



Book Club Set

The Marrow Thieves

By Cherie Dimaline

About the Author



Cherie Dimaline's 2017 book, *The Marrow Thieves* was declared by TIME magazine, one of the Best YA Books of All Time. This international bestseller has won the Governor General's Award and the prestigious Kirkus Prize for Young Readers, and was named a Book of the Year on numerous lists including the National Public Radio, the School Library Journal, the New York Public Library, the Globe and Mail, and the CBC. Her novel *Empire of Wild* (Random House Canada, William Morrow US, Weiden and Nicolson UK) became an instant Canadian bestseller and was named Indigo's #1 Best Book of 2019. It was featured in The New York Times, the New Yorker, GOOP, and the Chicago Review of Books among others. *Hunting By Stars* (Abrams US and Penguin Canada), the hotly anticipated sequel to *The Marrow Thieves*, was a 2022 American Indian Library Association Honor Book. Cherie lives in her home territory where she is a registered and active member of the Georgian Bay Métis Community. She is currently writing for television and screen. The much anticipated witchy novel *VENCO* (Random House, Canada; William Morrow, US) hits stores in February 2023 and has already been optioned by AMC Studio and Network.

Who She is:

"WHERE MY STORIES COME FROM, WHICH IS TO SAY, WHO I AM

I am a registered and claimed member of the Metis Nation of Ontario (www.metisnation.org), the federally and provincially recognized representative government for our community. Specifically, I am from the Historic Georgian Bay Métis Community with section 35 Indigenous rights. My mother, aunts and uncles, siblings, children and cousins are all registered and claimed members. But I want to talk about the specificity of my stories outside of the categories and designations and instead, from a community standpoint.

My Mere (grandmother) Edna Dusome, was a member of the Georgian Bay Metis Community. She was born in 1913 and passed away in 2005 after raising me alongside my parents. I talk about her a lot in my work and most of my stories come from her, in one way or another. Her mother was Henrietta Patterson-Boucher-Trudeau-Beausoleil (DOD 1962). Henrietta (or Hattie as she was known) was raised by her aunt/godmother Olive Beausoleil and her uncle Isadore Dusome, both community members, but her

birth parents were Cecile Beausoleil and (Charles) Benjamin Trudeau, also both community members.

Henrietta's mother, Cecile Beausoleil, was the daughter of Alexie Beausoleil and Olive Giroux. Alexis was one of the "halfbreed" signatories on the 1840 Penetanguishene Petition (<http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/14577>). Olive was French. Henrietta's father died in Sault Ste. Marie in 1928 and was the son of Louis Trudeau (son of Jean Baptiste Trudeau and Angelique Papanaatianencoe, Anishnaabe) and Marie Parisien (the daughter of Jacques Parisien and Marie LaFramboise, Anishnaabe). My grandfather, Fred Dusome, also a member of the Georgian Bay Metis Community, was less constant in my life but is an important part of who I am. He was a fisherman and a guide on the Georgian Bay and his parents were Joseph Dusome and Philomene Secord. Philomene's parents were Sophie Beausoleil (from a "French Breed" family on the 1901 census) and Benjamin Secord (the halfbreed son of Simon Secord and his Anishnaabe wife Marguerite). Joseph Dusome's father was Frederic Dusome (son of Francis Dusome, halfbreed, born in Red River, Manitoba who passed away in Penetanguishene in 1906, and Elizabeth Giroux, who's mother Charlotte was listed in the 1836 Michigan Halfbreed Census and was descended from the Mentosaky's of Lac du Flambeau.)

Of my mother's four grandparents, only her maternal grandfather was not genealogically connected to the Indigenous community (Scottish) though he raised Indigenous children. My father is French and Scottish Canadian from a military family, and this is where my last name comes from. I travelled to parts of his homeland (France and around the UK) a few years ago and it is definitely a place of old magic. I want, and have started to, learn more about these ancestors and their land. Growing up, my parents made a decision that my brother and I would be raised as part of my mother's community, which is also the community both of her parents belonged to. My Mere lived with us as we moved around based on my Dad's work, but we always went back home to the Bay every year, no matter what, for months at a time. Now, I have come back to this place to live full time, surrounded by my extended and extensive family. I am a part of this community not only because it is on my registration card.

