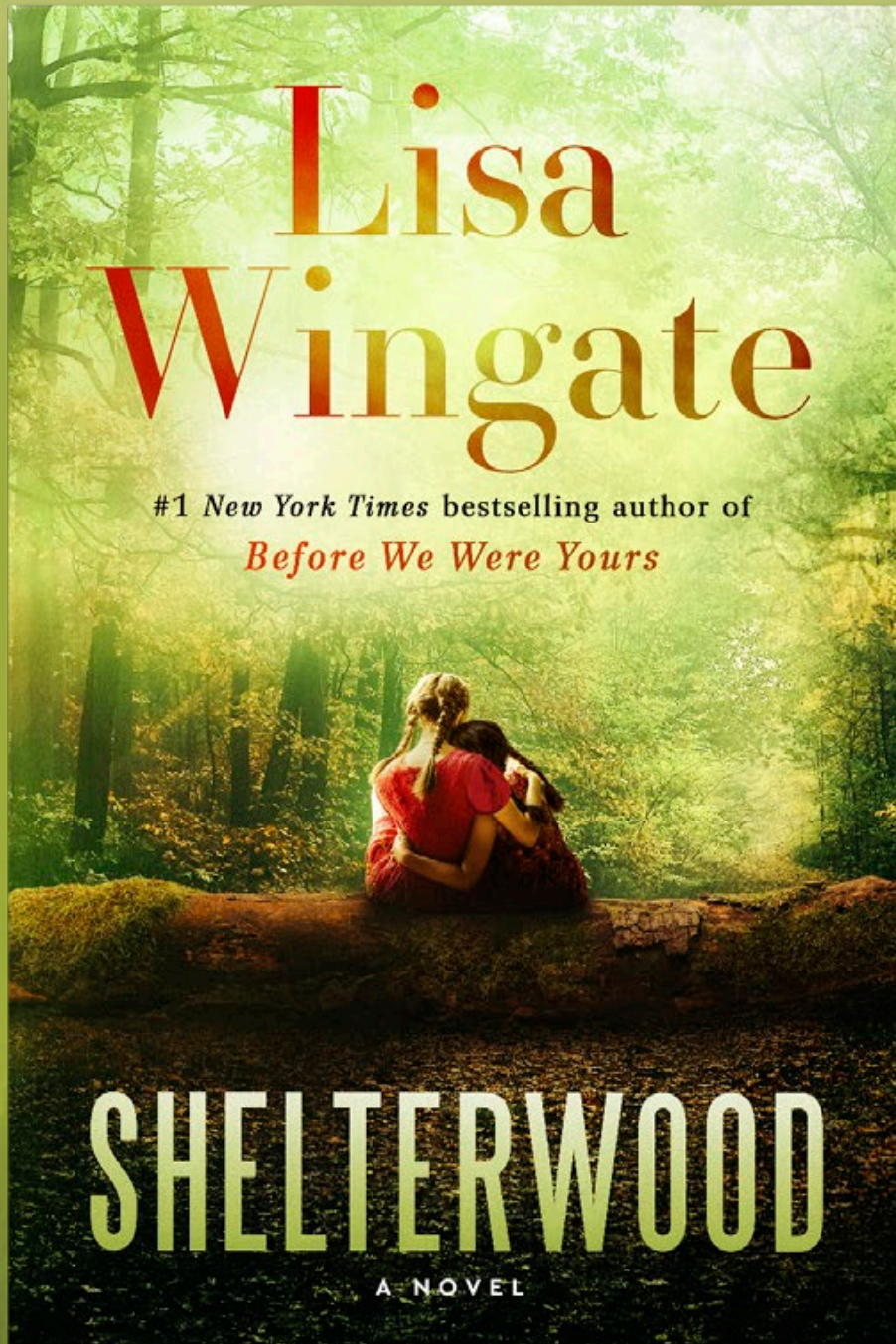


BOOK CLUB KIT



Lisa
Wingate

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of
Before We Were Yours

SHELTERWOOD

A NOVEL

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

What a strange and wonderful obsession we share, we people who love books. The idea that ink and paper could combine to form a portal to adventure, to times long gone, to old worlds and new worlds remains as magical to me today as it was the first time I remember being overtaken by a story. I suspect it's the same for you.

