



## Book club 36: Activism & engagement

*Three Burials*  
by Anders Lustgarten

### Rules

In this book club you will discuss *Three Burials* by Anders Lustgarten in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story: in turn, the players say what they did not understand about the book and try to find an answer together. When the biggest confusions are solved, round 3 starts.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit [www.litlab.nl](http://www.litlab.nl). A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at [www.litlab.nl/docenten](http://www.litlab.nl/docenten).



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## Three Burials

### Introduction

*'Omar isn't scared until Abdi Bile tells him who to call back home if he doesn't make it. They've never discussed this, all throughout their journey. But Abdi insists now, makes him repeat the name. Then Omar gets scared. Then he makes Abdi memorize Asha's number. Makes him repeat it four times until Abdi snaps at him to go fuck himself, he's bringing them bad luck.'* (p. 10)

Cherry Bristow finds herself on a beach in South-East England after blacking out from heavy drinking the night before, trying to cope with her son's suicide. On the beach she finds the washed-up body of a teenage refugee and calls the police. The body is taken to the morgue, where Cherry's friend Michael works. He discovers the boy didn't drown but died from a broken neck. Michael is then assaulted by two police officers who try to take the body with them. After telling Cherry about the incident, she decides the boy deserves a real funeral and that his loved ones should be able to say their goodbyes. She kidnaps the body and goes in search of the girl on the laminated picture clutched in the dead boy's hand.

*Three Burials* by Anders Lustgarten tells the story of a refugee's murder from different perspectives. This book club invites you to discuss this novel and its criticism of European immigration policies. Can a novel like *Three Burials* help you understand the motives of the officials and protesters, as well as the victims of these policies?

### Round 1: Quiz

Turn over the 5 cards with quiz questions one by one. Write down the answer on a piece of paper.

### Round 2: Initial questions

What questions popped into your head while reading *Three Burials*? Were there any parts that left you confused or wondering? Take turns sharing your questions about the story and try to come up with answers together. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

### Round 3: Discussion

The player with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to turn over a card first from one of the two piles of discussion questions. Once they have answered the question, the other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

### Round 4: Review

Review *Three Burials* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



### Question 1

Where did Cherry first meet her husband, Robert?

### Question 2

How does Barratt call the group trying to stop refugees from arriving in Britain?

### Question 3

Who is Danny Hodges?

### Question 4

How does Barratt find Andy and Cherry at the campsite?

### Question 5

How does Cherry get the pink convertible car?

### Answers

- 1 At a rave.
- 2 Defenders of the Realm
- 3 He is an officer of Border Force Regional Intake Unit, the place where Abdi Bile is being held.
- 4 By tracking Andy's phone.
- 5 A woman called Radka switched Cherry's car with that of her boss's wife.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



### Personal connections? 1

Omar's father teaches him about 'negative splits' in racing (i.e. finishing stronger than you start). Where do you see this idea shaping Omar's decisions during the crossing? Have you ever had a moment in your life where you had to 'run the second half faster than the first'?

### Personal connections? 2

Andy Jakubiak longs for a sense of identity and belonging and he finds both through Barratt. What specific moments in the novel reveal Andy's insecurity most clearly? Do you think you could ever be tempted to support an extreme ideology just to feel accepted or to feel that you belong? Explain your answer.

### Personal connections? 3

The cruelty in the story isn't just tied to individuals, it's part of society's system (Border Force conditions, 'Defenders of the Realm', public health burials). Which scenes most clearly show the failures of society rather than individual cruelty? Where do you see that social systems are shaping people's behaviour in your own society?

### Personal connections? 4

Andy ultimately decides not to report Barratt. At what exact point in the novel does he make that choice, and why? Have you ever stayed silent when speaking up might have cost you something? Explain your answer.

### Personal connections? 5

Covid and its backlash could be seen as a kick starter for a lot of the events in the novel. Could you explain this statement? What effects did the Covid pandemic and quarantine have on your life? Do you still experience these effects and to what extent?

### Personal connections? 6

According to the novel's title, there are three burials in this book. Besides Omar's real burial, who or what is buried in the other two burials? Were you moved by one of these (symbolic) burials, and if yes, how?

### Personal connections? 7

What does Michael tell Cherry happens to unidentified bodies? Can you explain Cherry's reaction to this? What do you believe makes a respectful ending to someone's life?

### Personal connections? 8

Cherry's daughter Danielle clearly takes her dad's side and is very angry with her mother. Do you think Danielle is justified in her anger towards Cherry? Why (not)? Have you ever judged someone or felt judged for how you handled something painful? How did that difference in coping styles affect the relationship?



Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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### Food for thought? 1

Cherry, Robert, and Danielle all respond differently to Liam's death. How does the novel explore different their forms of grieving?

### Food for thought? 2

Throughout the novel, multiple institutions—police, the NHS (the UK's public healthcare system) Border Force, and the Home Office (*Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken*)—fail or harm vulnerable people. How does the novel criticise British institutions and the damage they cause? Are there any parallels to be drawn with the (current) situation in the Netherlands?

### Food for thought? 3

Andy Jakubiak is part of the violence against the migrants, but he is also being used by Barratt. Do you see Andy more as a victim of Barratt's manipulation or as someone who should take responsibility for his actions? Why?

### Food for thought? 4

Omar and Abdi travel through many dangers to reach safety. What does the book show about the reality of being a refugee today? Which part of their journey impressed or shocked you most?

### Food for thought? 5

Cherry believes Omar needs a 'proper burial'. Why is this so important in the story? What does Omar's body symbolise for Cherry and for the other characters?

### Food for thought? 6

There are several moments where people resist the authorities (for example the detention centre revolt or the protests in London). Which act of resistance did you find most powerful, and why? Do these actions really change anything in the story?

### Food for thought? 7

Even though the book deals with violence, corruption, and grief, many characters still try to do good. Where do you see moments of hope in the story? Why are these moments important?

### Food for thought? 8

Technology (GPS tracking, phones, CCTV, Stingray devices) plays a big role in how people get tracked down in the novel. Does technology in the book make people safer, or does it create more danger? Explain your answer.



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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