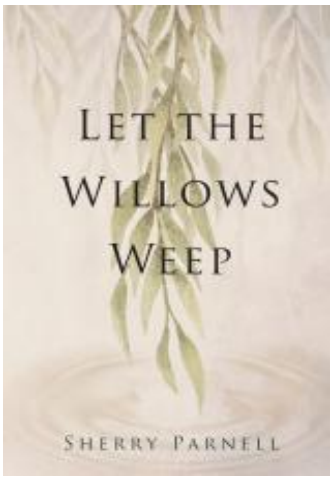
Let the Willows Weep

by Sherry Parnell



About the Book

In the tradition of the best Southern fiction --- from BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA to WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING --- Sherry Parnell?s LET THE WILLOWS WEEP is a heart-wrenching portrait of hardscrabble, humble lives in rural America. A keenly observed and unflinching look at the life of Birddog Harlin as she grows up in her dysfunctional family, this novel explores the line between destruction and redemption.

Discussion Guide

1. The narrator of LET THE WILLOWS WEEP is --- for much of the novel --- a child. How did this affect your perception of the story? How might the tale be told differently if it were related solely from Birddog?s adult perspective? What does the younger voice allow or free the narrative to do, and how does it (if at all) limit what we learn in certain scenes?

2. Our protagonist is identified by others throughout the book with nicknames: Denny originally came up with Birddog, Samuel calls her Daisy, and Mrs. Tarmar refers to her as Butterfly. What?s the significance of who gets to name her, and what they name her? What do you make of the fact that we never learn Birddog?s real first name?

3. What examples of courtship, marriage and love is Birddog exposed to before she meets Samuel? How does her experience of love align with or diverge from these role models?

4. The book certainly presents a range of what ?a mother?s love? means. Discuss the mother figures in this novel. Do you see any redemptive qualities in Birddog?s mother?

5. Discuss the book?s characters? moments of cruelty and tenderness. How are the two intertwined and contrasted with one another? How do these two qualities make someone like Caul a multi-dimensional character?

6. What do you think of how each Harlin family member responds to and changes following the sudden death in the family, and how the family dynamics adjust? Do you see this sad event bringing forth or solidifying existing traits or roles in these characters, or rather does it transform any of them? How do Samuel?s family and Birddog?s family differ in their dealing with grief?

7. The theme of belonging runs throughout this novel. Explore how its characters seek and rebuff belonging.

8. How do you assess the actions of Birddog, Denny, their mother, Samuel and his mother in the context of the book?s racially charged world?

9. Appearances are a recurring motif in the book, from being concerned about what the neighbors think to having the right dress for an occasion to the color of one?s skin and what that signifies. Think and talk about all the different ways author Sherry Parnell incorporates appearances --- both in the metaphorical and physical sense --- to shape characters and drive the plot.

10. How does Parnell utilize seasons and weather to signal changes in the lives of her characters?

11. Re-read chapter one of LET THE WILLOWS WEEP once you?ve finished the novel. Do you respond to it in a new manner now that you?ve read the whole story?

12. What do you think Birddog?s daughter?s future holds?

Author Bio

Having spent her entire life captivated by books, Sherry Parnell remains struck by the idea that there are boundless experiences and worlds that exist with only the turn of a page. A professor, trainer and writer, she lives with her husband and sons in the Pennsylvania countryside. She is the author of LET THE WILLOWS WEEP and has recently completed her second novel.

Critical Praise

?This story investigates how hardship, disappointment, and loss can change and mold a young girl and concludes with how she endures... This story kept my attention from beginning to end... transport[s] you into another world for the duration and will likely touch your heart.?

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