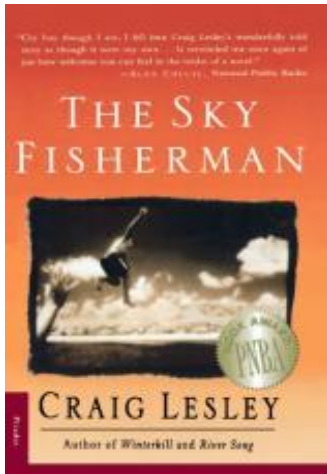


# The Sky Fisherman

by Craig Lesley

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## About the Book

Ripe with the concerns of a boy about to become a man, this novel explores the many paths to adulthood through its various characters and their relationships to the sometimes ravaging forces of nature. Culver, the narrator, is growing into adulthood as his mother leaves his stepfather and they both return to the town in which Culver's father, her first husband, drowned. Culver's Uncle Jake, a fishing guide, town leader, and witness to the drowning, becomes Culver's surrogate father. **The Sky Fisherman** reveals the intricate demography of a family trying to heal itself and survive. This reader's guide is designed as a navigation tool as you chart your way through this novel, which Carolyn See called, "an exquisitely delineated map of America."

## Discussion Guide

1. Author Craig Lesley writes, "**The Sky Fisherman** is my gift to the small communities I cherish." How does the small town function in the story, and what does it contribute to it? Could the novel take place in an urban setting? Why or why not?
2. The primary elements of fire and water both figure prominently in the novel. What is their significance to the story? What is the relationship each element has to the other? How do fire and water relate to the loss and redemption in the book?
3. How does the novel portray Native American traditions and beliefs? What is their relationship to the beliefs of the white community? To the events of the novel?
4. The railway figures centrally in the novel. What role does the railway play in both building character and in revealing the economics of the region? How does the metaphor of transportation relate to Culver's concerns in becoming a man?

5. **The Sky Fisherman** contains examples of both natural disasters and those caused by people. What is the relationship between these two types of tragedy? In what ways are they similar? Different? Describe the psychological effects of such events.

6. Uncle Jake is a larger-than-life figure in the narrative. What kind of hero is he? What does he represent to Culver? To the community? To the novel as a whole? What sort of adulthood does he signify?

7. What is Culver's relationship to his mother? What kind of woman is she? How have the circumstances of her life influenced her character?

8. At age fourteen, Craig Lesley was crushed by a farm machine and, as he puts it, "I know the swift, unpredictable nature of accident." What role do accidents play in the book? How -- and when -- do they haunt the various characters?

9. Is **The Sky Fisherman** a traditional coming-of-age story? Which characters come of age and how? What events contribute to these rites of passage?

10. Who, or what, is the "sky fisherman"? Which character, or characters, figure as fishermen of the sky? How might this symbol act as a metaphor, and for what?

## Author Bio

Craig Lesley is a lifelong resident of the Pacific Northwest. He was born in The Dalles and now lives in Portland, Oregon, with his wife and two daughters. He graduated from Whitman College, where he also received a Doctorate of Human Letters. He received an M.A. in English from the University of Kansas and an M.F.A. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has spent much of his life exploring the outdoors, including an eight-year stint with the Deschutes River Guide Service in Oregon. He is the author of three previous novels, including *Winterkill*, forthcoming in trade paperback from Picador USA.

Of his novel, Lesley writes, "*The Sky Fisherman's* rugged landscape backdrops family secrets, small town mysteries and flashpoints of violence. Larger-than-life characters inhabit the Interior West, work hard, and rise to heroic actions. Jake is modeled on my uncle, a legendary fishing guide and small-town hero. Flora resembles my mother, a tenacious single parent who worked on The Warm Springs Indian Reservation. Billyum Bruised Head played high school football with me.

The book explores the anger and friendship between the Indian and white communities. Occasionally, the long-smoldering grudges are set aside to fight common natural disasters."

## Critical Praise

"**The Sky Fisherman**, a tale of fire and water and thirst and redemption in Central Oregon, is Lesley at his best . . . .This is a lovely work from a generous man. "

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## **The Sky Fisherman**

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