

THE MARROW THIEVES in the Classroom

The Marrow Thieves (2017, DCB/Cormorant Books 231 pages, ISBN 978-1-77086-486-3)

Winner of the Governor General's Literary Award and the Kirkus Prize, a Canada Reads choice, and a finalist for the White Pine Award, *The Marrow Thieves* is a Canadian best-seller.

The Marrow Thieves has many elements of interest to the classroom. It is the recapitulation, set in a future time, of the results of the European colonization of Canada and the hundred-year history of the residential school system.

Setting

The Marrow Thieves is set in the province of Ontario – but a part of Northern Ontario that is often overlooked in literature and most forms of attention. Frenchie and his friends have left behind the cities of the south, which no longer carry the names “Toronto” or “London” or “Ottawa”. They are headed for Espanola, which has kept its name. The novel is set in the not-too-distant future, when the polar ice caps have melted and coastal metropolises of North America have been destroyed by rising sea levels. The populations of these cities have moved into the centre of the continent and they've moved up, disrupting the previous residents of the cities and towns.

The Plot

Humanity has nearly destroyed its world through global warming, but now an even greater evil lurks. The Indigenous people of North America are being hunted and harvested for their bone marrow, which carries the key to recovering something the rest of the population has lost: the ability to dream. In this dark world, Frenchie and his companions struggle to survive as they make their way up north to the old lands. For now, survival means staying hidden - but what they don't know is that one of them holds the secret to defeating the marrow thieves.

About CHERIE DIMALINE

Cherie Dimaline is a Métis author and editor whose award-winning fiction has been published and anthologized internationally. Her first book, *Red Rooms*, was published in 2007, and her novel *The Girl Who Grew a Galaxy* was released in 2013. In 2014, she was named the Emerging Artist of the Year at the Ontario Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts, and became the first Aboriginal Writer in Residence for the Toronto Public Library. Her book *A Gentle Habit* was published in August 2016.

Curriculum

Grade 9, 10, 11, 12 Native Studies (Expressing Aboriginal Cultures, Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, English: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Issues of Indigenous Peoples in a Global Context)

Grade 10, 11, 12 Canadian and World Studies (Canadian History Since WW1, Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group, Canada: History, Identity and Culture, World History since the 15th Century, The Environment and Resource Management)

Grade 9, 10, 11, 12 English (Compulsory English 9-12, Canadian Literature, Studies in Literature)

Grade 11 Science (Environmental Science)

Getting Started

1. Discuss Indigenous history within North America. (e.g. colonisation, residential schools, land claims/displacement)
2. Define genocide and discuss genocides that have taken place globally. (e.g. The Holocaust, The Rwandan Genocide, Residential Schools, The American Indian Wars, etc.)
3. Discuss climate change and its impacts on the land.

Chapter-Specific Questions

1. What is the significance of “north”/going north? (Chapter 1: Frenchie’s Coming-To Story)
2. The government has reopened the residential schools to house the Indigenous people that they steal. Does this reflect something that could happen in today’s society? What measures could be taken to stop this from happening? (Chapter 1: Frenchie’s Coming-To Story)
3. Discuss Miig’s brief history of North America. What message is he trying to convey to the group? (Chapter 3: Story: Part One)
4. Does RiRi deserve to “know her own history” or is Miig right to want to keep “Story” from her until she is older? (Chapter 3: Story: Part One)
5. What is the significance of Minerva teaching the group “language”? Why is Frenchie so upset that Rose is learning it before he is? (Chapter 4: Magic Words)
6. Frenchie has a nightmare about his brother being taken away. Which is worse, having nightmares or not being able to dream at all? Explain. (Chapter 4: Magic Words)
7. The group is given the chance to have their own rooms when they come across the hotel, but instead, they all end up sleeping in Frenchie’s room. What could have prompted this? (Chapter 7: The Four Winds)
8. Why might Indigenous peoples refuse to let others into their ceremony? How is this reflective of today’s society? (Chapter 9: Story Part 2)
9. How has RiRi changed since hearing Story? (Chapter 10: Back into the Woods)
10. Is Isaac being naïve about the strangers or is it that he is unwilling to give up on humanity? Is there a difference? (Chapter 11: Miigwan’s Coming-To Story)
11. Is Miig right? Are there times when we should keep information to ourselves in order to protect others? (Chapter 12: Finding Direction)
12. Lincoln says the cities are to blame for peoples’ bad behaviour. What does he mean by this? Is it a valid reason for poor behaviour? (Chapter 14: The Other Indians)
13. Discuss French’s reaction to losing RiRi. How would you have reacted? (Chapter 15: The Way It All Changed)

