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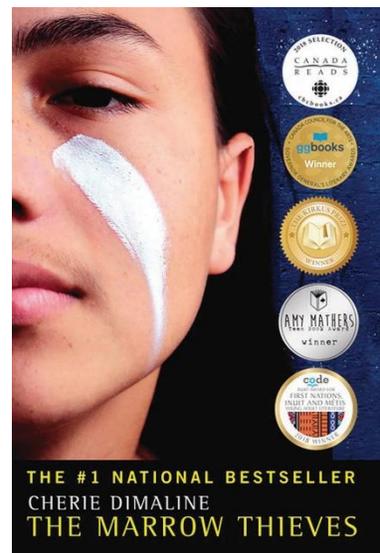
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The Marrow Thieves by Cherie Dimaline Teacher's Guide

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Just when you have nothing left to lose, they come for your dreams.

Frenchie's whole world has fallen apart. Alone, lost, and starving, he struggles to avoid the dangerous Recruiters who have already taken his family and many of his people. The Recruiters will stop at nothing to capture those with Indigenous blood so they can harvest the marrow of their bones. In this Dystopian world of global warming and natural disasters, only the Indigenous Peoples can still dream – and their bone marrow holds the key. As Frenchie struggles to make his way north, searching for his family and dodging certain death, he learns the answers he seeks are closer than he ever imagined.



Themes

Some key themes and “big ideas” in this book include:

- Indigenous Culture (as a way towards survival and healing)
- Racism (primarily against Indigenous Peoples)
- Genocide
- Family
- Global Warming
- Dreams and everything they represent

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.

The 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.

What Kind of Reader Will Love This Book? One who...

- Loves Dystopian stories
- Is interested in Indigenous culture and history
- Is fascinated by survival stories
- Is passionate about global warming and climate change
- Loves adventure and mystery stories
- Is intrigued by scientific experimentation
- Appreciates a strong narrative voice

Pre-Teaching Prep

A must-read for educators before starting to teach this book is this blog post by Jen Beaupre: *Teaching about Indigenous Peoples: Culture and History Within the Classroom* (used with permission) <https://www.jenniferbeaupre.com/teaching-indigenous-culture/>

This novel features some heavy subject matter, so it is important to prepare the readers beforehand. Some possible resources are provided below to assist with this. As always, consider the age of your readers, the knowledge they bring with them, and what you believe they can handle.

Indigenous Culture

Consider inviting local Indigenous Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers into your classroom. This will be both engaging and educational, putting the students in the right frame of mind to begin the novel. You can prepare questions for your guests ahead of time, knowing where the book will lead, or you can brainstorm some questions your students wish to know (with a qualifier that some questions may not be appropriate or able to be answered by your guest). It is also a great idea to simply ask the speaker what they would like to share.

There are many guidelines about how to respectfully welcome Elders and Knowledge Keepers into your classrooms, but here are two for immediate reference:

<https://burnabyschools.ca/indigenouseducation/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/09/Elders-Guide-V3-FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For%20Members/ProfessionalDevelopment/Walking%20Together/PD-WT-16g%20-%20Elder%20Protocol.pdf>

Residential Schools

The National Council for Truth and Reconciliation's "Residential School History" website, found here: <https://nctr.ca/education/teaching-resources/residential-school-history/> and its timeline, found here: <https://nctr.ca/exhibits/residential-school-timeline/>

Residential Schools in Canada Education Guide:

http://education.historicacanada.ca/files/32/ResidentialSchools_English.pdf

Genocide

The History of Genocide: <https://www.history.com/topics/holocaust/what-is-genocide>

Genocides: Our World in Data (charts and graphs as provocations):

<https://ourworldindata.org/genocides>

The United Nations Office on Genocide:

<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

Climate Change and Global Warming

Some great lessons and provocations here: <https://www.climatelearning.ca/inquiry-guide/>

Chapter Questions

Pick and choose the questions that work for *your* students in *your* classroom. Some approach the same idea from different directions. Use as many or as few as you like.

Frenchie's Coming-To Story

1. In this first chapter, the author includes many setting details that suggest Frenchie's world is not the one we know today. What are some of these clues to Frenchie's dystopian surroundings?
2. How would you describe Frenchie's world? Explain your ideas.
3. In this first chapter, we meet Frenchie and learn about him and his family. Use jot notes to record what you believe are the most important details we learn.
4. Use the information from the chapter to create a character sketch of Frenchie. Think about both his personality and his physical characteristics. Look at what he says, what he does, and what others say about him.

5. Cherie Dimaline is an expert at combining words to create powerful images, as she does here:

“My legs screamed from a night and day of ache and stretch marinated in old adrenalin and scabbed with tree bark cuts.” (p. 9)

Look for another sentence or phrase in this chapter that demonstrates great word choices and imagery. Share it with a fellow student or with the whole class.

