
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, April 24, at 1:30PM**

The Island of Missing Trees, Elif Shafak

About the Author: Elif Shafak is an award-winning British-Turkish novelist and the most widely read female author in Turkey. She writes in both Turkish and English, and has published seventeen books, eleven of which are novels. Her work has been translated into fifty languages. Shafak holds a PhD in political science and she has taught at various universities in Turkey, the US and the UK, including St Anne's College, Oxford University, where she is an honorary fellow. She is a member of Weforum Global Agenda Council on Creative Economy and a founding member of ECFR (European Council on Foreign Relations). An advocate for women's rights, LGBT rights and freedom of speech, Shafak is an inspiring public speaker and twice a TED Global speaker, each time receiving a standing ovation. Shafak contributes to major publications around the world and she has been awarded the title of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. In 2017 she was chosen by Politico as one of the twelve people who would make the world better. She has judged numerous literary prizes and is chairing the Wellcome Prize 2019.

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

1. Favorite character? Favorite scene/chapter?
2. Which character needs the most therapy?
3. Consider Ada's scream in the novel's opening scene. Although she is humiliated by the viral video taken of her, she is equally confused when strangers start taping themselves screaming too and posting #canyouhearmenow in solidarity. Unknowingly, Ada reflected a societal desire shared by both women and youth across the world to be heard. What statements does the novel as a whole make about gender inequality and discrimination?

4. Throughout the novel, butterflies appear as a recurring symbol. Butterflies are engraved on the box that Kostas gives to Defne as a token of his love, Ada doodles them absentmindedly before her screaming spell, and it is a butterfly who discovers the grave of Defne and Kostas's baby during a mass migration to Cyprus. What is the significance of the butterfly's appearance in these moments? What does this insect symbolize to you and why? Do you see other natural symbols throughout the book? If so, what do they signify?
5. In her years, the fig tree meets many animals and insects. Why do you think Shafak emphasizes nature and non-human interactions to talk about migration, history, and human conflict in *The Island of Missing Trees*?
6. When a story is told from many perspectives, how do we, as readers, decipher what is true and what is not? Is it safe to assume that the natural world is unbiased? In your opinion, is the fig tree a narrator or a character? Would it be possible to have the entire story without her?
7. Throughout the novel, Shafak reinterprets the concepts of borders and sovereignty, and focuses on those things that do manage to travel beyond borders, as well as how the border between Turkish and Greek Cyprus is described as the Green Line – a color which evokes natural beauty rather than competition or bloodshed. Additionally, both Defne and Ada share a commitment to being islanders, rather than Turkish or Greek, Muslim or Christian. What statement is Shafak making about the nature of belonging, humanity, and ownership and the compulsion to delineate from others? How do Defne and Kostas grapple with these questions?
8. Interconnectedness and symbiosis are important themes for the characters of *The Island of Missing Trees*. Shafak illustrates the ways in which disparate natural elements intertwine to mutually thrive, how humanity and nature are connected through their reliance on the earth, and how humans are dependent on their histories even as they embark into the future. Discuss moments in the book where these themes are particularly apparent.
9. Defne's death looms over the novel. Kostas argues that she did not die by suicide but rather was plagued with an invisible illness that inhibited her ability to heal from the past. Like a girdled tree that is "strangled by its own roots" Defne could not escape her pain nor could she ward it off with love (334). Ada wants to blame her mother for not having enough love inside of her to survive. With whom do you agree?
10. Ada wants only to know the truth about her past. Meanwhile, Defne insists, "We have to remember in order to heal," and yet forces Kostas to withhold their past from Ada (215). Discuss this contradiction.

11. The book is centered around immigrants; those who fled conflict, like Kostas, and those who stayed, like Defne and Meryem, and they struggle to understand one another. Their mixed feelings of pride, guilt, resentment, and sadness can overshadow the grief that they share. Shafak writes, “First-generation immigrants are a species all their own” (23). How do the characters in this novel mourn or celebrate their home country? Are any of them able to overcome their loss and, if so, how?
12. At the end of the novel, we learn that Defne’s spirit transmutes into the fig tree when it leaves her physical body. While Meryem had prayed for Defne’s spirit to enter heaven, Defne explains: “I much preferred to stay where I am, rooted in the earth” (342). Discuss this final moment. Why would Defne choose to remain close to the life in which she suffered? What about the natural world is preferable to the human one? What shifts about the way we understand the fig tree’s story, knowing that Defne had embodied her all this time?
13. Do you have any final thoughts or questions?

B) Book questions and discussion from Book Club Members.

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

April: February, by Lisa Moore

May: Things Fall Apart, by Chinua Achebe

C) Writing Prompts Exercise

Immediately following Book Club, join Book Club member Molly Titus for a writing exercise called "Prompts".

How it works: A title is chosen, we write on that title for 10 minutes, then stop. The results can be surprising, satisfying and shocking! If anyone wants to read their piece to the group, they can, but there is no pressure to do so. We may try 2 or 3 prompts, depending on time and enjoyment. All Book Club members are welcome to stay for this writing exercise. All you need is pen and paper.