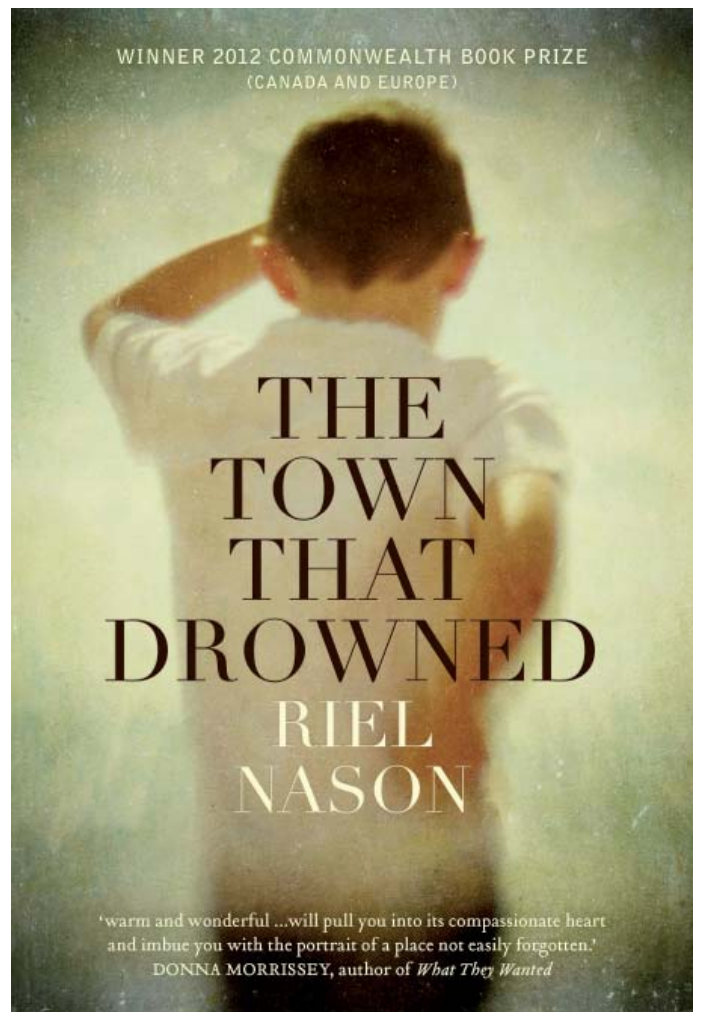


ALLEN & UNWIN



# READING GROUP NOTES

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## About the book

Living with a weird brother in a small town can be tough enough. Having a spectacular fall through the ice at a skating party and nearly drowning are grounds for embarrassment. But having a vision and narrating it to the assembled crowd solidifies your status as an outcast.

What Ruby Carson saw during that fateful day was her entire town, buildings and people floating underwater. Then an orange-tipped surveyor stake turns up in a farmer's field. Another is found in the cemetery. A man with surveying equipment is spotted eating lunch near Pokiok Falls. The residents of Haventon soon discover that a massive dam is being constructed and that most of their homes will be swallowed by the rising water.

Suspensions mount, tempers flare, and secrets are revealed. As the town prepares for its own demise, 14-year-old Ruby Carson sees it all from a front-row seat. Set in the 1960s, *The Town That Drowned* evokes the awkwardness of childhood, the thrill of first love, and the importance of having a place to call home.

Award-winning writer Riel Nason's keen insights into human nature and the depth of human attachment to place make this novel ripple in an amber tension of light and shadow.

## About the author

Riel Nason lives in New Brunswick, Canada with her husband and two young children. Nason's short stories have appeared in literary journals across Canada, and for more than ten years she wrote a newspaper column on the topic of antiques and collectibles. *The Town That Drowned* is her debut novel. It won the 2012 Commonwealth Book Prize for Canada and Europe as well as the 2012 Margaret and John Savage First Book Award. It is currently longlisted for the 2013 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Presently, Nason is working on her second novel.