6. Describe the characters Frenchie meets in this chapter.

The Fire

7. In this chapter we learn more about Frenchie’s traveling companions. Create a chart with details about each of the characters in the group.
8. Frenchie says “Us kids, we longed for the old timey.” (p. 21). Why do you think the “old timey” is so appealing to them? Explain.
9. The word “Story” is capitalized in the book. Why do you suppose that is? What does “Story” represent to the group, and how do you know?

Story: Part 1

10. Discuss the brief history of North America that Miig teaches the group during Story. What are some things that caused Frenchie’s world to change from the world we know now?
11. In your opinion, what message is Miig trying to teach, as he tells Story each night?
12. Why does Frenchie think, “*Please don’t let her be my cousin. Please...*” (p. 31).

Magic Words

13. Frenchie is upset when he hears that Minerva is teaching Rose and her group “language.” Why do you think it matters so much to him? Explain.

Haunted in the Bush

14. What do you think Wab saw in the woods? Explain your prediction with evidence from the text and your own ideas.

A Plague of Madness

15. Miig says, “not every Indian is an Indian,” (p. 55). What do you think he means by that?

The Four Winds

16. Why do you think the group chooses to stay together in one room when they find the Four Winds? Explain.

Wab’s Coming-To Story

17. Why does the author decide to share Wab’s coming-to story at this point in the novel?
18. What does Wab’s coming-to story teach us about the world in the city, and about Wab herself?

Story: Part 2

19. Explain what we learn in this chapter about the circumstances that led to the current reality of the world in the book. Write a paragraph, or create a graphic organizer or diagram, to show the various causes and consequences.

Back into the Woods

20. At the start of this chapter, Frenchie notes that the forest has started to “spring back” from the pollution and overpopulation that caused the current situation. This is reminiscent of the way our world reacted when Covid 19 shut down so much of the world in 2020. Can you make any other connections between the real world of our present-day and the world of the novel? Share your connections with the class.
21. Miig suddenly tells Frenchie the stories of the other members of their “family” in quick, brutal terms. What do you think prompted Miig to do this? Explain.

Miigwans’ Coming-to Story

22. What new things do we learn about Miig in this chapter?

Finding Direction

23. Do you agree with Miig that there are times when it is better to keep information to yourself to protect other people? Explain. [edited from existing guide]

The Potential of Change

24. In this chapter the author chooses to let the reader know that a big plot change is brewing. She writes that “something had to change, and soon. And then one day it did. Forever.” (p. 111). Why do you think she alerted the reader ahead of time in this way?

The Other Indians

25. Do you think Miig was right to lead the group into an encounter with these “other Indians,” especially after hearing that Wab had a bad encounter with one before? Share your thoughts with a partner.
26. What do you predict is going to happen, and why? Use evidence from the text and your own ideas to justify your prediction.

The Way It All Changed

27. Are you surprised by the way Frenchie handled Travis in this chapter? What would you have done?

The Long Stumble

28. As Miig tries to help Frenchie cope with his grief and his actions, Miig finally tells Frenchie the rest of his own story. Why do you think Miig has waited until now?

The Rogarou Comes Hunting

29. What's the significance of this chapter's title?
30. The Recruiters have a specific uniform that is described in this chapter, as well as earlier in the book. Why do you think the author has them dress this way?
31. Why does Frenchie decide he is going after Minerva? Do you think Miig will agree?

On the Road

32. Have you ever had a moment that was so perfect that the whole world seemed more alive because of it? Describe that experience to a classmate. How does yours compare with Frenchie's in this chapter?
33. Why are they so excited to have found clean water?

Found

34. The group makes some important discoveries in this chapter. Which one was most surprising to you? Why?

The Miracle of Minerva

35. How does the author reinforce the idea of the "school" in the book being like the residential schools of our history? Name at least two ways.
36. What is the secret weapon that Minerva uses to save herself and destroy her enemies?
37. Why do the Indigenous spectators who are camping near the "school" smudge themselves with the smoke from the destroyed building?

Loss

38. Frenchie has been maturing as the book has progressed. How does the author make him seem older and more mature in the last few chapters?
39. Frenchie tells Miig at the end of the chapter, "We'll get Minerva. And then we'll shut them down. All of them." (p. 183) Miig responds, "I know you will, Francis. I know you will." Why do you think Miig chooses to say "you" instead of "we" in his reply?

The Circle

40. In your opinion, what is going on with Frenchie in this chapter?

Word Arrives in Black

41. What is the message Frenchie's father is trying to get across to his son as he tells Frenchie the story of how he ran away to the city?

Lost and Found and Lost

42. Explain the significance of this quote in your own words:

"Suddenly the long drone of the horn stopped, and it was shocking, like the absence of ground at the start of a fall. Then, like punctuation, a gunshot poked a hole in the day and all the air ran out." (p. 209)

Kiiwen

43. Why do you think the author picked *this* chapter to have Frenchie explore Miig's pouch?
44. What does the following quote mean?

“We were desperate to craft more keys, to give shape to the kind of Indians who could not be robbed.” (p. 214)

45. If you were in Frenchie's place, would you have made the same choice as he does in this chapter? Explain your thoughts.