For generations my family lived 'across the Bay' and that's how we were known, to each other and in town, as across the Bay people. My cousins are the Gervais, Buttineau, Boucher, Grenier and Duquette families. There are many other familial and community connections and old stories, but the ones I mentioned here are the direct lines connected by archival documents and records.

One of the pivotal stories of this place is how the Halfbreeds, First Nations and French communities, separate but living in the same area, came together through a giant wolf. The story, and creature, came to be known as the Loup Lafontaine. He travelled the roads, menaced the people, but stopped to play with children and was finally brought down through a pact with God. This is not the only supernatural wolf story from here and every year there is a wolf festival, Festival du Loup. The community continues to tell stories of the Loup-Garou or the Rougarou, similar to the communities out west and the Cajun community in Louisiana where they have an annual Rougarou Festival in Houma. My own family has several stories of encounters, one that includes my Mere and the local priest in the 1950's.

I come from hunters and women who told stories and made their own remedies when they weren't purchasing slaves from the 'peddler' who would come across the Bay once in a while. Some remedies used holy water from the Shrine in town, others used water collected from the Bay on Easter Sunday. Many were based around onions and pine. To this day, my family hunts and harvests.

I recognize my privilege, one being that I had the great good fortune of growing up in a vibrant community without removal. My parents' decision to make sure that my brother and I were entrenched in our culture allowed me to stay connected and to pass along the stories I heard while spending years with my Mere and her sisters. My family has always had each other and everyone was fed and loved. It was beautiful. Difficult at times for many reasons, and we passed along anxiety as well as stories, but beautiful nonetheless.

I've spent my entire working life, with a few small detours, working in and for the Indigenous community; the friendship center, a women's center, for elected Councils, in government securing funding, etc. But all I ever wanted to be was a writer. It's not really surprising considering my Mere raised me with stories that went all the way back in our family lineage to the present. On the other hand, some of the things I have survived have compelled me to write inclusive of difficult subjects. I had the enormous good fortune of being taught writing and storytelling by the very best- people like Lee Maracle and Maria Campbell. This is where my stories come from, generations of halfbreeds on the Great Lakes over to Manitoba and reaching into the US, and guided and influenced by powerful, generous women who had already done the heavy lifting of blazing the literary trail.

I always preface any interview I give with a statement that I do not speak on behalf of anyone, that I am not an elected leader, that I am just one person from one community. I am a fiction author, not a cultural or political expert, not a spokesperson. I turn down speaking engagements and projects, instead sharing lists of people better positioned to

speak on issues and identity. I am a writer, I have opinions and experiences, I am a community member and that's where I speak from. When I am asked to present by the community on their behalf, I do my best. I try to use any platform I am given to make room for others. Like anyone else, I am not beyond reproach. I am also a person who has enormous anxiety in my daily life (one of those people lay in bed at night thinking about something I might have said 8 years ago and cringing...) so I prefer to build instead of speak.

I am fortunate enough to have a large and brilliant network of Indigenous friends and colleagues that I rely on to guide me when my fictional work veers from my own specific identity and experience. I am indebted to them for their knowledge and friendship. This is who I am. This is where my stories come from. Nothing more and definitely nothing less.

Retrieved from: <https://cheriedimaline.com/>

About the Book

“The Marrow Thieves,” by Cherie Dimaline, is a young adult novel that is set in an apocalyptic dystopian future where Canada has been so damaged by global warming that everyone has been impacted by the consequences. The water level is rising, continents are being fully submerged, and everyone is forced to migrate in order to survive. As a result, the majority of the population has lost the ability to dream, and are now experiencing severe psychological distress, which makes them difficult to govern. The only people who still have the ability to dream are Indigenous people. It is explained that “dreams get caught in the webs woven in [their] bones. That’s where they live, in that marrow there” (Dimaline, 2017, p. 20). Therefore, the Canadian government has deployed “Recruiters” (aka the “marrow thieves”) to find and capture Indigenous people so that they can extract their bone marrow and use it to find a cure or treatment for people who can no longer dream. They believe that this is the only way to help salvage the rest of humanity before everyone else loses their minds, and they descend into further chaos.