Chapter-Specific Questions (cont'd)

14. Why does Minerva sacrifice herself? (Chapter 17: Rogarou Comes Hunting)
15. Name three reasons why Frenchie would want to rescue Minerva. (Chapter 17: Rogarou Comes Hunting)
16. What is the significance of finding water? (Chapter 18: On the Road)
17. What “key” does Minerva have? (Chapter 21: Loss)
18. How has Frenchie changed since the beginning of the novel? (Chapter 21: Loss)
19. In the midst of all that is happening to these people, why would they have social night? What is the significance of social night? (Chapter 22: The Circle)
20. Why might Frenchie be lashing out at Rose? (Chapter 23: Word Arrives in Black)
21. What made Frenchie decide to go after Rose and leave his dad behind?(Chapter 25: Kiiwen)
22. Why is it important that they find, not simply an Elder, but someone who can speak the language? (Chapter 26: Locks Mean Nothing to Ghosts)
23. How did French know that it was Isaac? (Chapter 26: Locks Mean Nothing to Ghosts)

General Discussion and Essay Questions

1. Story-telling is a big part of Indigenous culture. Discuss the role of story-telling in the novel.
2. Choose two coming-to stories, compare and contrast them. What has brought these characters to the group? What motivates them to keep moving?
3. “And with the Council’s man watching, the campers made their hands into shallow cups and pulled the air over their heads and faces, making prayers out of ashes and smoke. Real old-timey” (page 174). This is not the first time French used the phrase “old-timey” to describe something. He seems to cling to the notion of “old-timey”. Why do you think this is?
4. Minerva teaches the “Homesteaders” a few words of “the language” and after she dies, the group is on the lookout for someone who knows “the language.” What role does language play in culture? How does the loss

General Discussion and Essay Questions (cont'd)

of language affect a culture and its people? Discuss the importance of language.

5. It can be said that history is cyclical in nature. Compare and contrast this novel to real historical events. How do these events relate to each other as well as to the book? (Think colonisation, residential schools, the Holocaust, etc.)
6. “They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge” (page 88). The whole reason that the world has been hunting the Indigenous peoples is to help themselves to dream again. Clearly, dreaming has an impact on the human psyche and how people choose to act. Discuss this excerpt.
7. The novel is set in a time where climate change has destroyed our fresh water supply and killed or displaced millions of people along the coast. As a result of the physical devastation, part of the population is unable to dream and they are targeting those who can still dream as a solution. Is this something that could happen in the future? Why or why not?
8. Choose one character and discuss how they have changed throughout the narrative.
9. Discuss the meaning of family in this novel. Compare and contrast Frenchie’s relationships with his dad and with Miigwans.

Additional Information

- Rights sold: English Canada, Cormorant Books; French world, Les Éditions du Boréal;
- Winner of the 2017 Governor General’s Literary Award, Literature for Young Readers — Text;
- Winner of the 2017 Kirkus Prize;
- Named the children’s book of the year 2017 by Quill & Quire;
- Shortlist, White Pine Award, Ontario Library Association

* Page numbers are in reference to the First Edition, ISBN 978-1-77086-486-3, published in 2017.