

When Margaret Lea opened the door to the past, what she confronted was her destiny. All children mythologize their birth ...So begins the prologue of reclusive author Vida Winter's collection of stories, which are as famous for the mystery of the missing thirteenth tale as they are for the delight and enchantment of the twelve that do exist. The enigmatic Winter has spent six decades creating various outlandish life histories for herself -- all of them inventions that have brought her fame and fortune but have kept her violent and tragic past a secret. Now old and ailing, she at last wants to tell the truth about her extraordinary life. She summons biographer Margaret Lea, a young woman for whom the secret of her own birth, hidden by those who loved her most, remains an ever-present pain. Struck by a curious parallel between Miss Winter's story and her own, Margaret takes on the commission. As Vida disinters the life she meant to bury for good, Margaret is mesmerized. It is a tale of gothic strangeness featuring the Angelfield family, including the beautiful and willful Isabelle, the feral twins Adeline and Emmeline, a ghost, a governess, a topiary garden and a devastating fire. Margaret succumbs to the power of Vida's storytelling but remains suspicious of the author's sincerity. She demands the truth from Vida, and together they confront the ghosts that have haunted them while becoming, finally, transformed by the truth themselves. *The Thirteenth Tale* is a love letter to reading, a book for the feral reader in all of us, a return to that rich vein of storytelling that our parents loved and that we loved as children. Diane Setterfield will keep you guessing, make you wonder, move you to tears and laughter and, in the end, deposit you breathless yet satisfied back upon the shore of your everyday life.

**Extras!**

Is there a book you have been attached to since childhood that you still think of and perhaps re-read? Bring it to the discussion, and when you are finished talking about *Shadow of the Wind*, share those personally life-long important books with the group.

