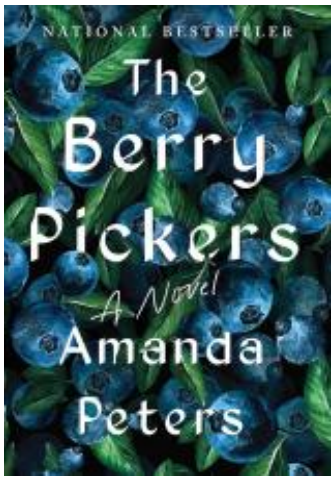
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Berry Pickers

by Amanda Peters



About the Book

A four-year-old Mi?kmaq girl goes missing from the blueberry fields of Maine, sparking a mystery that will haunt the survivors, unravel a family and remain unsolved for nearly 50 years.

July 1962. A Mi?kmaq family from Nova Scotia arrives in Maine to pick blueberries for the summer. Weeks later, four-year-old Ruthie, the family?s youngest child, vanishes. She is last seen by her six-year-old brother, Joe, sitting on a favorite rock at the edge of a berry field. Joe will remain distraught by his sister?s disappearance for years to come.

In Maine, a young girl named Norma grows up as the only child of an affluent family. Her father is emotionally distant, her mother frustratingly overprotective. Norma is often troubled by recurring dreams and visions that seem more like memories than imagination. As she grows older, Norma slowly comes to realize there is something her parents aren?t telling her. Unwilling to abandon her intuition, she will spend decades trying to uncover this family secret.

For readers of THE VANISHING HALF and WOMAN OF LIGHT, this showstopping debut by a vibrant new voice in fiction is a riveting novel about the search for truth, the shadow of trauma, and the persistence of love across time.

Discussion Guide

1. Amanda Peters has said that the opening line, "The day Ruthie went missing, the blackflies seemed to be especially hungry," came to her, and the rest of the book followed. How did this line set the scene? What expectations did it give you for the story, and were those fulfilled?

2. When did you figure out the relationship between the two storylines, and how did it make you feel?

3. Have you ever discovered a family secret? How did it change your relationship with the people around you?

4. Did you prefer Joe's voice, Norma's or the combination? Were there other characters you wished could give their point of view?

5. After Ruthie goes missing, what do you think keeps the remaining family members bound together? What do you think pulls them apart?

6. How does Ruthie's disappearance echo tragedies and atrocities in the broader history of Indigenous peoples? Have you learned more since reading the book?

7. How does Norma's feeling of being stuck between worlds come out in the story? In what ways might other characters feel a sense of duality or out of placeness?

8. Why do you think art-making becomes so important in the story? Are there other themes that jump out at you about making a meaningful life after loss?

9. In the end, why do you think Norma's mother did the very drastic thing she did?

10. You might say this story is ultimately about forgiveness. Are you able to find all the major characters redeemable in some way, or are there any you cannot forgive?

11. If you were going to write a novel based on stories of family history your parents told you, as Amanda Peters has here, where would it be set and what might it be about?

Author Bio

Amanda Peters is a writer of Mi?kmaq and settler ancestry. Her debut novel, THE BERRY PICKERS, was the winner of the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction and the 2023 Barnes & Noble Discover Prize, and was a finalist for the Atwood Gibson Writers? Trust Fiction Prize and the Amazon First Novel Award.

Peters is a graduate of the master of fine arts program at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and has a certificate in creative writing from the University of Toronto. She lives and writes in the Annapolis Valley Nova Scotia where she is an Associate Professor in English and Theatre at Acadia University.

Photo Credit: Audrey Michaud-Peters

The Berry Pickers

by Amanda Peters

Publication Date: October 29, 2024
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 320 pages
Publisher: Catapult
ISBN-10: 1646222385
ISBN-13: 9781646222384