Shelterwood began with an unexpected spark on an ordinary day, when the research for another novel led to a vintage newspaper mention of “Oklahoma Kate” Barnard, a female elected official (a rarity in a time when women couldn’t even vote) who was compelled to investigate reports of three “elf children” living in a hollow tree and begging for food at nearby farmhouses in 1909. In rescuing the children, Kate would discover that they were not elves at all, but orphans of Oklahoma’s Five Tribes (the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole). Along with fifty-one other children, they were under the protection of a court-appointed guardian, who had “lost all track of” most of his wards. He was living lavishly on their oil monies, while the children survived in the woods and became so malnourished, skittish, and small that people thought they were elves.

In taking on the children’s case, Kate would uncover a system of greed, graft, payoffs, and political favors that would pit her against the biggest land barons and oil tycoons of the day. The buried history of Kate’s war, while fascinating, wasn’t the most important part of the story for me. The details of Kate’s war were difficult to dredge up, but they did exist in old reports, records, newspaper accounts, court transcripts, and oral history interviews. What didn’t exist anywhere was the story of the children. Who were they? Why did they run to the woods? What were they running from? How did they end up sheltering in a hollow tree?

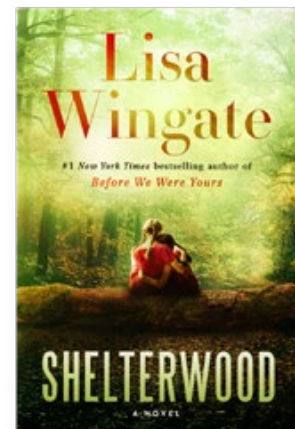
What became of them after they were found?

Questions beget stories and, in that way, the journey of eleven-year-old Ollie and six-year-old Nessa, and their wild flight away from danger and into danger began. I grew to love them for their tenacity, their grit, their resilience, and their determination to cling to childhood.

I hope you will love them, too, and that their journey will become part of your journey.

With many good wishes,

Lisa



BEHIND THE SCENES

Writing *Shelterwood* was a study in secrets hidden in plain sight. Growing up in Oklahoma, I had a sense of things unspoken and unseen, of shadows lurking in tumbledown homesteads, on vine-covered railroad beds left with intermittent bits of track, in the skeletons of timber mills quietly decaying along secluded streams. Long before the days of cell phones and video games, we kids explored those oddities and appropriated them as backdrops for our let's-pretend games. We gave them names and stories. But the true history of the land was even more fascinating, more beautiful and more sinister, than anything we could have imagined.

I'm pleased to be your guide on this photo journey through the research files.

—Lisa Wingate



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, GEOGRAPHY AND MAP DIVISION.

OKLAHOMA

This 1889 map shows the pre-statehood boundaries of what were referred to as the “Indian Nations” or the lands of the “Five Tribes” of Eastern Oklahoma, the Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole nations prior to statehood.

BEHIND THE SCENES

KATE BARNARD

My journey into *Shelterwood* began with a newspaper mention of a woman who discovered “elf children” living in a hollow tree in Oklahoma in 1909. The children were not elves, but land-wealthy orphans of the Five Tribes. Their court-appointed guardian was living lavishly on the children’s oil monies, while the kids fled to the woods to survive. Despite the fact that I grew up in Oklahoma, this story was the first mention I’d ever heard of “Oklahoma Kate” Barnard.

