

# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *The Preservationist*

by David Maine

St. Martin's Press

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### Introduction to *The Preservationist*

*"Noe says, -I must build a boat.*

*-A boat, she says.*

*-A ship, more like. I'll need the boys to help, he adds as an afterthought.*

*-We're leagues from the sea, she says, or any river big enough to warrant a boat.*

*This conversation is making Noe impatient. -I've no need to explain myself to you.*

*-And when you're done, she says carefully, we'll be taking this ship to the sea somehow?*

*As usual, Noe's impatience fades quickly. -We'll not be going to the sea. The sea will be coming to us."*

In this brilliant debut novel, Noah's family (or Noe as he's called here)-his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law-tell what it's like to live with a man touched by God, while struggling against events that cannot be controlled or explained. When Noe orders his sons to build an ark, he can't tell them where the wood will come from. When he sends his daughters-in-law out to gather animals, he can offer no directions, money, or protection. And once the rain starts, they all realize that the true test of their faith is just beginning. Because the family is trapped on the ark with thousands of animals-with no experience feeding or caring for them, and no idea of when the waters will recede. What emerges is a family caught in the midst of an extraordinary Biblical event, with all the tension, humanity-even humor-that implies.

### Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Who is your favorite character? Why? Who is your least favorite?
2. In the original, Biblical version of the story, only God, Noah and his sons are mentioned (and only God and Noah perform any specific actions). Does this [male] writer do a good job of creating convincing female characters?
3. Who is "the preservationist"? Explain.

4. How does the book's structure contribute to its pacing and emotional resonance?
5. The chapters jump back and forth between 3rd and 1st person narration. Is this effective?
6. The book starts with Noe and ends with Mirn. Is she the right character to be given the last word, or would you have preferred someone else?
7. According to Father James Martin, a Catholic priest quoted in *USA Today*, the current trend of Bible-oriented books is "theology lite... some is nourishing, most of it isn't. But it's easily digested and makes few demands." Is this a fair criticism?
8. How does each character grow and change through the course of the novel and what are some lessons each of them learned?
9. Do you think any of these lessons have relevance to things we need to learn today?

## About the Author

**David Maine** was born in 1963 and grew up in Farmington, Connecticut. He attended Oberlin College and the University of Arizona, and has worked in the mental health systems of Massachusetts and Arizona. He has taught English in Morocco and Pakistan, and since 1998 has lived in Lahore, Pakistan with his wife, novelist Uzma Aslam Khan.