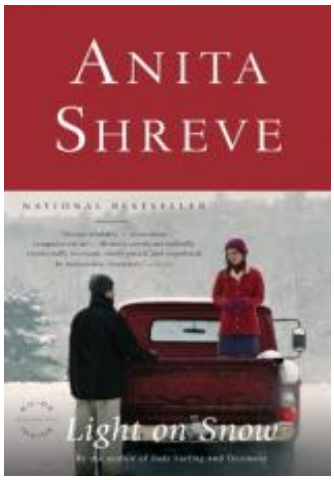
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Light on Snow

by Anita Shreve



About the Book

From the bestselling author of **The Pilot's Wife** comes a tender and surprising novel about love and its consequences.

Snowshoeing over crusted snow in the woods near their home, twelve-year-old Nicky Dillon and her father come upon something shocking. There, in the pristine winter scene, an abandoned baby wails, its survival made possible only by the coincidence of their having chosen this path for their late afternoon outing.

In the days and weeks that follow, Nicky glimpses corners of the adult world that she never dreamed existed. As she follows the fate of the baby girl and talks with the police officers assigned to investigate, Nicky for the first time asks questions about her life's strange shape. Why has her father moved them to this isolated New England farmhouse? How can they come to terms with the tragedy they left behind? And how can she bridge the chasm between his needs and her own growing sense of the world? Nicky's ideas about life are thrown into stark relief by the arrival of a young woman haunted by her own terrible choices. Together, Nicky, her father, and this woman must work their way through a thicket of decisions, each one seeming to carry equal possibilities of heartbreak or redemption.

With the glorious prose and emotional resonance that have won readers' hearts all over the world, Anita Shreve delivers her deepest and most powerful novel yet-a mesmerizing story of the secrets we keep and the secrets we unearth, and the power of forgiveness to mend even the most battered souls.

Discussion Guide

1. Nicky notes near the beginning of Light on Snow that her father actively avoids civilization, yet when they find Baby Doris he quickly breaks out of his self-imposed exile to help save the abandoned infant. Why do you think he chooses to become so involved in this situation?

2. Discuss the relationship between Nicky and her father as the novel opens. In what ways is their relationship unique? In what ways does it reflect or subvert the traditional roles of parent and child?

3. The December days through which Light on Snow unfolds represent a rite of passage for Nicky in many ways. How is she ultimately influenced by what she experiences in these weeks? What does Nicky draw from her relationships with the various adults around her? Do you think they learn something from her as well?

4. A great deal about Robert Dillon's pre?New Hampshire life as a successful architect in New York City is revealed when his former colleagues visit his new home. Discuss the distinctions that the author draws between the Dillons' past and their present life.

5. Several scenes in the novel are focused on the preparation and consumption of food. Discuss the significance of these meals to the story.

6. How does Charlotte's arrival affect Robert and Nicky's interaction with the rest of the world?

7. After meeting Charlotte, Nicky's father struggles with the decision of whether or not to turn her in. Does he make a good choice in the end? Why?

8. Nicky's argument with her father after Charlotte leaves becomes a turning point in the novel. What does Nicky discover about herself in this passage? What does she learn about her father?

9. When Nicky overhears Charlotte's confession, she notes, "I want to believe that my father and I were meant to stumble across Baby Doris and give her a chance at life. But I'm not sure. I think about accidents and intersecting footsteps" (page 240). What does she mean by this observation? What role does fate or chance play in **Light on Snow**? Offer some examples.

10. The morning after the snowstorm, Nicky and Charlotte move a table into the kitchen. What does this action suggest? What exactly has changed?

11. "I know, as one does at twelve or eleven or ten, that I have witnessed something I shouldn't have witnessed, seen something I shouldn't have seen" (page 198). What has Nicky witnessed in this passage and how does what she has seen affect her?

12. Discuss the relationship between Nicky and Charlotte. How does each influence the other?

13. Do you think Charlotte's behavior with respect to her newborn child is justified? Do you think she takes appropriate responsibility for her actions in the end?

14. Although the novel's action takes place when Nicky is twelve years old, she is thirty when she recounts it. Why do you think the author has chosen to have a grown-up Nicky tell the story?

Author Bio

Anita Shreve was a high school teacher and a freelance magazine journalist before writing fiction full time. She was the author 19 novels, including THE STARS ARE FIRE as well as the international bestseller THE PILOT'S WIFE, and THE WEIGHT OF WATER, a finalist for the Orange Prize. On March 29, 2018, Shreve passed away from cancer at the age of 71.

Critical Praise

"Few other contemporary novelists weave past and present so skillfully, capturing the seamless texture of time."

Light on Snow

by Anita Shreve

Publication Date: September 12, 2005
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Back Bay Books
ISBN-10: 0316010677
ISBN-13: 9780316010672