After sweeping into elected office by the largest majority of any candidate on the ballot (in an era when women couldn’t even vote), Kate was arguably the most powerful politician in the newly-formed state. Though small in stature and only thirty years old, she had a scrappy personality. Known for her forward-thinking ideas, her willingness to fight for her beliefs, and her political savvy, Kate held broad public support. Her powerful oratory drew massive crowds not only in Oklahoma, but nationwide. In the second photo, a crowd has gathered in the street to hear her speak from a hotel balcony.



BEHIND THE SCENES

THE CLUBWOMEN

At the time of Oklahoma statehood, the burgeoning women's club movement was all the rage in some quarters, and a bit of a scandal in others. The very idea that women would leave the house, unchaperoned by husbands or male relatives, for the sole purpose of gathering with other women to discuss ideas, politics, education, and other matters pertinent to their interests! Oh my!



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In 1909, the newly united women's clubs of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory joined the General Federation of Women's Clubs, an international organization still active today. Many of you may have had mothers, grandmothers, or great-grandmothers who were members. Early in her career, Kate Barnard both courted the support of the Oklahoma Federation of Women's Clubs and criticized their reluctance to move beyond "hand wringing" over the land grafting issues in Oklahoma, particularly as it pertained to Indigenous children and orphans. The beautiful irony is that, while Kate lost her war against big oil and the grafters, she had planted a seed that would eventually lead the General Federation of Women's Clubs to send a team of investigators to Oklahoma to travel the state, conduct interviews, scour court documents, and compose an eyewitness report.

BEHIND THE SCENES

ZITKÁLA-ŠÁ (GERTRUDE BONNIN)



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Gertrude Bonnin, also known as Zitkála-Šá (Red Bird), came to Oklahoma as a research agent for the General Federation of Women's Clubs. A member of the Yankton Sioux (or Dakota) Nation, she was a well-known speaker, writer, and advocate for indigenous rights. She traveled the state with two male investigators. Their 1924 report, authored in large part by Bonnin, put forth a searing indictment of grafters, guardians, probate courts, and the now decades-old land grab. Through interviews, Bonnin also offered a view through the eyes of the victims—indigenous landowners, both adults and children. You can read Bonnin's original report [here](#).

Rather than simply handing the report to Congress, where lobby money and political ambitions would inevitably have quashed it, the Clubwomen sought to force action by sending their report straight to every newspaper in the country.

ANGIE DEBO

Angie Debo began life as a farm girl whose sights were set on higher education and a wider world. She would become Oklahoma's premier historian. Despite earning her bachelor's and master's degrees, and publishing a groundbreaking book on the Choctaw Republic, Debo found that faculty jobs in college history departments were closed to women.

After uncovering documents about the graft and massive land grab of the statehood era, Debo wrote *And Still the Waters Run*, which not only presented a stark picture of fraud, exploitation, greed, and criminal

conspiracy, but named names and set off a firestorm of controversy. The information Debo discovered was so explosive it caused her to worry for her safety as she wrote, yet she later remarked, "When I got into it, I couldn't honestly back out." The PBS documentary, *Indians, Outlaws, and Angie Debo* offers a striking view of Debo's career in her own words. You can find her book [here](#).



THE TIME AND PLACE

CHILD LABOR

Kate Barnard's deepest passion was evident in her pursuit of laws protecting children. She championed education and child labor laws in Oklahoma and pushed for nationwide regulation to prevent the use of children as low-budget labor in dangerous jobs. Another notable figure in the cause was Lewis Hine, who altered the tide of the debate by showing the faces of child laborers in photos like these:



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Most child laborers worked ten or twelve-hour shifts, either days or nights, sixty to seventy hours per week. Willie Mullins in *Shelterwood* could have been one of these breaker boys, toiling deep in a coal mine.

Seven-year-old Rosie, a full-time oyster shucker. Hine's notes record that she is illiterate and works every day at a canning company.



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Mill boys so small they had to "climb up on the spinning frame to mend the broken threads," according to Hine.

