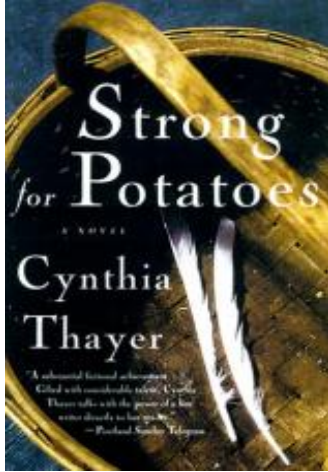


Strong for Potatoes

by Cynthia Thayer



About the Book

Strong for Potatoes is the resonant story of the difficult youth of Blue Willoughby, a remarkable girl growing up in eastern Maine. In a life beset by tragedy, beginning with the death of her twin sister Berry only days after their birth, Blue must discover on her own what strength she needs to survive. Blue's true rock of strength is her grandfather, a full-blooded Passamaquoddy Indian who passes on to Blue the ways of his ancestors, including the art of weaving baskets from ash and sweet grass--knowledge that Blue will need to find a sense of her own true self amid the chaos of her adolescence.

Strong for Potatoes is a rich, evocative literary debut by a gifted writer and teller of the most rewarding kind of story: beautifully crafted, authentic, moving, and ultimately uplifting.

Discussion Guide

1. Is the novel's first-person voice believable? Is it believable once you learn that the author was a grandmother when she wrote the book and is neither a twin nor Native American? What are the advantages and limitations of this first-person narration?
2. What does the Passamaquoddy element add to the novel? What role does Blue's heritage play in her development?
3. What purpose does the narrative frame, the snapshot captions, serve in the book?
4. How much responsibility do Blue's parents have for Blue's troubles? Do you have sympathy for them in their own struggles? Do you consider Blue's personal obstacles "extraordinary"? How do they shape her? What other coming-of-age novels have characters that must face such extreme struggles, and how do these characters compare to Blue?

5. What do baskets and basketweaving symbolize in the novel for Blue, both literally and figuratively?
6. Do you consider the novel political?
7. How does Blue's image of Berry work, both for Blue and for the novel itself? What is the purpose of the character of Berry? How successful is the character of Berry as a 'foil' for Blue?
8. What role does the theme of 'mothering' play in the book? When and where does it appear, and how does it develop over the course of Blue's life?

Author Bio

Cynthia Thayer was born in New York City but moved with her family to Nova Scotia when she was seven years old. After earning a college degree in English and theater, Cynthia became a teacher of both subjects, but for more than twenty years now she has owned and operated a diversified organic farm in Goulds-boro, Maine, with her husband.

When she was 48, she began writing, and of her 'new' career, she says, 'I guess you could say that I am a late bloomer.' Writing has become part of the 'new me.'

Critical Praise

"[**Strong for Potatoes**] celebrates diversity and strong women. "

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