
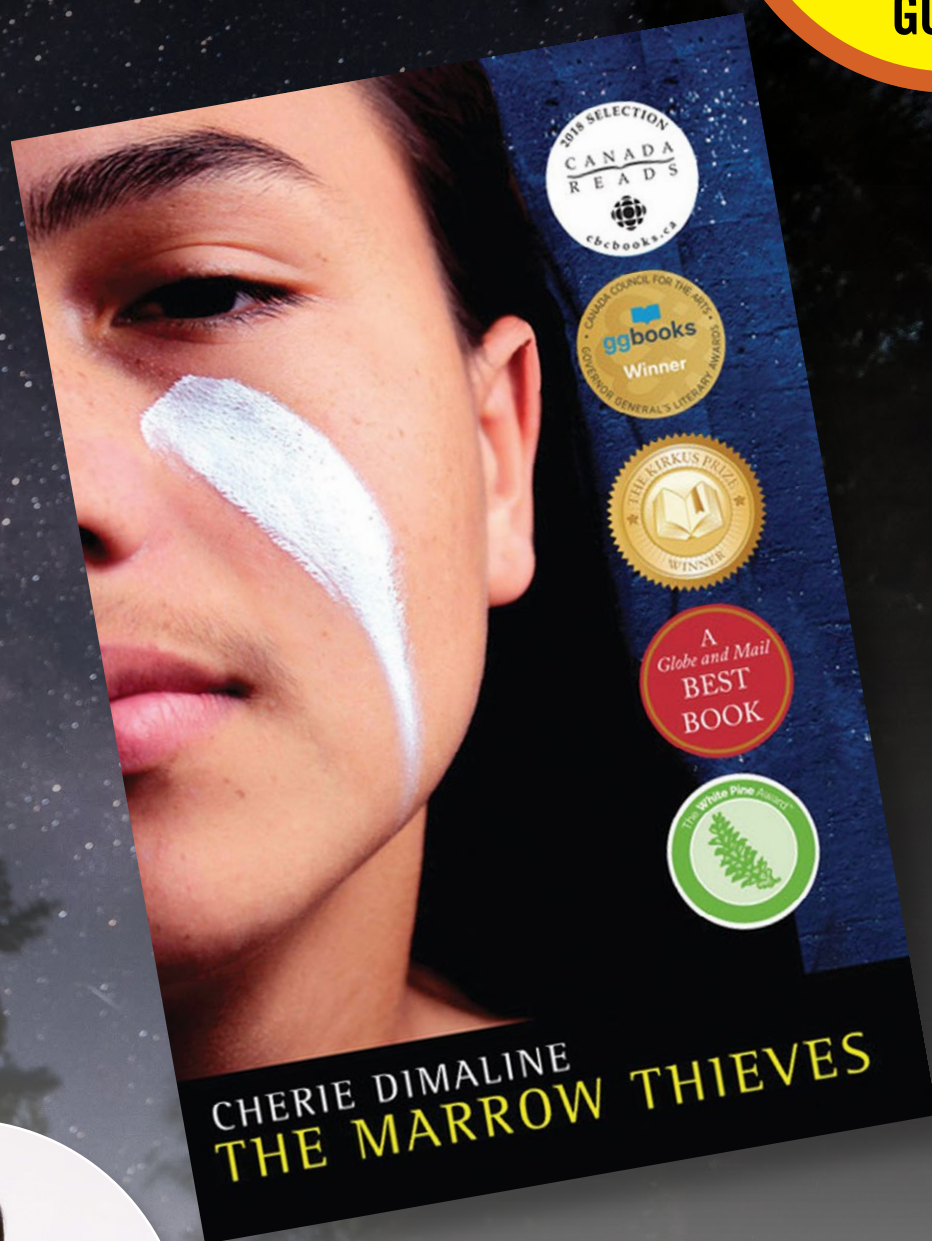


SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019 DISCUSSION GUIDE

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 
BOOK CLUB
DISCUSSION
GUIDE



THE MARROW THIEVES

BY **CHERIE DIMALINE**

RECOMMENDED BY **LORINA MAPA**

WELCOME

Amnesty Book Club members

Welcome back to the Amnesty International Book Club! We are pleased to announce our September/October 2019 title which will be the last book recommended by an author in 2019 is *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline. This award winning novel has been recommended by our guest reader Lorina Mapa, with whom you will explore the book and read beyond it to draw our attention to some pressing world problems such as violation of human rights of the Indigenous peoples in North America and global warming and climate change effects.

In this guide, you will find Mapa's reflection on the book, as well as discussion questions, an Amnesty Background section, and an action you can take to join the people of the Grassy Narrows First Nation in their struggle for justice.

