

**YA Café Podcast**  
**Episode 54: *The Marrow Thieves***  
**2 May 2019**

Danielle Hall: 00:00 Welcome to the YA Café where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.

Amanda Thrasher: 00:21 Welcome y'all. As always, our first segment will be spoiler-free, and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher.

Danielle Hall: 00:28 And I'm Danielle Hall, an eighth and ninth grade English teacher, and I blog at [teachnouvelle.com](http://teachnouvelle.com).

Amanda Thrasher: 00:34 In a world wrecked by global warming, most people have lost the ability to dream. The state believes the answer to this loss is inside the bones of indigenous people, and they try desperately to steal it. This is the world where Frenchie and his friends are on the run. They grow as their own family, and try to stay away from the schools the government has created for their people. And although their government envies and despises them, they work to build a life together. They will stand with, love, and guard each other no matter the dangers.

Danielle Hall: 01:00 *The Marrow Thieves* was recommended to us by listener Carly, who teaches in Ontario, Canada. Let's listen to what Carly has to say.

Carly: 01:11 Hi, I'm Carly. I'm a teacher in Ontario, Canada, and I would highly recommend *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline. This book was introduced to me by a colleague and I fell in love with it right away. First of all, I love the way that it is written. The descriptions are so beautiful, and I think that for a YA novel, Cherie really did an excellent job at making a really good solid piece of literature. The characters are easy to relate to in the way that you feel happy for them, and you feel sympathy for them, and you just really feel like you are with them on this journey the whole time.

Carly: 01:53 I also think that it's a really great book for the classroom because it can be used as a jumping off point, and there are so many different topics that you can look at and cover in connection to *The Marrow Thieves*. You can connect to science and look at climate change, you can look at indigenous history, and culture with connection to languages and residential schools in Canada. It's good for current events and looking at Truth and Reconciliation. There are just so many ways that you can branch out with this novel.

Carly: 02:30 I think it is a great read, everyone should look into it, and I hope that you pick it up and enjoy it!

Amanda Thrasher: 02:37 Thank you so much for this recommendation, this is a really great book. I'm not sure it would have popped up on our radar otherwise.

Danielle Hall: 02:42 I don't know if it's like, we just don't know what's getting published in Canada-

Amanda Thrasher: 02:46 It's a whole other world up there!

Danielle Hall: 02:48 They don't even speak the same language! \*laughter\* No, but seriously, thank you so much for the recommendation, Carly. I agree with Carly. I really liked this book. I thought the world building was rich, and the characters were really relatable. What did you think, Amanda?

Amanda Thrasher: 03:03 I absolutely agree. I think that the way that she built these characters and this community was really incredible. You felt their connections, you felt how much they loved each other, and had really built this family on the road, and I just thought that it was really well done, and I felt very connected to their little community.

Danielle Hall: 03:22 Yeah. Our characters are on the run, pretty much the whole time. There's a lot of camping, but not like the Harry Potter kind of camping, right?

Amanda Thrasher: 03:34 Yeah, they joke that 'they're real bush Indians now', that they are out making their own camps as they go, they're finding abandoned buildings and sleeping in them.

Danielle Hall: 03:43 They're tracking, and one of the things I really liked about this was Frenchie's happiness when he feels like he's doing something quote unquote 'old-timey.' He really connects when Miigwans is teaching the boys how to hunt, Frenchie's like, "Yeah! We're doing something old-timey! We're like real Indians now!" That's kind of his sentiment.

Danielle Hall: 04:05 There's this moment where he's up in the tree kind of looking down, and this feeling of old-timey-ness descends upon him, and he feels like he's a scout, and he just connects to something that he felt was previously lost to him. I feel like that's kind of a huge strength of this novel, is reclaiming what has been stolen from a culture.

Amanda Thrasher: 04:33 Yeah, I think that's very clearly the through line. They're working to reconnect with the traditions and language, and in this story, the factories/concentration/death camps, whatever you call it, they are called "schools" because of this history of residential schools in Canada, and how those schools were used as a tool of genocide to erase language and erase their traditions, and all these kinds of things. So that connection to history through not only the things that they do, but also through Minerva who is the oldest member of their group, and is clearly their group elder, it really shows that for this group, and for Frenchie, a lot of his strength comes from an ability to connect to these traditions and this past, and he feels it especially in the little bits and pieces of language that he's able to pick up.

