

THE BERRY PICKERS

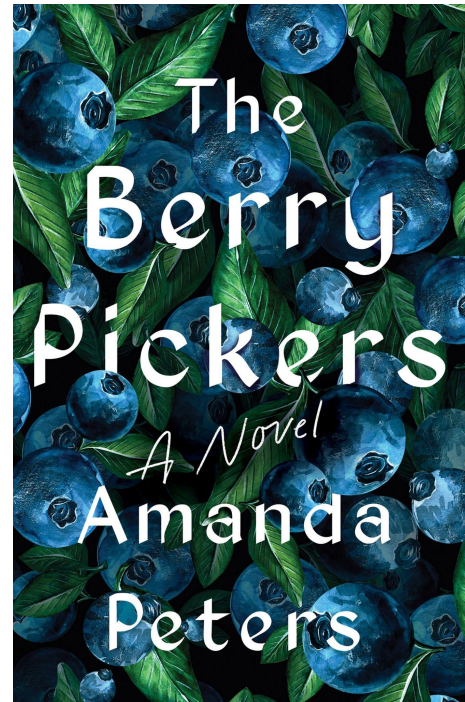
READING GROUP GUIDE

by Amanda Peters

About the Book

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.



About the Author

Amanda Peters is a writer of Mi'kmaq and settler ancestry. Her work has appeared in the *Antigonish Review*, *Grain Magazine*, the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, the *Dalhousie Review* and *Filling Station Magazine*. She is the winner of the 2021 Indigenous Voices Award for Unpublished Prose and a participant in the 2021 Writers' Trust Rising Stars program. A graduate of the Master of Fine Arts Program at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Amanda Peters has a Certificate in Creative Writing from the University of Toronto. She lives in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, with her fur babies, Holly and Pook.

"A stunning debut about love, race, brutality, and the balm of forgiveness." —*People Magazine*, A Best New Book

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Discussion Questions

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?