An Indigenous vision of a post-apocalyptic future informed by the injustices of the past and present

Humanity has nearly destroyed its world through global warming, but now an even greater evil lurks. The Indigenous peoples 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.

According to a Sunburst Award Society Jury, *The Marrow Thieves* brilliantly connects the legacy of residential schools to a dystopian post-climate-change future

where only Indigenous persons are able to dream. Dimaline's novel reminds us of the power of storytelling and the importance of community, reinforced for the disenfranchised children by the wisdom of the heroic father-figure Miigwans. The writing is painful yet beautiful, bleak but ultimately hopeful. In this era of renewed dialogue around reconciliation, Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* is a work of speculative fiction that resonates and stays with the reader long past the last page.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or comments you may have. Just send us an email at bookclub@amnesty.ca.

We, at Amnesty Book Club, believe that this is an important, necessary, and timely read. We are pleased to be able to be part of this conversation with you.

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.

September/October 2019: *The Marrow Thieves*

About this month's author, **Cherie Dimaline**



Cherie Dimaline, a member of the Georgian Bay Métis Community in Ontario, has published four books. 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 Marrow Thieves won the Governor General's Award, the Kirkus Prize for Young Readers, and was a selection for CBC's 2018 Canada Reads. It was also named a Book of Year by National Public Radio, the New York Public Library, the Globe and Mail, and Quill & Quire.

the Toronto Public Library. Her book *A Gentle Habit* was published in August 2016.

Her 2017 book, *The Marrow Thieves*, which we are reading now, won the Governor General's Award and the prestigious Kirkus Prize for Young Readers, was a finalist for the White Pine Award, and was a selection for CBC's 2018 Canada Reads. It was also named a Book of Year on numerous lists including the National Public Radio, the School Library Journal, the New York Public Library, the Globe and Mail, Quill & Quire and the CBC, and continues to be a national bestseller and has been translated into several languages. Cherie is currently working on the TV adaptation of *The Marrow Thieves*, launching her next novel, *Empire of Wild*, with Random House in September 2019 (US release through William Morrow 2020), and is working on a new YA novel to be published in 2020.

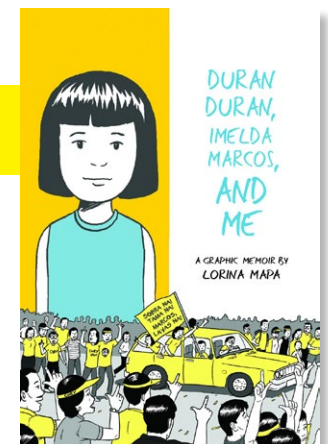


About this month's reader, **Lorina Mapa**



Lorina Mapa was born and raised in Manila and in 1986 at the age of sixteen moved with her family to Washington DC. She graduated from the Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in New Jersey where she met her artist husband Daniel Shelton (creator of the popular comic strip "Ben"). In 2003, her father's sudden death by car accident sparked a series of childhood memories which she wrote down and illustrated as a way of dealing with his passing. These stories became *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos and Me*, a graphic memoir about growing up in the Philippines in the 1980s. Weaving the past with the present, it explores and entertains with themes on religion, pop

culture, adolescence, social class and politics, including Mapa's experiences of the 1986 People Power Revolution which made headlines around the world. *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos and Me* ("touching and joyous" — *Publisher's Weekly*; "the emotion shines through on every page" — Booklist) has been featured on the CBC, Conde Nast Traveller and nominated by the American Library Association as a Great Graphic Novel for Teens. Lorina is a Best Writer nominee for the Joe Schuster Awards and was listed on the CBC International Women's Day List of Writers to Watch. She lives with her husband and four children in Hudson, Quebec.



Lorina Mapa's Reflection on *The Marrow Thieves*

T*he Marrow Thieves*” by Métis writer Cherie Dimaline takes place in a post-apocalyptic, not-too distant future where the effects of global warming are wreaking havoc around the world. People have lost the ability to dream and are dying as a result, save for those from Indigenous Nations. Recruiters sent by the government are hunting them down in order to extract and harvest their unique bone marrow, which will allow the rest of the country to dream as well. It is a survival story told from the point of view of a teenage boy and his companions who are attempting to flee to the northern lands and reunite with other Indigenous peoples.

Everything else has been brutally taken away from them but what can never be taken away are their stories. This is how they have kept their culture alive.

