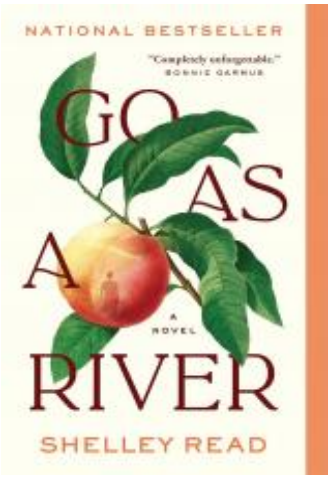
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Go as a River

by Shelley Read



About the Book

Set amid Colorado?s wild beauty, a heartbreaking coming-of-age story of a resilient young woman whose life is changed forever by one chance encounter. A tragic and uplifting novel of love and loss, family and survival --- and hope --- for readers of GREAT CIRCLE, THE FOUR WINDS and WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING.

Seventeen-year-old Victoria Nash runs the household on her family?s peach farm in the small ranch town of Iola, Colorado --- the sole surviving female in a family of troubled men. Wilson Moon is a young drifter with a mysterious past, displaced from his tribal land and determined to live as he chooses.

Victoria encounters Wil by chance on a street corner, a meeting that profoundly alters both of their young lives, unknowingly igniting as much passion as danger. When tragedy strikes, Victoria leaves the only life she has ever known. She flees into the surrounding mountains where she struggles to survive in the wilderness with no clear notion of what her future will bring. As the seasons change, she also charts the changes in herself, finding in the beautiful but harsh landscape the meaning and strength to move forward and rebuild all that she has lost, even as the Gunnison River threatens to submerge her homeland --- its ranches, farms and the beloved peach orchard that has been in her family for generations.

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.

Discussion Guide

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? Victoria states, ?The landscapes of our youths create us, and we carry them within us, storied by all they gave and stole, in who we become.? Is this true for you? Where and how does Victoria find another ?home??

2. Wil and Victoria?s relationship is a case of star-crossed lovers from different backgrounds and cultures. We know very little about Wil?s life before he arrived in Iola. Do you feel the novel should have revealed more about Wil and where he came from? Why do you think the author held back? Can you imagine a future in which Victoria and Wil might have been able to stay together? Why or why not?

3. When Victoria and Wil meet, Victoria has spent all of her life in one place, whereas Wil is a drifter. How does this contribute to who each of them is?

4. 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?

5. GO AS A RIVER turns on the brutal murder of Wil, which is the culmination of the racism he has suffered throughout his life. 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?

6. When pregnant Victoria flees to the wilderness, she is exposed to the elements and must survive on her own. How do the forces of nature in the Big Blue contrast with those in Iola? As Victoria attunes herself to her new forest home, she finds herself changing: ?Woven in some great and mysterious tapestry, the only sound I listened for was the steady pulse of the vast collection of beating hearts, the inhale and exhale of a million lives being lived alongside mine. I realized I had never been less afraid in my life.? How would you characterize the role of the natural world in Victoria?s development? What does her time in the wilderness allow her to discover about herself?

7. Victoria?s decision to sell her family?s farm to the government and leave Iola is seen by many in the community as an act of betrayal. What factors beyond the threat of the new reservoir compel Victoria to leave? Do you believe she had an obligation to stay? Why does Seth want to return to Iola? Was Victoria right to lie to Seth and remove the family?s orchard without his knowledge?

8. Victoria expects Ruby-Alice?s funeral to be a small affair, in keeping with her status as the town?s outsider. But, to Victoria?s surprise, a large gathering of townsfolk attend the burial, joining hands and singing the community funeral song for Ruby-Alice. Were you also surprised? How did this moment change or develop your opinion of the townspeople of Iola? Do you agree or disagree with Victoria?s belief that most would have also attended a funeral for Wil, had they been given the chance?

9. 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 Iola, 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?

10. Zelda compares the displacement of Iola 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? How is Zelda?s comment linked to Victoria?s thoughts about ?progress? as she is turned away from visiting Iola one final time?

11. While Inga and Victoria are initially bonded by their different circumstances --- Inga?s ability to provide what Victoria cannot --- there are also many parallels between them. What similarities do you see between Inga and Victoria? What differences?

12. The title of the book refers to a phrase first spoken by Wil that eventually becomes a mantra for Victoria. Toward the end of the novel, Victoria ponders what she might say to her lost son: ?I would explain that what I had learned most about becoming is that it takes time. I would say I had tried, as Wil taught me, to go as a river, but it had taken me a long while to understand what that meant.? What do you think it means to ?go as a river??

13. What do you believe happened next for Victoria, Inga, Zelda and Lukas after the final lines of the novel?

Author Bio

Shelley Read?s debut novel, GO AS A RIVER, is an international bestseller that has been translated into 34 languages and is in development for film with the Mazur Kaplan Company. Winner of the High Plains Book Award for Fiction and the Reading the West Book Award for Debut Fiction, GO AS A RIVER is also a *Sunday Times* bestseller, a Goodreads Choice Award finalist, an Amazon Editors? Pick for Best Debut Fiction, an Indie Next Pick, and a Colorado Public Radio Books We Love selection, among other national and international accolades.

Shelley was an award-winning senior lecturer at Western Colorado University for nearly three decades, where she taught writing, literature, environmental studies and honors. She is a mom, mountaineer, world traveler and fifth-generation Coloradan who lives with her family in the Elk Mountains of Colorado?s Western Slope.

Go as a River
by Shelley Read

Publication Date: June 3, 2025
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 320 pages
Publisher: Spiegel & Grau
ISBN-10: 1954118635
ISBN-13: 9781954118638