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You Belong Here: A Novel

By Laurie Steed

SUMMARY

Jen and Steven meet at sixteen and marry at eighteen. Soon they're the parents of three young children.

Initially, the kids keep them together until love turns to lies and the family implodes. As they grow into adults, each child faces love and loss in the shadow of their family legacy.

You Belong Here is a book about trust and connection. About what keeps us going, in spite of ourselves.

About a place where we belong.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laurie Steed is the Patricia Hackett Prize-winning author of *You Belong Here*, published by Margaret River Press. His fiction has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and has appeared in *Best Australian Stories*, *Award Winning Australian Writing*, *The Age*, *Meanjin*, *Westerly*, *Island*, and elsewhere. He is the recipient of fellowships from The University of Iowa, The Baltic Writing Residency, The Elizabeth Kostova Foundation, The Katharine Susannah Prichard Foundation and The Fellowship of Writers (Western Australia).

He lives in Perth, Western Australia, with his wife and two young sons.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *You Belong Here* has been described by reviewer Nathan Hobby as a 'Generation X family chronicle'. Do you think that's fair, or does the book have things to say about families as a whole?
2. How important is it to tell stories not only of desirable or famous cities but also of lesser cities, too?
3. Music plays a huge part in the book, and yet it's arguable what's being 'said' about music, and how it plays a role in one's life. Is Steed's take judgemental, or is he encouraging the reader to find music that speaks to them?
4. Who is your favourite character in *You Belong Here*, and why?
5. What does the book say about generational legacy? Is such legacy something to be accepted or challenged as one grows into adulthood? Can legacy be lessened or reversed as a family moves into its next generation?
6. Reviewer Samantha Van Zweden wrote on the compressed nature of time in *You Belong Here* and how this allows for huge territory to be covered, both in terms of chronology and the emotional journeys of each character. Was this compression effective for you as a reader? How would you describe the experience of reading such focused but wide-reaching narratives?
7. Popular culture plays a large part in *You Belong Here*, specifically the larger-than-life figures of Lionel Richie and Trent Reznor. How did music change during the period 1972–2002? How does it sit today in the digital age? Could you see a similarly affectionate novel using today's musical icons?
8. What's more important in a family misunderstanding: an apology or greater knowledge of the context behind the misunderstanding? Can a dialogue always help with healing, or are some things healed only by time and by experience?
9. How important is an understanding of history, either familial or societal, when considering a present-day character? How



has society and, in particular, Western Australian society changed during the period 1972–2002?

10. What do you think Steed is saying about life and family in *You Belong Here*? Does his take on the latter concur with Tolstoy's quote that '*all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is*

unhappy in its own way'?

11. Is *You Belong Here* symbolic of a time, place, or both? What memories of your own did it ignite, and why?

IF YOU LIKED THIS BOOK, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...

- *Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout, Random House 2008
- *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan, Random House 2011
- *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* by Anne Tyler, Knopf 1982
- *The Sweet Hereafter* by Russell Banks, Harper Collins 1991
- *Leaving Elvis and other stories* by Michelle Michau-Crawford, UWA Publishing 2016

REVIEWS & ENDORSEMENTS

Laurie Steed's dazzling novel 'You Belong Here' has a tenderness, honesty, and sense of humour that's rarely seen in Australian fiction.

RYAN O'NEILL, winner of the 2017 Prime Minister's Literary Award

A little gem.

SHELLEY HADFIELD, Herald Sun

In 'You Belong Here', Laurie Steed brings us the Slaters, a family with all the dysfunction of an Anne Tyler novel, but with a distinctively Australian feel. At times I felt transported back to my teenage self—music blaring, face buried in a pillow, overcome with heartache, but also rather enjoying myself.

MELANIE CHENG, winner of the 2016 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an Unpublished Manuscript