When I first came across *The Marrow Thieves*, my casual thought was that on the surface, due to its futuristic setting and premise, it looked like an interesting YA dystopian novel, the kind of which has been quite popular in the last ten years or so. But as I read it, I realized it was actually much more than that and my initial response of placing this novel in any one particular genre was putting limits on a work that is so and relevant and important in our world today.

The Marrow Thieves embodies the very essence of Indigenous culture in its narrative; characters tell their stories as a rite of passage, and there is a reverence and importance in the telling, in the spoken word and in their language. Everything else has been brutally taken away from them but what can never be taken away are their stories. This is how they have kept their culture alive.

Although the events in the book are horrific, we can't forget that those events parallel what actually happened to the Indigenous peoples in North America over the centuries and whose repercussions are still being felt to this day. The backdrop of global warming further highlights that this is a culture known for their bonds and ties with and their respect for nature. A world where such things are happening is dysfunctional

and related to the demise of a people who have always lived in harmony with the Earth.

Dimaline's terrific writing is taut, energetic and confident, filled with empathy and poetry. She seamlessly jumps from past to present while bringing in new characters and reveals plot points through their experiences. From Frenchie, the likeable, sensitive fifteen-year old narrator on the cusp of manhood even as he has had to grow up too fast, to tough as nails Wab who has lived through horrors but tells her Story to her new family as a show of trust, to their leader Miig, wise, soft-spoken and selfless. There is also Minerva, an Elder whom everyone takes turn helping and carrying, reminding us of the importance and reverence older generations rightfully have in Indigenous cultures. That there is much more to her than meets the eye feels like a statement. Then there is my personal favourite, Chi-Boy, who is not a main character but whose steadfast nature represents duty, compassion and stoicism, traits that seem scarce in today's world.

Dimaline also writes about a half-white, half-Cree man named Isaac who plays an important role in the book. That he is of his mixed ethnicity and yet is such a pivotal character is a statement of inclusivity. No less

“We all do what we do in order to survive. Right now, they can chase us. And us? We can run. It may not always be this way, and who is to say what we will be capable of.”

important is his relationship to his husband Miig; their devotion to each other is very moving, and a beacon of light in such a dark world.

There are other plot points that recall the past, such as the re-emergence of residential schools in the form of facilities built to forcibly detain captives. Indigenous children being torn from their loved ones and placed in such schools were traumatic events for which Canada has yet to make full redress. In writing about this, Dimaline at once confronts and condemns what was such an assault on her people.

An interesting, thought-provoking moment in the book is Miig's clear-eyed assessment of why people act as they do. *"We all do what we do in order to survive. Right now, they can chase us. And us? We can run. It may not always be this way, and who is to say what*

This is more than a mere cautionary tale. It's their story being retold in a futuristic setting, and the harsh reality is what is to stop something like this from happening again?

we will be capable of." While Indigenous peoples have suffered greatly and are victims of terrible injustices, this acknowledgement of human nature actually puts them on equal terms morally by wondering, would they

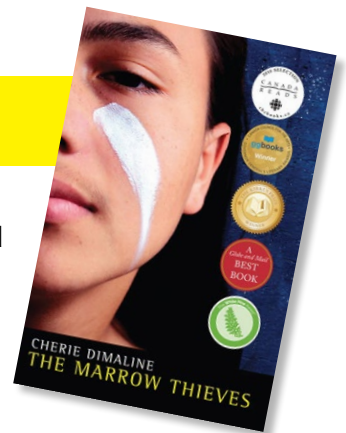
be any different in order to survive? For me, it gives them dignity and agency. It's a short passage but shows Dimaline's ability to be objective. In the same way, she casts other Indigenous characters in traitorous and violent roles. Ultimately it is how people act, and not always the culture they were born into, that matters.

Mostly though it is the stakes of this book that make it so unique. This is more than a mere cautionary tale. Here we have abuses happening to a people that have already been through so much before. It's their story being retold in a futuristic setting, and the harsh reality is what is to stop something like this from happening again? The state of our current world with its inflammatory leaders and politics and our disregard for the environment, feels very fragile indeed, and one feels that this kind of thing could really happen if the powers that be go unchecked.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM GUEST READER LORINA MAPA

