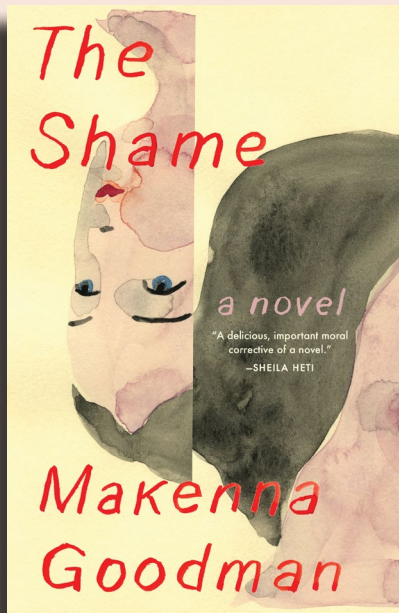
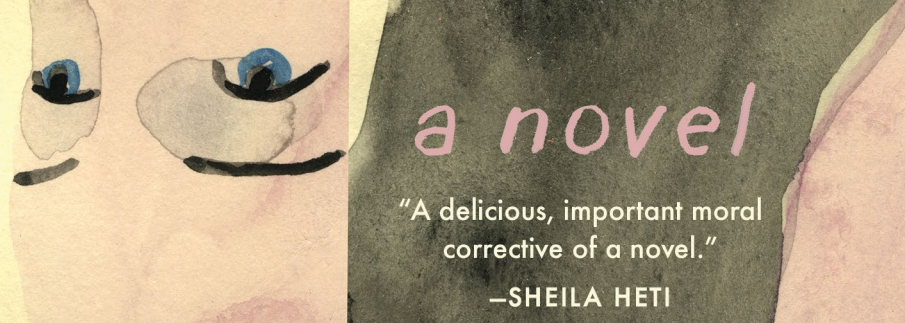


The Shame by Makenna Goodman Discussion Guide



1. Alma is constantly colliding with her identity as a mother. “Yes, I felt invisible. I didn’t have anything to show for myself except my kids, and the older they got the more themselves they became, while I grew more and more servile, adhering always to their changing needs” (17). What obligation does she have as a mother to her family? How does Alma associate herself with her children? Are her feelings a common sentiment in society today?
2. Alma expresses her fear—and at times obsession—with death. What has led her to this viewpoint? How has this fear affected Alma’s will to survive?
3. How does the structure of the novel—bouncing back between flashbacks— influence your reading? What does Alma’s backstory reveal about her intentions?
4. When Alma describes the character for her potential novel, she says, “I wanted her to be looked down on, but also to inspire wonder and desire against the reader’s better judgment. . . in the way I hoped to be read if I were written down” (54). How does Goodman accomplish this in writing the character of Alma? What is your perception of Alma?
5. ***The Shame*** highlights the significance of social media and the desire for approval that it harbors in society. What is Goodman trying to convey about Alma, technology, and the weight she puts on herself to live up to a certain standard?
6. Alma discusses her dislike of capitalism and the ways in which she opposes it. How do the situations in her life conflict and align with capitalist tendencies? How does capitalism act as an obstacle in the novel?
7. The search for purpose and meaningful art eats at Alma throughout the novel. In what ways does she achieve these things? What is Goodman’s idea of meaningful art?
8. Consider the title and the many topics Alma encounters in the book—motherhood, technology, capitalism, among others. Also consider what Alma questions about Celeste: “Was she cowering somewhere, overwhelmed with the shame of having failed both herself and the culture she had once thought herself in sync with?” (101). How does Goodman depict shame throughout the novel? What does the title represent to you?
9. ***The Shame*** plays with the idea of changing the trajectory of one’s life. Would you follow through with Alma’s actions? How do you differ from Alma?
10. The novel deals with the burden of isolation and suppression and the effect they have on the mind. What parallels do you see in society regarding the trapped mentality that Alma feels?



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