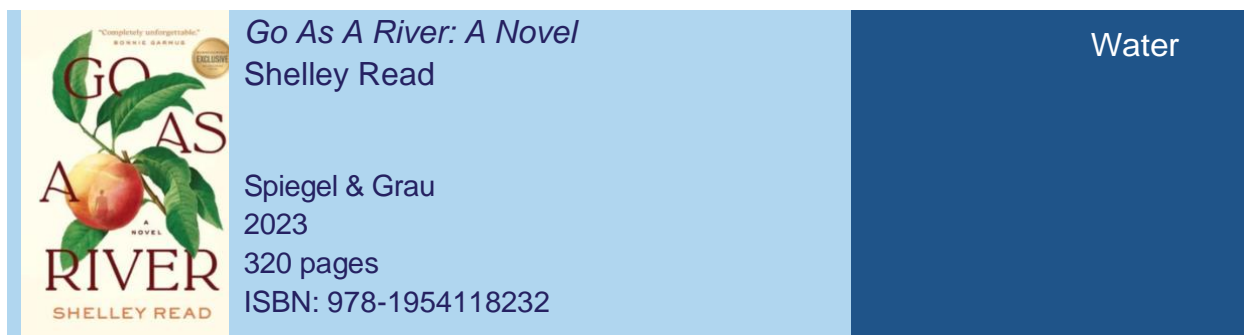


Discussion Guide



Summary

Inspired by true events surrounding the destruction of the town of Iola in the 1960s, *Go As A River* is a story of deeply held love in the face of hardship and loss, but also of finding courage, resilience, friendship, and, finally, home--where least expected. This stunning debut explores what it means to lead your life as if it were a river--gathering and flowing, finding a way forward even when a river is dammed.

Questions

1. Shelley Read based *Go as a River* on a historical event – the destruction of the town of Iola, Colorado, which now lies at the bottom of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Discuss the way the idea of 'home' is treated in the novel. What makes a home? Is one's childhood home ever somewhere to which one can truly return?
2. The presence of water in a story is usually symbolic. How do you think the river is symbolic here? Do you notice other symbolism in the story?
3. Many of the characters in the novel are shaped by the losses they have suffered. For Victoria, her father, Seth, and Og, the deaths of their loved ones in the car accident means they share a common tragedy, but they each respond to this trauma in different ways. Og also experiences the loss of his brother and his leg in the war, and Ruby-Alice, Inga, and Lukas suffer loss as well. Discuss the role of loss in the novel. Why do you think Victoria can move forward in her life, while many other characters cannot?
4. Of the many themes, explain a strong connection you have with one.
5. In what ways do you think the creation of Wil's character adds another layer of depth to the story? Why does the author write him with this specific cultural identity? In what ways are his heritage and cultural experiences important to the story? What opinion do you think the author has about indigenous people and do you have evidence to support your conclusion?
6. Discuss the role prejudice plays in the novel. How are Wil, Lukas, and Ruby-Alice affected by people's incorrect assumptions? How are Victoria and Inga also limited by societal norms?

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7. Adoption is addressed in this poignant story. Do you have thoughts about how the adoption storyline was portrayed?
8. The high arid climate of the Gunnison Valley is not a natural fit for peaches, yet the Nash family succeeds in adapting their Georgia peach trees to Iowa, and, later, Victoria manages to transplant the orchard to Paonia. Why do you think she feels so strongly about transplanting the trees? The trees' ability to survive and then thrive under trying circumstances mirrors Victoria's own path. In what ways is the orchard a metaphor for Victoria's journey? Does saving the orchard give Victoria the purpose she is looking for?
9. Farmers and others in the valley are displaced by the dam project. In what other ways, is the theme of displacement evident in the story?
10. From Colorado Public Radio: "The Blue Mesa Dam was built in the 1960s as a part of a Bureau of Reclamation Colorado River Storage Project, which collects water from the Colorado River and its offshoots for agricultural, municipal and power generation uses across the Southwest." Creating the Blue Mesa Reservoir to control water flow in the area and create a recreational destination required the intentional destruction and subsequent flooding of three towns. Does this disturb the natural ecosystem? Does water control work? What are the immediate and long-term impacts (positive and negative)?
11. Zelda compares the displacement of Iowa residents for the creation of the reservoir to the forced removal of the Ute tribe, the indigenous people of Colorado's Western Slope, pointing out that the place the current inhabitants like to call their own once was another people's homeland. She acknowledges that the two circumstances are 'not the same', but what is Zelda's point? Do you agree or disagree?
12. What are your thoughts about the ending? Were you satisfied? Did you find it hopeful? Do you wish it had been more fully developed or was it just right? What, if anything, would you change about the ending? Were there any loose ends you wish had been tied up? Would you enjoy a sequel or follow-up story? Did you wish for an epilogue?