



STILLWATER READS

“Listen” by Sheldon Russell | September 2025

My Book Discussion Date: _____

Need to reschedule your book discussion date? Call the help desk (405) 372-3633 x8106.

Discussion Questions

The title “Listen” refers to many parts of the story – both who is listening and who needs to listen. How does the listening change as the story progresses?

How, if at all, did this book relate to your own life? Did it evoke any memories or create any connections for you?

The Castle on the Hill makes a strong first impression on Liam, both as a home for students and a symbol. Does it become a character in its own right?

Of all the stories and people Liam interviewed over the course of the book, which one stood out to you the most? Why was that? Was there a favorite one that you liked?

Are there any characters you wish you could have given advice to? What would you have told them?

“Listen” features several strong female characters. Do you think they accurately reflect the way life was in a small town in Oklahoma during the 1930s?

Willie is elusive, but Liam eventually wins him over. Why do you think Willie was hard to get close to, and did that have an impact on how Liam approached his interviews?

One character in the book who gets a few moments in the spotlight is Dr. Dubois, the state director of the Federal Writers’ Project. Russell has said that Dubois is a reference to Angie Debo. How does she impact the story? Why do you think Russell changed her name from Debo to Dubois? Did his portrayal of Dubois do Debo justice?

Stillwater Reads: “Listen” by Sheldon Russell

Find more information about the series including events at stillwaterok.gov/StwReads

Discussion Questions

Discuss what you know about Oklahoma during the Great Depression before reading “Listen.” Did this book open your eyes to a new reality or paint a different picture of how you imagined life during this time period?

Were you familiar with the Federal Writers’ Project before reading this book? How important is preserving stories?

If the Federal Writers’ Project were reestablished today, what kind of impact would it have? Would it differ from modern-day podcasting?

The characters seem to grapple with stereotypes and assumptions people make based on where they live and the level of education they have received. How do you think the lessons learned in the book could apply to society today?

A few reading series ago, we read “Killers of the Flower Moon” by David Grann. Despite being vastly different novels, KFM leaves off right at the start of the Great Depression, while “Listen” takes place during the Great Depression. What conclusions can you draw about living in Oklahoma from reading these books?

As a work of historical fiction, “Listen” combines fictional narratives with real historical elements. How well does the author convey the era? Do you think the author remained true to the events and social structures of the time?

In writing “Listen,” Sheldon Russell strikes a balance between humorous and serious moments. How do you feel this worked for you? Did you like Russell’s writing style? Why or why not?

The small town of Atlas is in Oklahoma. Do you think this story could have worked in another location? Would it have changed the story?

The author leaves the ending somewhat open. What do you think happens to the characters after the novel concludes?

Is there anything about the book that you would change? If so, what would it be?