1. In *The Marrow Thieves*, we are told of a future where most of the Earth's population has lost the ability to dream. At the same time, the environment continues to drastically change, with food shortages, natural disasters, persistent rains eroding coastlines and the appearance of mutated animals. What do you think the author is trying to say to connect these events?
2. The presence of detainment facilities is mentioned throughout the book. Historically, residential schools have had extremely negative consequences for Indigenous peoples. Did the author succeed in making you understand just how devastating this was to their cultures?
3. Frenchie and the others are headed North to escape from the Recruiters. As you read the book, did you feel there was hope for them there, or did you feel sad given it was all so futile given the circumstances? What do you imagine will happen to the community that has formed? And how does imagining what could happen make you feel?
4. Frenchie's group is betrayed by fellow Indigenous members, with devastating consequences. What do you think of the author's decision to do this?
5. Frenchie finds out his father is alive and has been living with an Indigenous group in Espanola for the past 5 years. Although his dad has lost a leg and is clearly unable to get around, Frenchie at first is angry at the thought that his father did not come back to get his family. What did you think of how quickly Frenchie was able to forgive his father? Would you have been able to do the same?
6. Although he is offered a permanent place in Espanola with his father and other members of his group, the ending sees Frenchie choosing to be on the run with his girlfriend Rose. What do you think of his decision and why do you think the author wanted this for his character?
7. Although *The Marrow Thieves* is a work of speculative fiction, did you find you also learned about the real-life lives of Indigenous peoples and the challenges they face today? What was the most important thing you learned?



BACKGROUND



River Run 2019: Walk with Grassy Narrows for Mercury Justice, Toronto, Canada, 20 June 2019.

“Sometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you’re not the one that’ll be alive to see it.”

—Chi-Boy, in Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves*

About Grassy Narrows

Métis author, Cherie Dimaline’s YA novel, *The Marrow Thieves*, is often categorized as speculative fiction. But the issues and questions that Frenchie and his friends face throughout its pages are far from speculative. Just ask the youth of Grassy Narrows First Nation.

Just like Frenchie and his friends, who work together to survive in a world devastated by environmental destruction and assaults on Indigenous cultures, young people from Grassy Narrows are working to address the impacts of 50 years of mercury poisoning in their community and secure justice after decades of government inaction.

“My generation is really trying to break the cycle,” says Zephyr Maracle, aged 21. “I always re-read the quote ‘be the change you want to see’. There’s always a chance for a change.”

Since Ontario allowed a paper mill company to dump 10 tons of mercury into the community’s waters

in the 1960s and 70s, generations of youth in the Anishinaabe community of Grassy Narrows living with the impacts of mercury poisoning.

Toxic methyl-mercury—still found in the fish and waters of Grassy Narrows—has severely limited these generations’ abilities to engage in traditional practices like fishing. It has also caused chronic and severe physical and mental health problems. The government has done very little to improve what is currently the country’s worst health crisis, but youth remain undaunted.

Many young people from Grassy Narrows have been involved in fighting for mercury justice all their lives. Youth-led walks and protests, like the Toronto “River Run” have focused public pressure on the federal and provincial governments.

For Zephyr, inspiration and motivation comes from thinking about his young cousins, “I just want the chance for them to be happy, healthy kids,” he says.

Today, young land and water defenders like Zephyr are calling on the Canadian government to end the decades of inaction and address the devastating impacts of mercury poisoning in their community. The federal and provincial governments have finally promised to clean up the river and ensure necessary health care. They need to keep their promises.

ACT NOW!



Gathering of Amnesty International Members in support of people of Grassy Narrows — June 2019

Join with the people of Grassy Narrows in demanding that the federal and provincial governments keep their promises. Grassy Narrows can't wait for justice. The federal and provincial governments must commit to

- Fully implement the recommendations of the Grassy Narrows Community Health Assessment, including the need for food security programs that support cultural harvesting traditions, increased support for mothers, emergency and long-term programs for children and youth, and specialized care for community members suffering from mercury poisoning.
- Fully and fairly compensate all Grassy Narrows people for the impacts of the mercury crisis on their health, culture, livelihood, environment and Treaty rights.
- Swiftly implement existing commitments including the construction and operation of a Mercury Survivors Home and Care Centre, complete remediation of English and Wabigoon River system, and comprehensive reform of the Mercury Disability Board.

Fully and fairly compensate all Grassy Narrows people for the impacts of the mercury crisis on their health, culture, livelihood, environment and Treaty rights.

Please send a short, polite letter supporting these calls for justice to:

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister's Office
80 Wellington St Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A2

Premier Doug Ford
Legislative Building
Queens Park, Toronto, ON
M7A 1A1

Grassy Narrows can't wait for justice. The federal and provincial governments must keep their promises.



COMING UP IN NOVEMBER 2019

Readers' Choice

RECOMMENDED BY AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS

The top picks from Amnesty Book Club Members

Stay Tuned: Our selection of 2019 will be announced in the beginning of November after your votes are in. Follow us online and in social media for the updates.

The discussion guide will be sent out November 2019.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at bookclub@amnesty.ca.

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