## Reviews & Quotes

'*The Town That Drowned* will pull you into its compassionate heart and imbue you with the portrait of a place not easily forgotten.' - Donna Morrissey, author of *What They Wanted*

'A very involving and enjoyable read, with nuanced characterisation...it questions progress and the nature of a place to call home.' - 2012 Commonwealth Book Prize judges

'By turns charming, humorous and terrifying, Riel Nason's unique and compelling coming-of-age story is infused with warmth and insight and - through artfully painted details of a richly textured community - speaks to the transcendent power of human bonds.' - Carla Gunn, author of *Amphibian*

'In very readable, smoothly flowing prose, Nason brings to life an actual moment from New Brunswick history...[and] creates a compelling piece of fiction charting a young woman's coming of age, and raises thoughtful questions about the meaning of home and the nature of progress.' - Shawn Syms, *The National Post*

'Nason's narrative control demonstrates literary maturity...[her] writing shines in the ominous scenes, where a creeping feeling of dread is juxtaposed with the sweetness of Ruby's coming of age.' - Grace O'Connell, *Quill and Quire*

'This is an impressive first novel.' - Victor Enns, *The Winnipeg Review*

'Riel Nason is a writer to watch...Recommended.' - Susan G. Cole, *NOW Magazine*

'With its wise, strong and vulnerable child narrator, this novel reminds of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, especially with its – at varying times – microscopic, telescopic and panoramic take on a rural community in the 1960s after a government orders the flooding of an entire town...Reading this book is like sitting in a tree house with the narrator right there with you, calmly relating the story as it happened two years prior. It's intimate, fulfilling, entrancing and loveable.'

- Gerald Collins, author of *Moonlight Sketches*

## For discussion

- ☞ What is your interpretation of a 'coming-of-age' tale? Does *The Town That Drowned* match your interpretation, or does it differ?
- ☞ Discuss Ruby Carson's relationship with Percy Carson.
- ☞ The judges of the Commonwealth Book Prize stated that: '[*The Town That Drowned*]...questions progress and the nature of a place to call home.' Do you agree? How important is having a place to call home, and what ramifications does the transplantation of homes have on the residents of the town of Haventon?
- ☞ How does Nason capture the nature of small town politics and long buried secrets in *The Town That Drowned*?
- ☞ "It was just two years ago, and it used to seem that nothing ever changed. Everyone thought Percy was so different when he was really all about being the same." *The Town That Drowned* p. 14. Discuss Percy's habits and his bottle launches. How do our habits compound our personality, and how others perceive us?
- ☞ How does Mr. Cole's disappearance reflect the fate of the town of Haventon?
- ☞ "A foolproof way to tell that an event is truly awful is when you lose count of how many long-dead people you've heard are probably rolling in their graves. There's a lot of "Thank goodness" or "Thank God" so-and-so isn't alive to see this" *The Town That Drowned* p. 62 – 63. Discuss the mentality of Haventon in relation to the bridge, the dam and the forcible acquisition of land by the Government.
- ☞ Gerald Collins states that *The Town That Drowned* is '...at varying times – microscopic, telescopic and panoramic take on a rural community in the 1960s...' What does Nason's book say about small towns in the 1960s, and what does it suggest about the nature of the future that is to come?

- ☞ “You never know what some people are capable of, she says, until they are given a test for better or worse. Unexpected problems bring unexpected results. I wonder if hitting your head and having a vision of the future counts?” *The Town That Drowned* p. 223. What do you think caused Ruby’s vision (p.24)? Why did she see what she did?
- ☞ Consider the following quote: “It seems hard to believe, but even I think it’s likely true. I’m standing in front of a hundred-year-old tree that has grown new roots and a house that already seems well rested from its journey. I’m looking down on a river that had the power to move them both. Anything is possible.” *The Town That Drowned* p. 252. What does home mean to you?

## Suggested Reading

*Jasper Jones* – Craig Silvey

*To Kill a Mockingbird* – Harper Lee

*Let the Balloon Go* – Ivan Southall

*Middlesex* – Jeffrey Eugenides

*Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* – Jamie Ford

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – Mark Haddon