ReadingGroupGuides
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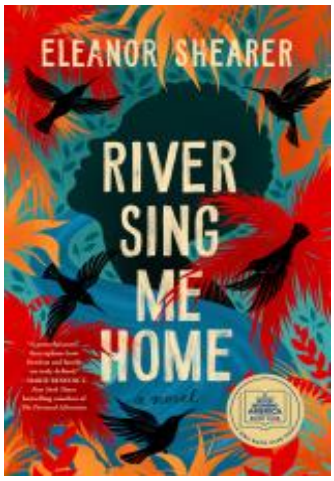
River Sing Me Home

by Eleanor Shearer



About the Book

Rare. Moving. Powerful. This beautiful, page-turning and redemptive story of a mother?s gripping journey across the Caribbean to find her stolen children in the aftermath of slavery is a remarkable debut.

Her search begins with an ending...

The master of the Providence plantation in Barbados gathers his slaves and announces the king has decreed an end to slavery. As of the following day, the Emancipation Act of 1834 will come into effect. The cries of joy fall silent when he announces that they are no longer his slaves; they are now his apprentices. No one can leave. They must work for him for another six years. Freedom is just another name for the life they have always lived. So Rachel runs.

Away from Providence, she begins a desperate search to find her children --- the five who survived birth and were sold. Are any of them still alive? Rachel has to know. The grueling, dangerous journey takes her from Barbados, then, by river, deep into the forest of British Guiana, and finally across the sea to Trinidad. She is driven on by the certainty that a mother cannot be truly free without knowing what has become of her children, even if the answer is more than she can bear.

These are the stories of Mary Grace, Micah, Thomas Augustus, Cherry Jane and Mercy. But above all, this is the story of Rachel and the extraordinary lengths to which a mother will go to find her children...and her freedom.

Discussion Guide

1. ?Rachel did not mind that she lacked Hope?s hard outlines and clear sense of self. That was how she had chosen to survive --- by letting little pieces of herself fall away without resistance.? What do you make of Rachel?s character and of her attitude to survival? Do you think her attitude changes during the novel?

2. What does Rachel?s journey say about motherhood? What do you think Rachel learns about being a mother over the course of the novel?

3. Each of Rachel?s children chooses a different path out of slavery. Are they all, in some sense, free? Are some paths better than others?

4. Lots of characters in this novel get a chance to tell small fragments of their stories. Why might this telling be important? What role do these stories play in Rachel?s journey? Are they able to teach her something about herself?

5. Rachel does not mention much about the fathers of her children. Do you think this is deliberate? Are there any clues in the text as to who the fathers might be?

6. What roles do music and song play in the novel?

7. Thomas Augustus tells Rachel that in the runaway village, some people love to tell and retell the past, while others just want to forget it. How does the novel deal with the themes of remembering and forgetting? Do you think there is a right choice between dwelling on the past and leaving it behind?

8. What do you make of the character of Mary Grace? Why do you think Nobody is so drawn to her, and her to him?

9. The natural world plays a significant role in the novel. How does the landscape of the Caribbean relate to Rachel?s journey? Do you think Rachel sees nature as benevolent, malign or something in-between?

Author Bio

Eleanor Shearer is a mixed-race writer and the granddaughter of Windrush generation immigrants. She splits her time between London and Ramsgate on the English coast so that she never has to go too long without seeing the sea. For her Master?s degree in Politics at the University of Oxford, Eleanor studied the legacy of slavery and the case for reparations, and her fieldwork in St. Lucia and Barbados helped inspire her first novel, RIVER SING ME HOME.

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Publication Date: August 1, 2023
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Berkley
ISBN-10: 059354806X
ISBN-13: 9780593548066