

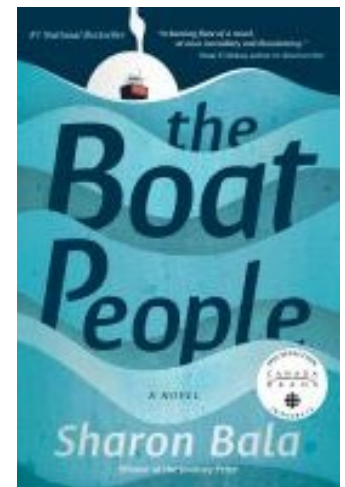


The Boat People

Sharon Bala

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the author chose *The Boat People* as her title? Throughout history, the term “boat people” has been used to refer to different waves of migrants. Who did you think the boat people of the title were going to be? What other examples of “boat people” are you aware of?
2. Consider the book’s epigraph by Martin Luther King Jr.: “We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.” How does this epigraph relate to the plot or set the stage for the themes explored in the book?
3. Author Sharon Bala has said that she wrote the novel as a “meditation on empathy.” Discuss how the novel explores both the need for empathy as well as how it is tested.
4. The novel is told through the perspectives of three characters: that of Priya, of Grace, and of Mahindan both in the present and in the past. What do you think the reader gains by having access to these different points of view? What do each of these perspectives bring to the story? Whose story did you enjoy most? Whose story surprised you the most?
5. Examine the relationships between parents and their children in the book. How would you characterize these relationships? What does being a parent mean to Mahindan, Grace, Appa, and He-ma? What sacrifices have these parents made for their children? Discuss the expectations the parents in turn have for their children.
6. Kumi is suffering from Alzheimer’s. In what ways does her illness reflect some of the book’s themes?
7. When asked about how the historical events of her novel increasingly appear pulled from today’s headlines, Bala has said that she never expected the book’s plot to “sound like warning bells rather than history lessons.” How is the novel relevant for us today?





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About the Author

Sharon Bala is trapped on a rock in the cold North Atlantic. Please send mangoes.

Her bestselling debut novel, *The Boat People*, was a finalist for Canada Reads 2018 and the 2018 Amazon Canada First Novel Award. Published in January 2018, it is available worldwide with forthcoming translations in French, Arabic, and Turkish. The unpublished manuscript won the Percy Janes First Novel Award (May 2015) and was short listed for the Fresh Fish Award (October 2015).

In 2017, Sharon won the Journey Prize and had a second story long-listed in the anthology. A three-time recipient of Newfoundland and Labrador's Arts and Letters award, she has stories published in *Hazlitt*, *Grain*, *Maisonneuve*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Riddle Fence*, *Room*, *Prism* international, *The New Quarterly*, and in an anthology called *Racket: New Writing From Newfoundland* (Breakwater Books, Fall 2015).

Sharon was born in Dubai, raised in Ontario, and now lives in St. John's, Newfoundland with her husband, the mathemagician Tom Baird.

This book is available for download as an eBook and an eAudiobook. For more information, please visit lpl.overdrive.com or call 519-661-4600.

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