Locks Mean Nothing to Ghosts

46. Why is it so important to French that Isaac dreams in Cree?
47. Consider what we know about Miig's husband Isaac from earlier in the book. Why is he the perfect person to arrive at this stage of the novel, to help them with their plans?
48. What does the chapter title mean? Explain.

Discussion Questions and Essay Topics

These topics can be used for the traditional assessment options of discussion and essay, but don't hesitate to offer alternatives. Consider assigning an infographic about a topic introduced in the novel (e.g., global warming, residential schools, etc.), holding a debate, designing a playlist for the “soundtrack” they'd like to see for the “movie” of the book, creating their own visual interpretation of a chapter in the book in the form of a graphic novel or performance, etc. Give students the opportunity to make connections to the world and themselves, as well as to other texts, and to choose their own way of demonstrating them.

- a) Look at the two quotations at the beginning of the novel. Explain how they introduce the various themes in the novel.
- b) In this novel, many things are “lost” and “found.” Discuss some of these losses and findings. How do they influence the characters and the choices they make? Explain.
- c) The author has taken real historical events and reinvented or revived them in the novel. She has also taken contemporary issues in our world and used them to influence the book's setting. In your opinion, is it necessary to tie books to real events and issues in order to make them “good books?” Explain.
- d) Family is a huge theme in this novel. How does the author play with the concept of family, both literally and figuratively?
- e) Consider what you know about global warming. Do you think the world of *The Marrow Thieves* could actually become our reality in the future? Explain.
- f) Storytelling is very important to Indigenous culture. Discuss the role of storytelling in the novel.
- g) Language is also very important to Indigenous culture, which is one reason residential schools were so determined to eliminate these original languages. Today people are working to teach Indigenous languages again. How does the author use the idea of “language” to bring across the themes in the novel?
- h) Compare the “coming-to” stories of two different characters in the novel. Think about their similarities and differences. Consider what brought each to the group, and what motivates them to keep moving.

- i) Which is worse? Having nightmares, or not being able to dream at all?
- j) Read the picture book *We Dream Medicine Dreams* by Lisa Boivin (Portage and Main Press, 2021). Discuss how the idea of dreams are used in both the picture book and the novel.

Other Culminating Activities

Plan to Survive

You are left alone in the world of *The Marrow Thieves* as yourself. You need to improve your knowledge if you have any hope of surviving alone, so you break into an abandoned library. What do you research? What do you learn? How can you best share the information with others?

Create a user-friendly survival guide with the information you learn.

Share Your Story

Imagine you are living in Frenchie's time. We know his story and the Story of his people...but what is *your* story? Is it a coming-to tale, or are you still alone? Are you in what remains of a city, or are you in the wilderness? Imagine what your story might be. How would you share it with others?

Write and share your story in a way that makes sense for you.

What Will You Leave Behind?

We know some of the events that led to the world of *The Marrow Thieves*, thanks to Miig sharing Story. Imagine you are alive when the natural disasters and wars are actually happening. Things are getting worse, and every day you fear will be your last. What do you leave for those who will come after you? Will it be a journal about your last days? A song or a poem that brings to life your reality? Perhaps a work of art that speaks to your inner emotions – your hopes and dreams?

Create and share what you would leave behind.

Some Interviews with the Author

<https://www.cbc.ca/books/why-cherie-dimaline-calls-on-her-indigenous-heritage-as-a-bestselling-storyteller-and-writer-1.5604533>

<https://publishingperspectives.com/2017/11/indigenous-writers-canada-interview-author-cherie-dimaline/>

Awards and Recognition for *The Marrow Thieves* (reprinted from the author's website, found at <https://cheriedimaline.com/>)

TIME Magazine's 100 Best YA Books of All Time

UPPER GRAND READS selected book, 2019

WINNER, 2018 Burt Award for First Nations, Metis and Inuit Literature

WINNER, 2018 Amy Mathers Teen Book Award

FINALIST 2018 White Pine Award, Ontario Forest of Reading

FINALIST 2018 Canada Reads

BOOK OF THE CITY, London, ON, 2018

WINNER, 2017 Kirkus Prize for Young Readers

WINNER, 2017 Governor General's Literary Award for Young People's Literature

HONOR BOOK, American Indian Library Association, 2017

The Marrow Thieves on the following Best Books of 2017 Lists: *Globe & Mail*, New York Public Library, *School Library Journal*, American Indians in Children's Literature, *Quill & Quire*, National Public Radio, Penn State Graduate School, 49th Shelf, CBC Books, *Kirkus Reviews*, Young Adult Library Services Association



Credit: Robin Sutherland

Related Weblinks and Resources for Further Learning

<https://cheriedimaline.com/>

https://media.curio.ca/filer_public/93/9b/939be401-60c9-4cd7-a731-21fb9e9b5ed7/cr18bgmarrow.pdf

<https://www.cbc.ca/books/6-books-that-inspired-the-marrow-thieves-novelist-cherie-dimaline-1.4553562>

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