



Summary

Oklahoma 1909. Eleven-year-old Olive Augusta Radley knows that her stepfather doesn't have good intentions toward the two Choctaw girls boarded in their home as wards. When the older girl disappears, Ollie flees to the woods, taking six-year-old Nessa with her. Together they begin a perilous journey to the rugged Winding Stair Mountains, the notorious territory of outlaws, treasure hunters, and desperate men. Along the way, Ollie and Nessa form an unlikely band with others like themselves, struggling to stay one step ahead of those who seek to exploit them... or worse. Oklahoma 1990. Law Enforcement Ranger Valerie Boren O'dell arrives at Horsethief Trail National Park seeking a quiet place to balance a career and single parenthood. But no sooner has Valerie reported for duty than she's faced with local controversy over the park's opening, a teenage hiker gone missing from one of the trails, and the long-hidden burial site of three children deep in a cave. Val's quest to uncover the truth wins an ally among the neighboring Choctaw Tribal Police, but soon collides with old secrets and the tragic and deadly history of the land itself. In this emotional and enveloping 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 traverse the wild and beautiful terrain, each leaving behind one life in search of another.



About the Author

Lisa Wingate is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours*, which remained on the NYT list for more than two years and has sold over three million copies. She has written more than 30 novels and co-authored the nonfiction *Before and After* with journalist Judy Christie. Wingate's books have been translated into over forty languages and have appeared on bestseller lists worldwide. *Shelterwood* (2024) marks her thirty-third release.

Wingate is a Goodreads Choice Award winner, an Oklahoma Book Award finalist, a Southern Book Prize winner and was named a 2023 Distinguished Alumni of Oklahoma State University. Americans for More Civility, a kindness watchdog organization, selected Wingate as a recipient of the National Civics Award, which celebrates public figures who work to promote greater kindness and civility in American life. "Booklist" summed up her work by saying, "Lisa Wingate is, quite simply, a master storyteller."

She was inspired to become a writer by a first-grade teacher who said she expected to see Lisa's name in a magazine one day. Wingate also entertained childhood dreams of being an Olympic gymnast and winning the National Finals Rodeo but was stalled by a mental block against backflips on the balance beam and by parents who stubbornly refused to finance a rodeo career. She was lucky enough to marry into a big family of tall tale enthusiasts who never let the truth get in the way of a good story. Wingate lives in Texas and Colorado with her family and her cuddly teddy bear of a dog, Huckleberry.

One of her favorite things about being a writer is connecting with people, both real and imaginary. Find out more at www.lisawingate.com. Or follow her on Facebook at LisaWingateAuthorPage, or on Instagram @author_lisa_wingate. More information about her novels can be found at www.lisawingate.com.

Discussion Questions

- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?

Discussion Questions

- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?