
Kennebecasis Public Library – Book Club Program

Librarian: Madaline Boutilier

Email: Madaline.boutilier@gnb.ca **Phone:** (506) 849-5314 and ask for her.

Please let Kirstin know which book(s) are selected so she can contact Madaline to reserve the book(s) the club wants to read next.

Date of next meeting: **Thursday, July 25, at 1:30PM**

Go as a River, by Shelley Read

About the Author: Shelley Read is a fifth generation Coloradoan who lives with her family in the Elk Mountains of the Western Slope. She was a Senior Lecturer at Western Colorado University for nearly three decades, where she taught writing, literature, environmental studies, and Honors, and was a founder of the Environment & Sustainability major and a support program for first-generation and at-risk students. *GO AS A RIVER*, her first novel, is inspired by the landscape she comes from and will be published in over twenty-five territories.

A) Here are 13 discussion questions to help kick-off discussion. Members can take turns reading the question aloud.

1. Shelley Read based *Go as a River* on a historical event – the destruction of the town of Lola, Colorado, which now lies at the bottom of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Discuss the way the idea of 'home' is treated in the novel. What makes a home? Is one's childhood home ever somewhere to which one can truly return? Victoria states, 'The landscapes of our youths create us, and we carry them within us, storied by all they gave and stole, in who we become.' Is this true for you? Where and how does Victoria find another 'home'?
2. Wil and Victoria's relationship is a case of star-crossed lovers from different backgrounds and cultures. We know very little about Wil's life before he arrived in Lola. Do you feel the novel should have revealed more about Wil and where he came from? Why do you think the author held back? Can you imagine a future in which Victoria and Wil might have been able to stay together? Why or why not?
3. When Victoria and Wil meet, Victoria has spent all of her life in one place, whereas Wil is a drifter. How does this contribute to who they have become?

4. Many of the characters in the novel are shaped by the losses they have suffered. For Victoria, her father, Seth, and Og, the deaths of their loved ones in the car accident means they share a common tragedy, but they each respond to this trauma in different ways. Og also experiences the loss of his brother and his leg in the war, and Ruby-Alice, Inga, and Lukas suffer loss as well. Discuss the role of loss in the novel. Why do you think Victoria can move forward in her life, while many other characters cannot?
5. Go as a River turns on the brutal murder of Wil, which is the culmination of the racism he has suffered throughout his life. Discuss the role prejudice plays in the novel. How are Wil, Lukas, and Ruby-Alice affected by people's incorrect assumptions? How are Victoria and Inga also limited by societal norms?
6. When pregnant Victoria flees to the wilderness, she is exposed to the elements and must survive on her own. How do the forces of nature in the Big Blue contrast with those in Lola? As Victoria attunes herself to her new forest home, she finds herself changing: 'Woven in some great and mysterious tapestry, the only sound I listened for was the steady pulse of the vast collection of beating hearts, the inhale and exhale of a million lives being lived alongside mine. I realized I had never been less afraid in my life.' How would you characterise the role of the natural world in Victoria's development? What does her time in the wilderness allow her to discover about herself?
7. Victoria's decision to sell her family's farm to the government and leave Lola is seen by many in the community as an act of betrayal. What factors beyond the threat of the new reservoir compel Victoria to leave? Do you believe she had an obligation to stay? Why does Seth want to return to Lola? Was Victoria right to lie to Seth and remove the family's orchard without his knowledge?
8. Victoria expects Ruby-Alice's funeral to be a small affair, in keeping with her status as the town's outsider. But, to Victoria's surprise, a large gathering of townsfolk attend the burial, joining hands and singing the community funeral song for Ruby-Alice. Were you also surprised? How did this moment change or develop your opinion of the townspeople of Lola? Do you agree or disagree with Victoria's belief that most would have also attended a funeral for Wil, had they been given the chance?
9. The high arid climate of the Gunnison Valley is not a natural fit for peaches, yet the Nash family succeeds in adapting their Georgia peach trees to Lola, and, later, Victoria manages to transplant the orchard to Paonia. Why do you think she feels so strongly about transplanting the trees? The trees' ability to survive and then thrive under trying circumstances mirrors Victoria's own path. In what

ways is the orchard a metaphor for Victoria's journey? Does saving the orchard give Victoria the purpose she is looking for?

10. Zelda compares the displacement of lola residents for the creation of the reservoir to the forced removal of the Ute tribe, the indigenous people of Colorado's Western Slope, pointing out that the place the current inhabitants like to call their own once was another people's homeland. She acknowledges that the two circumstances are 'not the same', but what is Zelda's point? Do you agree or disagree? How is Zelda's comment linked to Victoria's thoughts about 'progress' as she is turned away from visiting lola one final time?
11. While Inga and Victoria are initially bonded by their different circumstances – Inga's ability to provide what Victoria cannot – there are also many parallels between them. What similarities do you see between Inga and Victoria? What differences?
12. The title of the book refers to a phrase first spoken by Wil that eventually becomes a mantra for Victoria. Toward the end of the novel, Victoria ponders what she might say to her lost son: 'I would explain that what I had learned most about becoming is that it takes time. I would say I had tried, as Wil taught me, to go as a river, but it had taken me a long while to understand what that meant.' What do you think it means to 'go as a river'?
13. What do you believe happened next for Victoria, Inga, Zelda, and Lukas after the final lines of the novel?

B) Book questions and discussion from Book Club Members.

C) Discussion and choosing of the next book to read (by popular vote).

July Book: ?

August Book: ?