The fast-paced story is told from the perspective of a fifteen-year old Indigenous boy named Frenchie, who is on the run from Recruiters, and is separated from his brother, Mitch. On his journey, he meets another diverse group of Indigenous survivors, who temporarily adopt him into their family in order to travel together safely. He soon realizes that these people, particularly members of the younger generation, have a very different connection to their “roots” than he does. Through Frenchie’s experiences, ideas about family, belonging, storytelling, and Indigenous ways of knowing are explored. The author, Cherie Dimaline, is a Canadian Indigenous writer, who is part of the Georgian Bay Métis community in Ontario. This is her first young adult novel, which has won several awards, been the number one national bestseller, and has gained much critical acclaim since its publication in 2017. Through her speculative fiction, the author alludes to many current real-world problems and events that have happened in the course of Canadian history. For example, showing the potentially disastrous effects of the current climate crisis, and the intergenerational trauma inflicted on Indigenous people, particularly by the Residential school system. In an interview, Dimaline talked about how her writing mimics a traditional Indigenous way of storytelling, where each character is given a backstory when introduced, and then situated in the current context (Paikin, 2018). The narrative is mostly written in linear, chronological order, but includes flashbacks where necessary and relevant. It is clear that Dimaline values language and chooses her words carefully, to evoke vivid imagery, and draw clear metaphors.

When examining the text through the lens of representations of teaching and learning, there are several levels of education happening simultaneously. First, there is

Frenchie's journey of learning about his family's "roots," traditions, and history, which is tied to Indigenous ways of storytelling. This helps him construct his own identity, which is then challenged and re-shaped by Miigwans and his teachings. There is a heavy emphasis on Story (with a capital "S") being a sacred event that helps Indigenous youth learn and grow by being bestowed with particular knowledge at specific times in their lives, and having the responsibility of passing on those stories to others when they come of age. Second, there is an interrogation of the way the Canadian government, specifically via Recruiters, who are trying to access knowledge (or a cure for the dreamless) by harvesting it from the bodies of Indigenous people. The fact that these horrific acts and injustices take place in "schools," which are usually positive places of research and discovery, alludes to the corruption around seeking and gaining knowledge at the expense of marginalized groups. Finally, the reader is educated about Indigenous histories, the power of storytelling and language, and how to approach difficult ideas or knowledge, with an open mind and heart, to protect the hopes and dreams of those in future generations. Overall, this is a powerful text that uses the theme of education to help facilitate discourse about history, and the conciliation with Indigenous communities. At its core, this is an inspiring and emotional story about survival, the strength of familial roots, and hope.

Discussion Questions



1. How has climate change and severe weather impacted the landscape Frenchie navigates? How has it affected the main characters' daily lives? What impact has it had on the non-indigenous population?
2. How has climate change impacted you? Do you think the future Dimaline envisions is possible? Why or why not?
3. Around the world, youth have been leading the charge on climate action. In indigenous communities, Elders hold an honored place. Describe how Frenchie's family band is structured so that people of all ages are able to bring their strengths to the group. How do you see others in our community engaging or not engaging with this movement?
4. Discuss the role of story-telling in the novel. How do stories help define the concept of home?
5. Reflect on two characters' coming-to stories. What events have shaped their lives? Where do they find hope?
6. When Rose teaches Frenchie the word 'nishin,' good, he 'turn[s] the word over in [his] throat like a stone; a prayer [he] couldn't add breath to, a world [he] wasn't willing to release' (page 39). What role does language play in culture? How does the loss of language affect a culture and its people? Examine why Frenchie and the others are so hungry for bits of 'the language'.
7. Miig states that a 'man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge' (page 88). Why do you think dreams are so important? What would it be like to live without dreams?
8. Cherie Dimaline stated, "I wanted people to come away saying, 'I would never let that happen,' or, more correctly, 'I would never let that happen again.'" Compare and contrast this novel to real historical events (e.g. residential schools). How do these events relate to each other as well as to the book?
9. Cherie Dimaline speaks to the need for humor and joy in stories about survival. Where do you see joy and laughter in Frenchie's story? What role does it play?

Retrieved from: <https://sppl.org/blogs/post/reading-guide-the-marrow-thieves/>

Author Interview



What kind of reception were you expecting for *The Marrow Thieves* and how does it differ from the reception you got?

I was expecting, (as with) my other stories, they were very well received within the Indigenous community and they were very well received in the academic community. And I sort of thought OK, well, if Indigenous kids read this that's absolutely the best possible outcome.

I certainly never expected the United States to have to have such a large interest in it. I remember being on the phone in the early days with the Kirkus Review; they were doing an interview. And when they were done at the end, the interviewer said, "Do you have any questions for me?" And I said, "I think it's strange you're calling me from California (and that) people in the United States are thinking about this book. It's so Canadian to me and it's so Indigenous. There's a lot of concepts in it, even the terminology around First Nations, it's just not American."

