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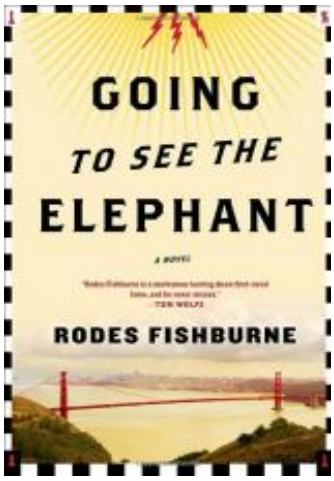
Going to See the Elephant

by Rodes Fishburne



About the Book

Meet Slater Brown. Twenty-five years old, he has arrived in San Francisco with a dream: to write a great novel. But where to begin?

Low on money and even lower on prospects, Slater manages to land a job at a third rate newspaper, *The Morning Trumpet*. Before long --- after being given a strange gift from a mystical seer that has netted him an exclusive on every story in the city --- this young man is suddenly the toast of the town.

With his newfound knack for finding scoops, Slater is on top of the world. He?s famous, he?s fallen in love, and he?s about to singlehandedly take down a corrupt city administration. But things are never quite what they seem, and as storm clouds gather *literally* overhead, Slater crosses paths with a self-obsessed inventor named Milo Magnet --- changing both of their lives forever.

Discussion Guide

1. When we first meet Slater Brown, he is feverishly working on?nothing. What did you make of Slater?s burning need to write something without knowing what that something is? Did you interpret this as a sign of youthful foolishness or a natural desire for a talented young man? Did your opinion of Slater?s aspirations change throughout the novel?

2. Discuss the way that journalists are portrayed in **Going to See the Elephant**. What about politicians? How accurate did you find these depictions?

3. Early in the book, Slater reveals that he believes that a person who is destined to do something great will do so by age twenty-nine. Is there an age by which you believe great work, or great talent, should be demonstrated?

4. Consider the title, as well as the author?s note on the title, of this novel. What significance do you think the title has in the context of the story and characters of **Going to See the Elephant**?

5. What similarities do you see between Slater and Milo? What differences in their motivations?

6. Going to See the Elephant is set in a semi-realistic world. Why do you think the author made this choice? What did you feel the setting added to the reading experience?

7. Consider the question of fate versus action in this novel. Which characters seem to be driven by fate, and which take their destinies into their own hands? How much of our lives is controlled by outside forces and to what extent do actions determine fate?

8. Why do you think that weather becomes Milo?s obsession? What it is about controlling the weather that he finds so compelling?

9. On page 117, Slater says ?Well you know what they say about stories. They find the people best suited to tell them.? Where do you see this being true in the world of this novel? Who tells what story, and why?

10. What is it that Slater sees in Callio upon their initial meeting? To what is he attracted? How does this change over time?

11. Discuss Havram?s relationship with his daughter. Is his anger toward Slater justified?

12. From what you are shown in the novel, do you think Slater is a good writer? Why or why not? Do you think his talents lie elsewhere? Will his newfound maturity help him accomplish his ambitious dream?

13. What is it that compels Slater to confide his secret to Callio? Did her reaction surprise you?

14. Throughout the novel, Slater is preoccupied with his legacy?doing something or creating something that will last. Do you think this is a common concern? What do you think this says about Slater as a character?

15. Consider Slater?s letter to Callio on page 259. How would you have reacted, were it written to you?

16. Did you like the ending of the novel? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Rodes Fishburne has been published in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle Magazine,* and *Forbes ASAP,* where he was the editor of the acclaimed ?Big Issue,? an annual magazine of literary essays from leading writers and thinkers. He is a member of the Grotto, a San Francisco writers? collective. **Going to See the Elephant** is his first novel.

Critical Praise

"Slater Brown, the wide-eyed young hero of Rodes Fishburne's delightful debut novel, is just the man I'd want to lead me through the streets of San Francisco and regale me with its stories **Going to See the Elephant** is a rollicking good tale with an old-fashioned sense of fun; one can't help falling in love."

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