Danielle Hall: 05:23 Yeah, I really enjoyed this connection to language. At first, Frenchie, who is part of the hunting group, he's like, "Oh, at least I don't have to stay and cook meals, that's so ridiculous." But then, what he discovers is that the people who are working with Minerva, who is leading the cooking of meals, and homesteading, are also learning the Language. Capital L, right?

Danielle Hall: 05:47 And Frenchie's like, "I want to learn the language!" And it just becomes this drive for him, and he describes at one point like, taking a word of the Language, and putting it in his pocket for later.

Amanda Thrasher: 05:59 Yeah.

Danielle Hall: 06:00 And I thought that was really beautiful. And you mentioned that one of the through lines was this connection to culture and things that have been stolen. I would say another major through line was like, if anyone is in denial of the residential school system being something of the past, which, it is factual that this happened, this book makes it clear (through a dystopian lens), but still clear that this could happen again. Humanity hasn't grown past this thing. So this book is like a warning - "Do not let this happen."

Danielle Hall: 06:40 I feel like I'm not articulating this point very well, but-

Amanda Thrasher: 06:43 I'm not sure I agree with you? I think that obviously that's possible and present in any kind of book with this sort of atrocity. I don't think that this book is primarily meant to be a warning. This book feels more like it's an echo of trauma that is still inflicted on indigenous communities because of these schools that have happened. It feels like it's using the new schools as a manifestation of the trauma that has carried indigenous communities into the present.

Amanda Thrasher: 07:12 I want to mention one thing that I really appreciated about this book and the way it was written... Like Carly said, it's really beautifully written, especially with the relationships and the tenderness, and the moments between characters, I thought was really nicely done. And one thing I really appreciated was the way that the characters' trauma that they brought into their family was addressed. Especially with all of the sexual violence that some people had gone through before finding this family, I felt like it was really well done to the point where it's like a part of their reality and part of their story, but not the defining thing, or used as an aside. Do you know what I'm saying? It felt much richer than the old 'rape as a backstory' trope, but without being like, the one thing about each of these characters.

Danielle Hall: 08:01 Right. These characters definitely felt multidimensional. They weren't like, stuck in their trauma, but all of their actions were informed by it, so that's like real people, you know? It's not like a two-dimensional comic book character that's like stuck in the memory of his parents being murdered outside the theater.

Amanda Thrasher: 08:21 I mean, I feel like you're making a dig at Batman here, and like, Batman goes into it, Dani! \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 08:27 And with that, friends, we'll take our first break. When we come back, we'll share about Things We Like a Latte, then we'll return to our discussion of The Marrow Thieves, and dig a little deeper.

Danielle Hall: 08:35 Hey friends! We need your support to keep making this podcast happen. One easy way to show your love is to order our book choices through our affiliate links. Up next, we'll be discussing Elizabeth Acevedo's book, *With the Fire on High*, and we'll be joined by bookstagrammer Anna, from @never\_without\_a\_book. Order this book through the link in our show notes, and help us keep bringing you great content. Happy reading!

Amanda Thrasher: 09:19 Welcome back y'all, it's time for Things We Like A Latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?

Danielle Hall: 09:24 Well, Amanda...

Amanda Thrasher: 09:25 Well, Danielle...

Danielle Hall: 09:28 I cannot remember why we were in this YouTube wormhole, but we found a video called Disney Medley in One Take. It has Alan Menken on the piano, and the stars of the Broadway Aladdin, Adam Jacobs and James Monroe Iglehart, and they are just singing clips of several of Alan Menken's songs, and what I really enjoyed about this was watching these dudes sing songs from a songbook, and it's not like they were only singing songs that were dude songs in dude ranges, like they were playing! And I love watching talented people who get paid to do something for a living, play. It's like watching a pick-up game of basketball with like, Micheal Jordan and LeBron James.

Amanda Thrasher: 10:16 \*laughter\* Nice!

Danielle Hall: 10:18 How about you, Amanda? What's your brew of choice?

Amanda Thrasher: 10:21 So I recently recommended Tetris 99, which, I stand by that recommendation, it's a great game. However, I started playing another game, which is sort of the opposite of Tetris 99. In our house, it's gotten the name "feelings Tetris", but it's actually called The Tetris Effect, and it's on PlayStation 4, and to call it a Tetris game is kind of a misnomer because it's very different from a normal, like, 'blocks go down, clear the line, great job, you did the thing'... It feels more like a love letter to the universe written in the language of Tetris. The way that it's all crafted together with the visuals and the music, it just winds up being this really beautiful, relaxing chance to sit and play a game and just unwind from the day, in a way that Tetris 99 is not at all. So if you like Tetris but you're a little intimidated by 99 people who are all trying to kill you, The Tetris Effect is a great option.