And she said, "Well, you know your book is very dystopian." "Yes." "You know who our president is right now?" I said, "Right." She said, "The end of the world is every day right now." So this is probably why it's happening.

What message do you want readers to take away from *The Marrow Thieves*? Is there a difference between what you want Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers to take away?

We have a suicide epidemic in our communities. I've done a lot of work in the past with Indigenous youth and one of the things I realize is that they didn't look forward, they didn't see themselves in any kind of viable future, and not just surviving but being the heroes and being the answer, then that's it.

I think above all for me the book is really hopeful. Even in this horrible dystopian future, people are being hunted, there's a terrible outcome; there's still so much hope in that group of characters. They fall in love and they develop friendships, and they become family and they sing and they laugh. There's a part early on in the book where Frenchie, the main character, says "We are still kings among men," and he's walking through the forest on threadbare soles and ragged clothes, but he's still got that feeling of great importance, of being extraordinary.

What about non-Indigenous readers?

I really want them first of all to fall in love with the characters and then to walk beside them through hardships, through running away, through being hunted, through the ideal of residential schools, even in telling their back stories and where they'd been...

If these non-Indigenous youth can feel like they have kinship ties to our Indigenous communities, these are our future leaders, so when they're sitting at the negotiating table for the government or developing policies, or deciding whether or not to do business with first nations communities, then maybe they'll feel that this is the right thing to do, to have these conversations, to talk to us. We're in this together and I want them to feel that.

Why does the Young Adult audience in particular interest you?

I think with YA there's no standing on a mountain somewhere and surveying the scene or the landscape below. Everything is immediate, passionate, it's so full of emotion. I couldn't think of a more passionate, energetic narrator than a teenage boy to take you through this because he would just say exactly what he's feeling and he would react to what he's feeling. It's horrifying and it's hopeful, and to get both the horror and the hope and love across I needed that immediate nature of youth.

What is the biggest challenge facing Indigenous writers in Canada today?

I was just one of the first faculty at Humber College to do an editing Indigenous manuscript program. I mean, there are a lot of issues, but I'm going to pick this one.

Indigenous stories are different. We're generally raised in stories. We have traditional stories that hold our teachings. A lot of our culture is held within our stories. And there's different protocols and permissions that come with Indigenous stories. As an Indigenous writer I'm cognizant of when I speak I always say "This is my opinion. I am allowed to speak for my community because I have permission to speak on behalf of my community." But that's my specific community. There are hundreds of communities out there - different world views, different languages, different ceremonies - and I can't be the pan-Indigenous spokesperson.

There is so much conversation about appropriation and there was the whole Joseph Boyden thing and so (publishers and editors said), "Somebody please tell us, how do we get this right?" So we pulled people together with Indigenous editors and writers and we talked about the issues: here what it means to have a community story; you can't

publish a traditional story that somebody outside the community tells you, but here's how you go and get those permissions. Really practical advice, it's about finding ways to work together.

Retrieved from: <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2017/11/06/cherie-dimaline-hopes-and-dreams-in-the-apocalypse.html>

Other Links and Resources

Indigenous Writers in Canada: Interview with Author Cherie Dimaline:

- <https://publishingperspectives.com/2017/11/indigenous-writers-canada-interview-author-cherie-dimaline/>

Q&A: Cherie Dimaline on her award-winning week:

- <https://quillandquire.com/omni/qa-cherie-dimaline-on-her-award-winning-week/>

Sequel Hunting by Stars information:

- <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/full-episode-july-11-2022-1.6215510/after-blockbuster-book-the-marrow-thieves-peer-pressure-led-cherie-dimaline-to-pen-sequel-hunting-by-stars-1.6215513>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/books/hunting-by-stars-1.6090247>

The case of Joseph Boyden controversy:

- <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-5-2017-1.3921340/indigenous-identity-and-the-case-of-joseph-boyden-1.3922327>
- https://thewalrus.ca/why-is-joseph-boydens-indigenous-identity-being-questioned/?qclid=CjwKCAjwv8qkBhAnEiwAkY-ahoBi05crDeYd_iTE_je4EfnaSI4IGF4s_JsciDn9U9szo_nP3x_KLxoCljAQAvD_BwE

Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: