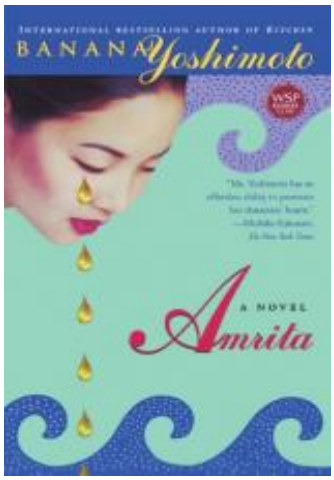
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Amrita

by Banana Yoshimoto



About the Book

After losing her beautiful younger sister, a celebrated actress, to suicide, Sakumi falls down a flight of stairs and loses her memory to a head injury. Struggling to remember whom she loves and what she lost, she embarks on a unique emotional journey, accompanied at times by her dead sister's lover, at others by her clairvoyant kid brother. This is the story of Sakumi's remarkable expedition through grief, dreams, and shadows to a place of transformation and the discovery of a soul.

Discussion Guide

1. Banana Yoshimoto has been hailed as a voice for a global Generation X, and a writer whose appeal is not limited by international boundaries. What seems to you exotic or foreign in Amrita? In what ways do you think *Amrita* is universal?

2. Ghosts, telepathy, visions, and dreams all play an important role in *Amrita*. Through Yoshio, and later through her friendship with Saseko and Kozumi, Sakumi comes to see extrasensory events as a normal part of life. How does Yoshimoto make these extraordinary perceptions seem natural and convincing -- or not?

3. Sakumi's mother once asks Sakumi, "Why don't you just stop and allow your own beautiful light to shine?" What prevents her from doing this?

4. How does Sakumi's grief over Mayu's death and over her own memory loss relate to her realization that there's "a spot in a person's mind that expands what is lost to a size hundreds of times bigger than that which is obtained"?

5. On the trip to Saipan, Sakumi finds a new way of living and being. Discuss her discoveries there and their long-term significance for her.

6. Living on the beach in Saipan, Saseko and Kozumi have opted out of the pressures and aspirations of life in Japan. Why don't Ryuichiro and Sakumi follow in their footsteps? How does the author view the benefits of life in Saipan versus Japan?

7. Saseko tells Sakumi, "I was born for only one reason, and that's why I keep going. I'm here just to be happy." Compare this view to Sakumi's great-grandfather's "checkpoints for life."

8. With her detailed descriptions of daily life, Yoshimoto subtly points out many of the small, everyday things that are valuable supports for living. She identifies hard rock music as an important support for Kozumi, and a favorite novel by Truman Capote as an aid to Ryuichiro. Do Sakumi and her family have any such supports? What habits or preferences support you in your own life, and what ones do you notice in the lives of your friends?

9. Ryuichiro states that "the most inspiring [people] are those who've found a way to balance everyday life along with their amazing talents....eating and sleeping every day, just like you and me." After being disturbed by his emerging psychic abilities, Yoshio starts to achieve this balance. What about Sakumi? How much do you value this balance?

10. Yoshimoto reveals at the end of the novel that the word "amrita" comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "divine nectar." Describe what you think this divine nectar is in the novel.

Author Bio

Banana Yoshimoto is the author of the international bestseller KITCHEN. She has published 11 books in English translation, including GOODBYE TSUGUMI, MOSHI MOSHI, DEAD-END MEMORIES and, most recently, THE PREMONITION. Her work has been translated and published in more than 30 countries. In Italy, she won the Scanno Literary Prize in 1993, the Fendissime Literary Prize in 1996, the Maschera d?Argento Prize in 1999, and the Capri Award in 2011. She lives in Tokyo.

Critical Praise

" Entering Banana Yoshimoto's fictional world is a little like living as an expatriate in Tokyo -- everyday things are disconcertingly different. The exotic lurks around every corner...What sets Yoshimoto apart, though, is her blunt candor, a sense of truth, no matter how odd or awkward, is more important than polish...**Amrita** is difficult to forget. "***-Janice P. Nimura, San Francisco Chronicle***" Yoshimoto's most fully realized work to date...Her firm grasp of her characters, her surefooted prose and her wide-eyed exploration of everything from American pop culture to the Japanese language make this one of the most satisfying books of the summer. "***-Ben Greenman, Time Out New York***"Yoshimoto shouldn't be shy about basking in her celebrity. Her achievements are already legend. "***-Boston Globe***"Banana Yoshimoto is a master storyteller...The sensuality is subtle, masked, and extraordinarily powerful. The language is deceptively simple. "***-Frank Ramirez, Chicago Tribune***

Amrita

by Banana Yoshimoto

Publication Date: August 1, 1998
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Washington Square Press
ISBN-10: 0671532855
ISBN-13: 9780671532857