Danielle Hall: 11:17 It feels like Journey?

Amanda Thrasher: 11:18 It does, yeah.

Danielle Hall: 11:19 It's kind of snuggly Tetris.

Amanda Thrasher: 11:21 Journey, Abu, these kinds of indie games that are kind of just hugging you a little bit.

Danielle Hall: 11:27 We are going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we will return to our discussion on The Marrow Thieves. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter at @yacafepodcast. We'll be back!

Amanda Thrasher: 11:58 Welcome back y'all, to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on The Marrow Thieves by Cherie Dimaline. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers!

Danielle Hall: 12:07 Spoilers!

Amanda Thrasher: 12:09 Alright, so, we mentioned that we wanted to talk more about Story in this section, right?

Danielle Hall: 12:14 With a capital S.

Amanda Thrasher: 12:15 Story with a capital S. This is how people's backstory is revealed to the group, they come and share their own Story. And who is it who shares - Miigwans? Right?

Danielle Hall: 12:27 Who shares what?

Amanda Thrasher: 12:28 Who shares the big Story, of how we have gotten to this place.

Danielle Hall: 12:34 Oh, yeah, yeah.

Amanda Thrasher: 12:34 And a big conversation at the beginning of the book, is they have a small child with them, doesn't exactly say how old she is, but she's young, and they're trying to figure out at what point do we tell her this whole Story? Like, everything that has actually gotten us to this point?

Danielle Hall: 12:52 Right, so she's kept out, she has to be initiated into Story, and I loved this so much because the way that she eventually gets initiated is like, she didn't go to bed when they told her to, and she overheard this traumatic backstory of sexual violence and Wab's survival of this encounter. And she's there talking about bad guys, and she's like four or five, and they didn't get to choose a gentle story to introduce her in, she's just been plunged into it, and I thought that was so good! Because that's how life is, right? You don't always get to start in the shallow end and make your way in.

Amanda Thrasher: 13:34 Yeah, I really loved how it made her feel like a kid who really just heard something they maybe shouldn't have, because in her next scenes, Frenchie talks about how she has this real dark streak to her imagination. Like she finds these boots, and she's very concerned about the previous owner of these boots and you want to wrap her up and just tell her, "Take the boots! There's boots for you! You need good feet." But that whole character shift of seeing the world in this empathetic, dark way of seeing the possibilities... I thought it was so realistic and so heartbreaking.

Danielle Hall: 14:15 Yeah. And then she dies.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:19 Yeah.

Danielle Hall: 14:20 She is murdered.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:21 That one was rough.

Danielle Hall: 14:22 It was so rough.

Danielle Hall: 14:24 I... Gosh, when she died, she's like their hope, right? They hope that they get to a future where they're not on the run, and she's the one out of the group with the hope to maybe forget these experiences.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:41 Well, and also, she's one of the bookends because they have her as their young, their anchor to the future, and they have Minerva, as their elder and their link to the past, and when both of those things are lost... Sure they can cover more ground and they are a more physically capable group, but they really lose a lot of the essence of what they had built as a community, and I liked how that was not just brushed over, how it was clear that the loss of the two weakest members of their community made their community weaker.

Danielle Hall: 15:12 Right. I completely agree. And I did want to apologize for a thing that I just said, which as I was reflecting back on it, has a lot of cultural bias. I said that Ri-Ri had "the hope of forgetting the things that had happened to her" because she would have been young, and if they can resolve this in a couple years, like she would have the "hope", quote unquote, of forgetting. But in actuality, the whole point of this book, and the point of Story, and the point of having a culture with an oral tradition, is not to forget.

Amanda Thrasher: 15:49 Right.

Danielle Hall: 15:50 So I apologize for imposing my cultural values where they don't belong.

Danielle Hall: 15:58 I did want to talk about something that Carly mentioned which may not be in the lingo here in the United States. But Carly mentioned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada. This is an explanatory comma for American listeners who may not know what this is. But a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an organization at a government level. So in Canada it is the federal government, and oftentimes in the United States, when it occurs, it occurs from the bottom up. And it can be on a number of topics.

Danielle Hall: 16:31 For example, there was a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to give voice to the survivors of Apartheid so they could tell their story. There has been Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Greensboro to help some survivors of a Ku Klux Klan attack tell their story, and now in Canada there is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to help survivors and witnesses of the residential school system tell their story, and basically inform the conversation going forward to move to a place of healing after atrocities of the past. And that's a long to say, but I think it's important to recognize this work that the Canadian government is doing to... Well, like I said, recognize and move forward.