THE TIME AND PLACE

THE BUILDERS AND THE BROKERS

At the turn of the century, the territory that would become the state of Oklahoma was a land in transition. If you happened upon James W. Hale's *Indian Territory Guide for the Home Seeker and Investor* in 1905, you might have perused pages like these, compiled in anticipation of changing laws and the forced breakup of tribal lands causing parcels to become "alienable," or cleared for sale without government restrictions. The brokers, printers, and land hustlers who compiled such solicitations into guidebooks saw opportunity in the making:

Talihina

Talihina is a town of six hundred people located seventy miles southwest of the Fort Smith on the main line of the Frisco Railroad. It is in the eastern part of the fertile Kiamichi Valley and thus has tributary to it some five hundred square miles of the richest land in the Choctaw Nation.

Talihina has seven general-stores, two drug stores, a racket store, meat market, weekly newspaper, the Talihina Tribune, barber shop, two cotton gins, two lumber mills, one planing mill, two blacksmith shops, one hotel, three restaurants, one livery stable and first national bank.

There is a good opening in Talihina for handle factories or workers in hard woods, lumber yards, (the demand for lumber for houses being very great) and for a good hardware store, carrying builders materials, also for a general repair shop and jeweler. In fact, there is a good opening for nearly everyone, but more than all for farmers and stock raisers. The Kiamichi Valley is exceedingly fertile and its rainfall can be relied upon. In twenty years there has never been a crop failure caused by drought or, in fact, by anything. The flood of 1904 causing the worst partial failure the country has so far experienced. The bot-

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tom lands along the Kiamichi River affords the best quality of black bottom land soil, while the prairies of the valley are easier of cultivation and not far behind in fertility. There has been a great deal of building in Talihina the past year.

JOHN T. BAILEY,
Recorder

Antlers

Antlers has a population of 1,500 people, and is situated at the foot of the Kiamichi Mountains and also located on the west bank of Kiamichi River and she is commonly known as "Queen of the Kiamichi."

Antlers is surrounded by fine agricultural land and does a large truck farming and regular farming business. Some of the best merchants in the southern part of the Choctaw Nation are located here. She has two large banks, two gins, planing mill, ice plant, and the best hotel on the Frisco road.

The spring located near the depot and Harvey House has a reputation beyond the limits of the Indian Territory.

Antlers is the gate-way for the finest virgin pine timber forest now located in the United States. Several large saw mills are contemplating locating here. Antlers has a large wagon factory now in the course of construction, also bids for an electric light and water-works franchise.

JAKE EASTON,
Secretary of Commercial Club.

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THE TIME AND PLACE

THE OUTLAWS

In the decades before statehood, the remoteness and rugged terrain of the Winding Stair Mountains made the area a danger for travelers and a haven for horse thieves, cattle rustlers, and well-known outlaws like Belle Starr.



The 1832 Old Military Road where it crossed the Winding Stairs on the path from Fort Smith to Fort Towson.

THE WINDING STAIR

After being logged, burned, and clear-cut to the point of devastation by the 1930s, the Winding Stair now offers a different kind of haven. As Winding Stair Mountain National Recreation Area (site of the fictional Horsethief Trail National Park in *Shelterwood*), the reforested mountains provide an escape for tourists, travelers, and outdoor enthusiasts seeking time away from the hustle and noise of modern life. From the Old Military Road, to the Horsethief Spring, to the hiking trails, views, and vistas, no matter the time of year, the mountains have a quiet, mysterious beauty that's not to be missed. These photos were taken during a hiking trip in early March, just as the jonquils, dogwoods, and redbuds inched toward full bloom.

The Horsethief Spring, a popular hiding place for horse and cattle thieves in need of water for their four-legged loot.



The overlook at Emerald Vista. A breathtaking view.

