

# READING GROUP GUIDE

*Shotgun Lovesongs* by Nickolas Butler

## About the Author

Nickolas Butler (b. 1979)



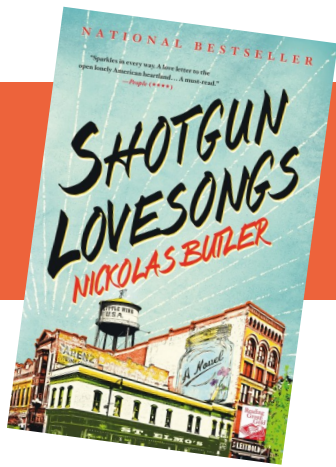
Nickolas Butler was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and was raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He graduated with a degree in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and earned his MFA from the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. His first novel was the internationally best-selling and prize-winning *Shotgun Lovesongs*, which has been optioned for film development and has been translated into ten languages. Butler attended high school alongside Justin Vernon, frontman of the indie folk band Bon Iver, which partly inspired the character Leland in *Shotgun Lovesongs*. *Beneath the Bonfire*, a collection of short stories, followed a year later. In 2017, he published *The Hearts of Men* which was short-listed for two of France's most prestigious literary prizes even before its American publishing. In 2019, his fourth book, *Little Faith* was published, and his most recent book, *Godspeed*, came out in 2021 and is set in the mountains of the American West. Butler is the recipient of many literary prizes and commendations and has published articles,

reviews, short stories, and poetry in publications such as: *Ploughshares*, *Narrative*, and *The New York Times Book Review*, to name a few. Prior to publishing *Shotgun Lovesongs*, Butler worked a long list of jobs including: coffee roaster, liquor store clerk, office manager, hot-dog vendor, author escort, meatpacker, bed-and-breakfast manager, telemarketer, and Burger King maintenance man.

Nickolas Butler is married and lives with his wife and two children on sixteen acres of land adjacent to a buffalo farm in rural Wisconsin.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Many of the characters in *Shotgun Lovesongs* regret specific moments in their life, moments that (perhaps) other people may not regret at all. Do you feel regret is a useful emotion? What do you regret? Which characters (and their regrets) do you identify with?
2. Late in the novel (p. 245), Lee makes a particular observation about what he thinks America is. Do you feel that his perspective is at odds with your own notions of what America is? Or do you agree with him?
3. Many critics and early readers of *Shotgun Lovesongs* have remarked that it is a novel that explores adult male friendships. And yet, perhaps at the heart of the story is Beth (and she is given her own voice in the novel). How did you feel about Butler's representation of women? Was it accurate?
4. Fame seems to be an important theme or consideration throughout *Shotgun Lovesongs*. Do you feel that the novel critiques fame? Celebrates fame? What do you think about the cult of personality in America? Do you care about celebrity? Read tabloids? Why?
5. Some critics have said that *Shotgun Lovesongs* is overly sentimental, even "precious"? Do you think this novel is sentimental? Is sentimentality something to be altogether avoided in fiction?
6. Beth and Leland share one night of romance. This incident happened when neither character was married or even dating someone. And yet, it is enough to unravel lifelong friendships. What do you think about this? Could you relate to characters and their reactions?
7. There is a kind of dichotomy in this novel between city and country. Has your own life been subject to the push-pull of living rural vs. living urban? What have you had to sacrifice to live where you live? Do you see it as a sacrifice?
8. *Shotguns Lovesongs* is in development for a film adaptation. Who would you cast as the main characters?

(Discussion questions 1-7 courtesy of Macmillan Publishers.)