

Closer by Sea

Perry Chafe

Reading Group Guide

This reading group guide for *Closer by Sea* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing the conversations sparked by this book. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

Introduction

On a small, isolated island off the coast of Newfoundland in the nineties, a local girl goes missing. Twelve-year-old Pierce, who lost his father just one year prior, suspects a stranger to the island is involved in her disappearance. He and his friends are determined to find out more about the mysterious man, who is not what he seems. Part coming-of-age story, part literary mystery, and part suspense thriller, *Closer by Sea* is a page-turning and poignant novel about family, friendship, and community; about death, grief, and renewal; about the survival of an industry, a people, and a way of life.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. The novel is set on Perigo Island, a small island off the coast of Newfoundland. How does the landscape and the surrounding Atlantic Ocean act not only as a setting and backdrop, but almost as characters in the novel? How does place and environment shape the community and the kids? How does it reflect their history and legacy?
2. Twelve-year-old Pierce is deeply marked by the loss of his father. How has his father shaped his character? What lessons does he recall his father imparting upon him?
3. Pierce has spoken to Anna only three times, but she left an indelible mark on him. Why does Pierce feel so close to Anna?



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4. Pierce, Bennie, and Thomas's friendship is one that is built on adventure, jocular rivalry, and close bonds. How does it strengthen when confronted by Ross and the Arseholes? How does it change with Emily becoming a part of the group?

5. What is the significance of the boat in the backyard? Why is it so important to Pierce to repair it when he is so afraid of the ocean?

6. What does the iceberg symbolize in the novel?

7. What kinds of lessons and values does Pierce's mother impart on him? How does she play a role in easing him out of childhood and into adulthood?

8. How does the collapse of the cod fish industry affect the community? In addition to the economic threat, does it also threaten other aspects of people's lives?

9. Pierce, Bennie, Thomas, and Emily are children who are in some ways standing at the threshold of the adulthood. In what ways do we see glimpses of their future selves? In what ways are their talents and strengths employed in the story?

10. Why does Solomon take the time to teach the children about ocean life? How does his message echo Pierce's father's talks with his son?

11. In many ways, the novel is a love song to a time, a place, and a way of life. What aspects of 1991 Perigo Island appealed to you? What aspects of the cod fishery appeal to you?

12. The novel is also about childhood friendship. How do these formative relationships affect not only one's childhood, but also carry reverberations into adulthood?