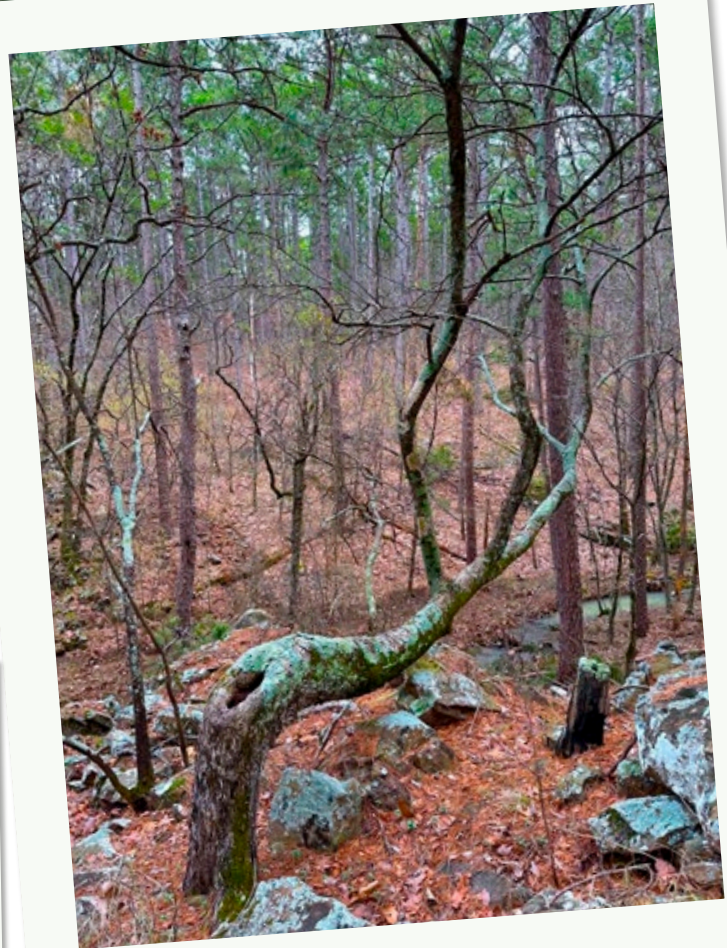
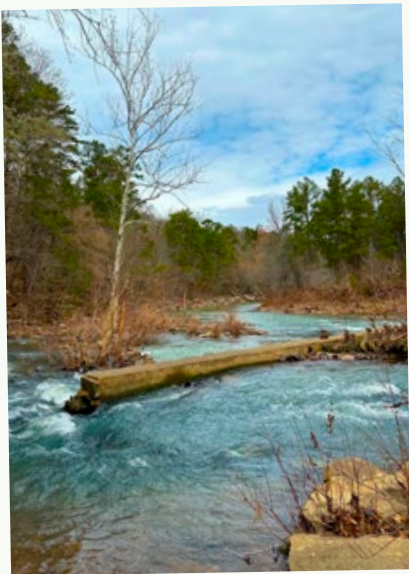


THE TIME AND PLACE



The Winding Stair campground atop the mountains. This cross-country traveler in his unique camper added atmosphere. He was heating up pork and beans still in the can and lightheartedly offered to share.

The place that inspired Sleeping Beauty Bridge and Sweetwater Creek. Shelterwood Camp would be somewhere down this softly tumbling waterway.



Holson Creek at a low-water crossing. These currents look like they could hide a mystery, don't they?

THE TIME AND PLACE



THE CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA

No matter where you come from or when you make your way there, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma will welcome you with Choctaw history, culture, and fun. In Durant, you can spend a day at the new Choctaw Cultural Center. [Be sure to check the website for a schedule of special activities and presentations.](#) In Tuskahoma, the Choctaw Nation Capitol Museum is located in the stately brick building that housed the Choctaw government from 1894 until statehood in 1907.

THE CAPITOL BUILDING

The Capitol Building is not only a beautiful example of period architecture; its halls are steeped in history. The photos below were taken various years at the annual Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival.

