



**Book AK**

***The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*, by Robert Edsel**

**Discussion Questions**

Here is a series of discussion questions to consider as you read *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*.

1. This book is filled with stories and historical accounts of the rescue of many cultural treasures during and shortly after World War II. Which story did you find most interesting, and why?
2. When thinking about the Monuments Men described in this book, do you feel there are general characteristics or traits shared by all of the men in the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) division? What are these traits?
3. Not taking into account the outcome that we know today, do you think the Allies were justified in bombing the abbey at Monte Cassino on February 15, 1944? What do you think of the fact that the Germans had not been in the abbey, and “had actually been respecting its cultural importance?” (p. 47)
4. Do you feel it is ironic that Adolf Hitler, a man who despised the Jewish people, coveted their art and their other belongings?
5. What do you think of Monuments Man George Stout’s strong dislike of having a museum director on the MFAA or conservation team? Do you think this was justified? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think there was such a lack of financial and supply support for the original MFAA received from Lord Woolley’s war office? (p. 59)
7. The story of the rescue of a sixteenth-century Flemish painting details how, in the midst of the fighting, two Monuments Men, Walter Hancock and George Stout, carefully wrote detailed notes on the painting. Do you think it took a special type of person with an interest in and/or passion for the arts to be a Monuments Man? Do you think the outcomes would have been the same if a soldier had been assigned to that division who did not have an interest in art? (p. 152)

8. In a letter to a colleague on October 4, 1944, George Stout recounts his conversation with an old colonel about his activities in the MFAA division, and how the colonel became more and more interested and excited. Stout closes the letter by writing, "Perhaps [. . .] this simple, curious outlook of healthy men is more important than some of the monuments themselves." After having read the book, do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? (*p. 154*)
9. How do you compare President Eisenhower's letter detailing how cultural works should be preserved with his desire to have his office at Versailles decorated with works from the Louvre's collection? Was his request for art inappropriate? (*p. 156*)
10. Every time the one main female character in this book, Rose Valland, is introduced, the author makes descriptive comments about her drab, matronly, and unattractive appearance. Do you think this is appropriate or necessary? Why do you think the author chose to do this?
11. Rose Valland believed "My duty is to the art." How would you describe Valland based on what you read in this book? (*p. 204*)
12. Do you think James Rorimer's being an American had anything to do with Valland's caution in agreeing to trust and work with him at the beginning of their relationship? Based on what we now know of Valland's life and role during World War II, do you think her caution in general was justified?
13. In this book, Walter Hancock is repeatedly referring to his belief that "Nothing is beyond this war. Nothing is immune." Based on what you read, do you agree with his statement?
14. What do you think of the people of La Gleize, Belgium's refusal to let Walter Hancock take the Madonna sculpture for safekeeping? Do you think they were justified in their actions? (*pp. 214-19*)
15. Why do you think Adolf Hitler considered modern art to be degenerate?
16. With the war nearing an end and the Nazis beginning to be defeated, the MFAA division began to use a model to attempt to recover the works. This approach was based on a notion of "education coupled with local participation." Do you think this was an effective strategy? Do you think another method would have worked better?
17. Many of the stories detailed in this book show that the limited number of men in the MFAA division resulted in the need for the Monuments Men to work alone or in two-man teams. Do you think the MFAA division would have been more effective

with more men? Would this have been a justifiable use of soldiers during the war? Do you think the work of the MFAA division is, by its very nature, solitary? Why or why not?

18. On May 13, 1945, Monuments Man Lincoln Kirstein wrote about Altaussee, wondering, "How could one of the most important and unbelievable moments in art history—not to mention the history of a world war—simply become a forgotten footnote?" Despite his disbelief that this could ever happen, for the most part the role of the Monuments Men did remain largely forgotten or unknown until recently. Why do you think this happened? (*p. 378*)

19. Is there one particular work or story detailed in this book that you think best epitomizes the MFAA division and the work of the Monuments Men during World War II?

20. There has not been a dedicated unit like the MFAA division since World War II. What do you think is the reason for this? Do you think there should have been a dedicated unit with any other war, and if so, which war? Do you think there should be a formalized MFAA division in the Army today?