

Reading Group Guide

33 PLACE BRUGMANN

Discussion Questions

1. Did you enjoy this book? Why or why not?
2. Which character's perspective resonated with you most, and how did the changing of viewpoints through the novel impact your understanding of the community's dynamics?
3. Mrs. Raphaël firmly banned all things German, from music and food to art and language. The question of whether art should remain separate from the artist is a timely one. Would you say that it is right or "good" to boycott art because of the behavior or culture of its creator? Or should art still be appreciated even if its creator/culture has acted in a problematic way?
4. Despite the darkness of war, many characters cling to art and beauty. What does the novel suggest about the meaning and value of art, and why are its characters willing to risk so much to preserve it?
5. Charlotte's color blindness forces her to see the world in textures, light, and gradations rather than distinct hues. How does her literal condition serve as a broader metaphor for moral judgment and human perception during wartime?
6. Many of the characters spend time musing on philosophical subjects. Would you say that philosophy is ultimately presented as something useful or superfluous in *33 Place Brugmann*?
7. The novel is divided into the time before and after of the occupation of Brussels. Faced with the inevitable choice of whether to submit to their occupiers or resist, who chooses to resist and how does this shape their fate?
8. Living in close quarters forces the tenants of 33 Place Brugmann to share space, but fear and secrecy often isolate them. How do the characters decide whom they can or cannot trust? Are they typically correct in their judgements?
9. Although set between 1939 and 1942, the novel grapples with timeless questions about civic duty, complicity, and solidarity in fractured times. What lessons or reflections from *33 Place Brugmann* feel particularly relevant to modern life?

About the Author

Alice Austen

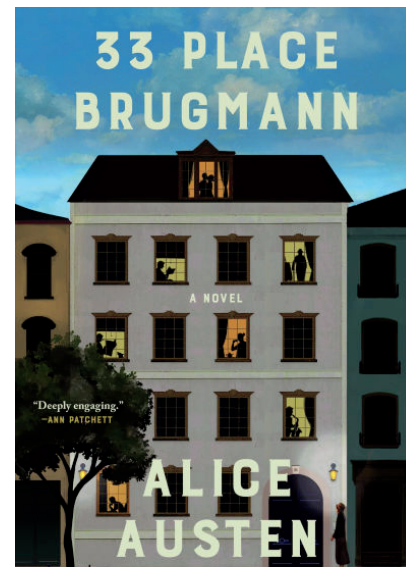
Alice Austen grew up in the Pacific Northwest. She attended the University of Oregon in Eugene, where she was an NCAA Scholar-Athlete on the women's track team.

Alice went on to study creative writing under Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney at Harvard, where she also earned her law degree. While at Harvard Law School, Austen co-founded the *Harvard Human Rights Journal*. After graduating, she traveled to Prague to represent Václav Havel's Czech government and to Brussels, where she led groundbreaking transactions that later became *Harvard Business Review* case studies.

Over a bet in an Irish pub, Alice Austen penned a play that was picked up and produced. She went on to write several other plays that have been honored with numerous awards, residencies, and productions—including at the Royal Court, Steppenwolf, and Goodman Theatres. Her internationally produced plays include *Animal Farm*, *Water*, an adaptation of *La Musica*, *Girls in the Boat*, and *Cherry Orchard Massacre*.

In 2014, Alice co-founded Give Me Liberty, Mfg., a creative collective dedicated to producing narrative and documentary films that elevate the cinematic experience while upholding the highest standards of artistic integrity. As a filmmaker, Austen won the John Cassavetes Award for the documentary film *Give Me Liberty* at the 35th Independent Spirit Awards.

Alice Austen's debut novel, *33 Place Brugmann*, was published in 2025. She currently lives in Milwaukee and is working on a new film and her next novel.



*Biography taken from aliceaustenauthor.com, givemelibertymfg.com, and wrapwomen.thewrap.com

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Reads
20th Anniversary