Long Walk -Many Tears Choctaw Removal 1831-1833

" . . . they are a people that will walk to the last,
or I do not know how we could get on."
— Major Francis W. Armstrong, Removal Agent, 1832

Inside the museum, a display recounting the treacherous and deadly journey westward on the Trail of Tears. The Choctaw were the first to endure the forced march from their homes in the east.



A photo display of Choctaw history and ancestors.

THE TIME AND PLACE



Presentation of the flags at the annual powwow. The Choctaw Nation historically and today has a high rate of military service. It's a little-known fact, but the first code talkers in wartime were Choctaw soldiers in World War I.

A few scenes from the powwow. These boys and girls are probably grown with lives, jobs, and homes of their own by now. Many are undoubtedly passing along their cultural heritage to their own children.



If you visit Southeastern Oklahoma, either in person or virtually, consider widening your trip and visiting the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole Nation sites as well. They have so much to offer!

Related links:

- [Visit Cherokee Nation](#)
- [Mvskoke Tourism](#)
- [The Chickasaw Nation](#)
- [The Great Seminole Nation of Oklahoma](#)

RECIPES



CHOCTAW FOODS AND SOME TRADITIONAL OKLAHOMA FARE:

[How to make fry bread](#) (top with refried beans and taco ingredients for fry bread tacos)
[Pashofa](#) (a hominy-pork stew) and [Bahana](#) (water-cooked cornbread nuggets).

[Cowboy Caviar Okie style](#), as shown in [405 Magazine](#).

Pecan pie or pecan anything (pecans grow wild Oklahoma and are collected by the bucketful in the fall).

Southern Living calls this Texas Funeral Cake, but these show up at every gathering of any size in Oklahoma . . . [topped with pecans, of course!](#)

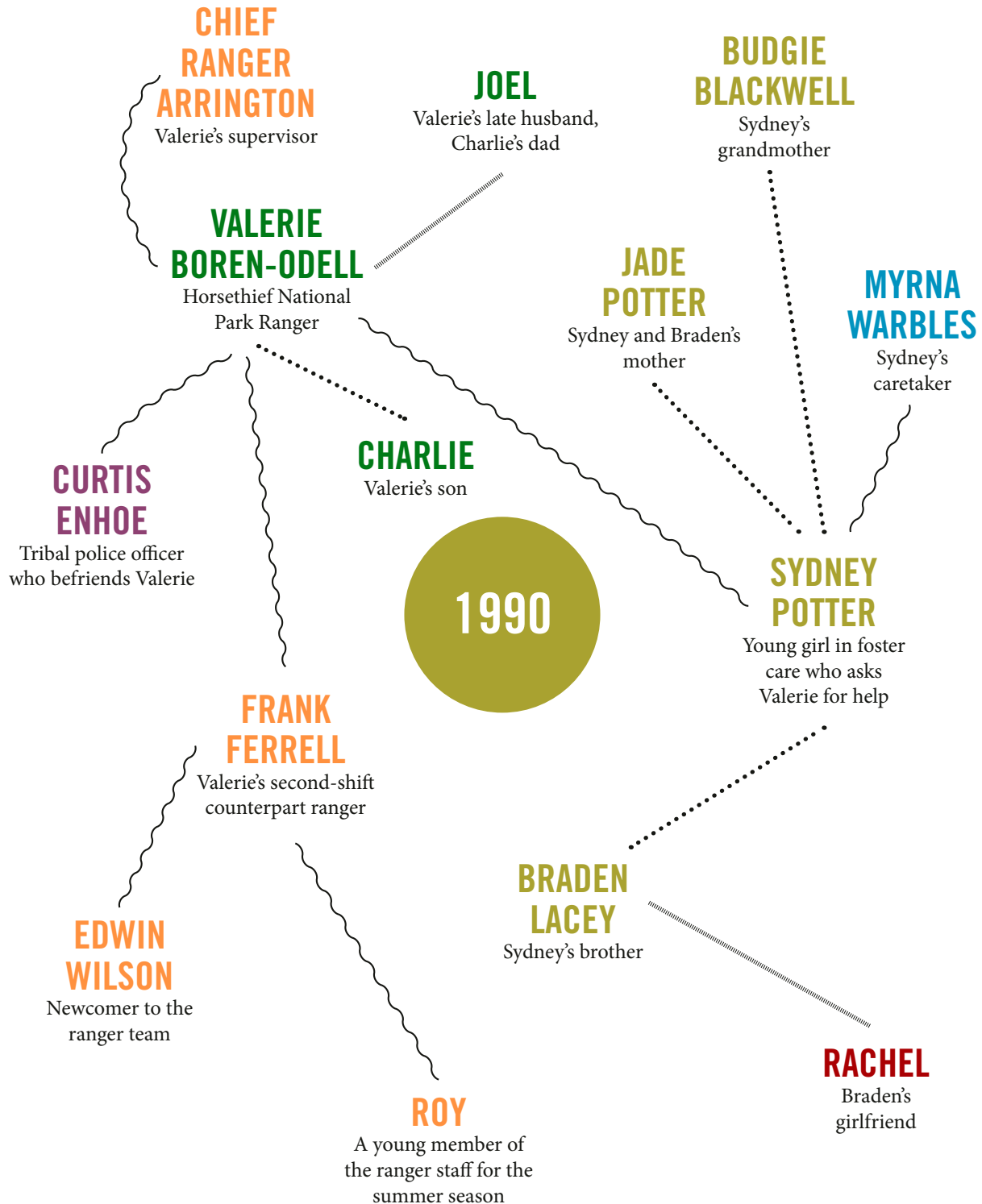
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SPOILER WARNING: STOP HERE IF YOU HAVEN'T FINISHED READING *SHELTERWOOD*

