**The Stars are Fire
by Anita Shreve**

**About the Book**

In October 1947, after a summer long drought, fires break out all along the Maine coast from Bar Harbor to Kittery and are soon racing out of control from town to village. Five months pregnant, Grace Holland is left alone to protect her two toddlers when her husband, Gene, joins the volunteer firefighters. Along with her best friend, Rosie, and Rosie's two young children, Grace watches helplessly as their houses burn to the ground, the flames finally forcing them all into the ocean as a last resort. The women spend the night frantically protecting their children, and in the morning find their lives forever changed: homeless, penniless, awaiting news of their husbands' fate, and left to face an uncertain future in a town that no longer exists. In the midst of this devastating loss, Grace discovers glorious new freedoms--joys and triumphs she could never have expected her narrow life with Gene could contain--and her spirit soars. And then the unthinkable happens--and Grace's bravery is tested as never before.

**About the Author**:

Anita Shreve grew up in Dedham, Massachusetts (just outside Boston), the eldest of three daughters. Early literary influences include having read Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton when she was a junior in high school (a short novel she still claims as one of her favorites) and everything Eugene O'Neill ever wrote while she was a senior (to which she attributes a somewhat dark streak in her own work). After graduating from Tufts University, she taught high school for a number of years in and around Boston. In the middle of her last year, she quit (something that, as a parent, she finds appalling now) to start writing. "I had this panicky sensation that it was now or never."

Shreve is married to a man she met when she was 13. She has two children and three stepchildren, and in the last eight years has made tuition payments to seven colleges and universities.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* The Good House by Ann Leary
* Before We Were Yours by Lisa Wingate
* Little Fires Everywhere by Celeste Ng
* In The Midst of Winter by Isabel Allende
* The Ninth Hour by Alice McDermott

**Discussion Questions**

1. The epigraph is a quote from Shakespeare’s Hamlet: “Doubt thou the stars are fire; / Doubt thou the sun doth move; / Doubt truth to be a liar; / But never doubt I love.” What does it mean? What does it have to do with the novel it introduces?
2. “Containerize, her own mother once told Grace, as if imparting the secret of sanity. Her mother meant children as well as dry goods.” (pages 9–­10) In what ways does Grace follow this advice? When does she disregard it?
3. Discuss Grace’s relationship with Rosie. Why is this friendship so important to Grace? What function does Rosie serve in her life?
4. Before reading The Stars Are Fire, what did you know about the fires that tore through Maine in 1947?
5. After the fire, after losing the baby, Grace believes Gene may have used the chaos as cover for him to leave the family. What makes her think this? Would she rather that he fled, or died fighting the fire?
6. At various points in the novel, Grace either ignores or heeds her intuition—­for instance, when Claire has a fever, or when Grace lets Aidan stay in the house. How does she decide when to follow her gut, and when to disregard it? Does her faith in her intuition grow over the course of the novel?
7. When Gene reappears, Grace thinks, “She will live in this house with this injured man on the couch until one of them dies. She will never again go to a job. She will never make love again. She will not have friends.” (page 175) What prompts her to find a way to escape this fate?
8. Are there any ways in which Gene’s rage about his situation is justified?
9. In her goodbye letter to Gene, Grace writes, “I think that if the fire hadn’t happened, we’d have continued as the little family that we were. In time, I believe, we would have come to care about each other in a way that was companionable.” (page 221) Without the upheaval of the fire, do you think Grace would have stayed in her marriage?
10. When Grace decided to drive north, where did you think she was going? Did the epilogue surprise you?