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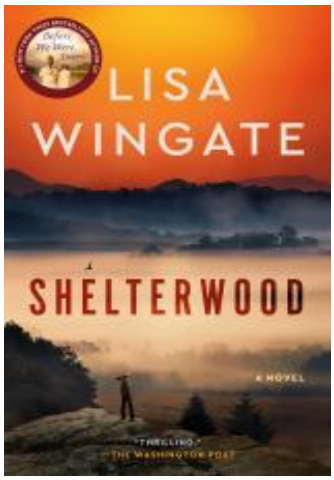
Shelterwood

by Lisa Wingate



About the Book

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of BEFORE WE WERE YOURS comes ?a sweeping tale about little known history? (*People*).

1990. Law enforcement ranger Valerie Boren-Odell arrives at Horsethief Trail National Park seeking a quiet place to raise her son. But no sooner has Valerie reported for duty than a teenage hiker goes missing, and the long-hidden burial site of three children is discovered in a cave. Val?s quest to uncover the truth wins an ally among the Choctaw Nation?s Tribal Police but soon collides with the deadly legacy of the land itself.

1909. Eleven-year-old Olive Radley knows that her stepfather is a threat to the two Choctaw girls boarded in their home. When the older girl disappears, Ollie flees, taking six-year-old Nessa with her. Together they begin a perilous journey to the remote Winding Stair Mountains, the territory of outlaws, treasure hunters and desperate men. Along the way, they form an unlikely band with other children struggling to get by on their own.

In this gripping novel, Lisa Wingate traces the story of children abandoned by the law and the battle to see justice done. Amid times of deep conflict over who owns the land and its riches, Ollie and Val each leave behind one life in search of another.

Discussion Guide

SPOILER WARNING: Stop here if you haven?t finished reading the book.

1. SHELTERWOOD explores a number of themes, particularly the rights of women and children, family and justice. Which theme resonated the most deeply with you, and why?

2. At the beginning of each chapter, author Lisa Wingate included a historical quote from a wide-ranging variety of sources, including transcripts from congressional hearings, committee meetings, interviews and newspaper articles. How did the inclusion of these quotes influence your experience reading SHELTERWOOD?

3. SHELTERWOOD is told through two timelines and perspectives --- one of Olive Augusta Radley in 1909, and the other of Valerie Boren-Odell in 1990. How did these dual perspectives shape the novel? How do their stories parallel each other? What similarities and differences do you notice in their journeys and the challenges they face?

4. Historical fiction often introduces readers to new or deepened knowledge of past events and different perspectives than one?s own lived experience, and SHELTERWOOD is based on extensive research. Were you familiar with the historical events of Oklahoma and Choctaw Nation prior to reading SHELTERWOOD? What did you take away from learning more through this novel?

5. SHELTERWOOD is inspired by female pioneers like Kate Barnard, who fought to protect children?s rights and welfare in a time when child labor was unregulated and exploited. How does this historical context contribute to the overall themes and conflicts in the story?

6. How does the history of the land in Horsethief Trail National Park, even though much of it has been hidden over the years, affect the characters in the present day? Have you wondered about or discovered similar ?secrets? where you live or where you grew up?

7. Both Olive and Valerie find themselves in positions where they must fight for justice and protect those who are vulnerable. How do they struggle between self-interest and the interests of others or the need to do what?s right? Do we all have the capacity to be heroic, are heroes and heroines a limited few, or does heroism exist in many forms?

8. The Choctaw girls boarded in Olive?s home (Nessa, Hazel), as well as the children she and Nessa encounter in their journey (Tula, Pinti, Koi, Dewey, Amos, Cora, Effie and even the laundry girls), play a significant role in the story. How do race, identity, culture, gender, economic status and discrimination play out in the story? How do they shed light on the historical time period of the early 1900s?

9. How do the treasure hunters, outlaws and rugged landscape found in the Winding Stair Mountains contribute to the suspense and tension in the storytelling in SHELTERWOOD? Were there particular moments of danger or surprising twists that stood out to you?

10. The conflict over land ownership and wealth is a central theme in the book. How does this struggle for power drive the actions of the characters? Discuss the impact of their choices on the broader community. What can we learn from the stories of ordinary people whose experiences aren?t recorded in the history books?

11. How is Valerie?s life affected by the move to Horsethief Trail National Park? How does she navigate the push-pull between career and family? Do all working parents face the pressure to be ?all things at once,? and is it even possible to do so? Has the picture of ?having it all? changed over the years? How has this dilemma played out in your own life?

12. What were your thoughts as SHELTERWOOD ended? Where do you think the characters will go from here? If you were writing the stories of their futures, what would the stories be?

Author Bio

Lisa Wingate is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller BEFORE WE WERE YOURS, which has sold more than three million copies and been translated into over 40 languages worldwide. The co-author, with Judy Christie, of the nonfiction book BEFORE AND AFTER, Wingate is a Goodreads Choice Award winner, an Oklahoma Book Award finalist, and a Southern Book Prize winner. She was named a 2023 Distinguished Alumni of Oklahoma State University. She lives with her husband in Texas and Colorado.

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Publication Date: February 18, 2025

Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books

ISBN-10: 0593726529

ISBN-13: 9780593726525