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?

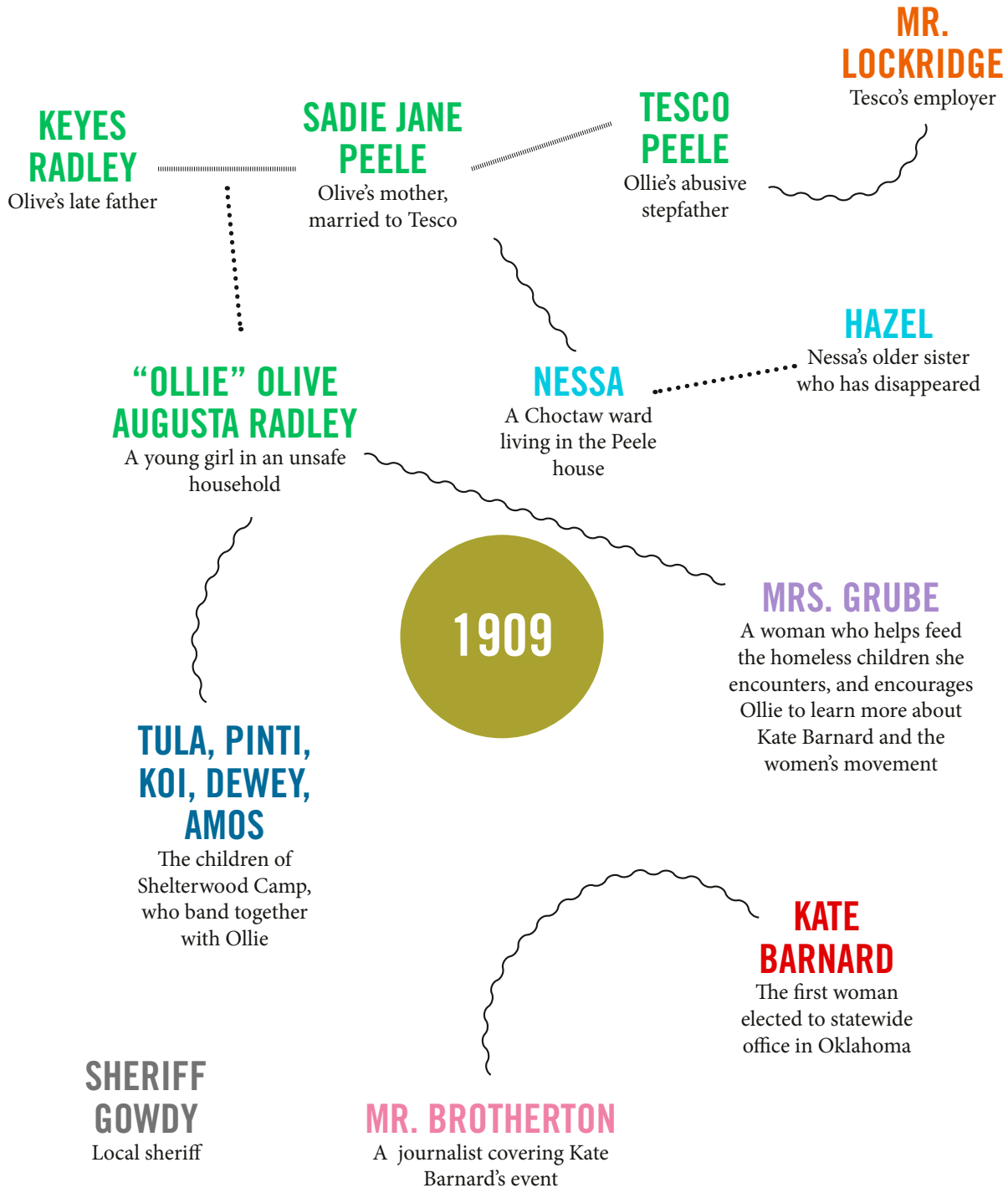
WHO'S WHO IN *SHELTERWOOD*

SPOILER WARNING: STOP HERE IF YOU HAVEN'T FINISHED READING *SHELTERWOOD*



WHO'S WHO IN *SHELTERWOOD*

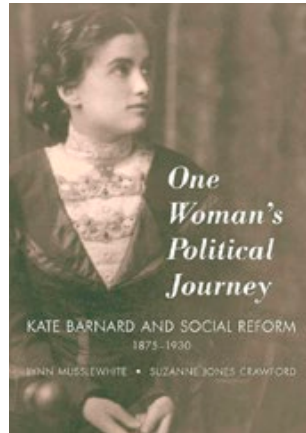
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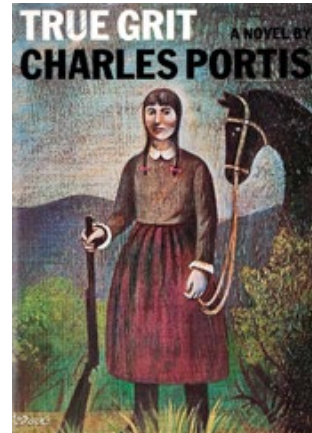
FURTHER READING



A Life on Fire, Oklahoma's Kate Barnard by Connie Cronley



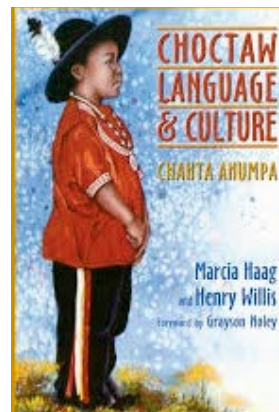
One Woman's Political Journey: Kate Barnard and Social Reform by Lynn Musselwhite and Suzanne Jones Crawford



True Grit by Charles Portis



[The Indian-Pioneer Papers Collection](#)



Choctaw Language and Culture by Marcia Haag and Henry Willis

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