Amanda Thrasher: 17:22 And the US government has not.

- Danielle Hall: 17:24 Right. I tried to emphasize "from the bottom up" meaning like, a group in Greensboro starts a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but as far as the federal government? Very silent on the matter.
- Amanda Thrasher: 17:38 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's really mostly focused on the damage done by these residential schools. So Danielle and I, we were just talking about, you had a different vision for what you thought part of the point of the novel was.
- Danielle Hall: 17:54 Right, okay. Miigwans, who is not the elder of the group, but sort of the leader of the group, and the father figure, he lost his husband Isaac before they went on the road, and there's this scene where Miigwans is like, "We need to leave," and Isaac is like, "No, no, we're just going to talk it out, it'll be fine." And Miigwans said that Isaac didn't have grandparents who told residential school stories like campfire tales to scare you into acting right. And basically that Isaac was naïve in his belief that humans wouldn't do this to each other anymore, and didn't fully understand the atrocities of the past.
- Danielle Hall: 18:36 And so I thought that part of the point of this book, even though it's a dystopian-esque future, is that it wouldn't take that much to get us back to a point of oppression on this level, if we don't take serious steps toward truth and reconciliation, and if we don't recognize that it wasn't some distant past that this happened.
- Amanda Thrasher: 19:02 So I don't think you're totally wrong.
- Danielle Hall: 19:03 Thanks!
- Amanda Thrasher: 19:04 I know, I'm so generous. I think that's definitely a part of it, as is with any dystopian look at the terrible things that humans can do to each other. But I think that the book is significantly more focused on the echoes of these past residential schools. And I think that everything that we look at in this book is an extended metaphor for the way that these residential schools have caused continued trauma throughout indigenous communities. Especially, you look at the very specific way that they can defeat the...
- Danielle Hall: 19:37 The white people?

Amanda Thrasher: 19:40 No no no, not just white people, but you see the very specific way that they can defeat this whole state industry robbing them of their dreams and their lives is through the history of their Language.

Amanda Thrasher: 19:52 That feels like, that's not an accident. One of the key pieces of genocide, as far as in US schools, and I assume in the Canadian residential schools, was the destruction of the language to try to disconnect people from their history and their culture. So I took it as being just an extended examination of the way that these schools continued to harm indigenous communities, and how indigenous communities can heal from the trauma of these schools.

Amanda Thrasher: 20:21 I'm not saying you're wrong, because obviously any dystopian look at a world is saying "humans are still garbage! How can we not be garbage?" And moving forward from there.

Danielle Hall: 20:32 Right. I think that one of the things that Cherie Dimaline has said was a purpose of her book was to provide hope going forward and so I think that that's important to talk about. So this book kind of happens in the middle of things, right? These characters have already suffered trauma and have already started running. And then it ends before the Industry is completely dismantled, but they have the key, which is their Language, like you said. And the fact that they dream in the Language.

Danielle Hall: 21:05 And going forward, we have the hope they can dismantle this Industry, and I think that they have hope in the things that these children are learning. They're getting back to things that are important to this culture, and there was this really beautiful moment in which they had been eating out of aluminum cans and things like that, and Frenchie noticed that Minerva was always collecting the cans, and he didn't know why. And then at the end, after she died, it was clear that she had been making a jingle dress, which is a ceremonial dress, and I love that she made this very important cultural artifact out of their trash.

Amanda Thrasher: 21:53 Knowing that she wouldn't be able to wear it, right? Because they're trying to stay silent on the run. So just knowing that she couldn't wear it, but for sometime in the future, yeah, I thought that was really beautiful.

Danielle Hall: 22:02 Yeah. She had a strong belief in this future time.

Amanda Thrasher: 22:05 I also, in thinking about the ending of the book, so the ending has a lot of contrivances of like, "We found your dad, and he's still alive! And then we found Isaac, and he's still alive!" And I was

like, normally this would annoy me, but I'm like, "Nope, I'm here for it." There was enough sadness and difficulty in this book, and like pain and loss, and if the queer one true love story gets a happy ending, I'm never going to be mad at that. \*laughter\* Even if it is a little coincident-y.

Danielle Hall: 22:32 Yeah, I really liked that, too. And I thought it was very funny when Carly first reached out to us on Instagram, she was like, "You should read this story! It's fabulous, the characters are fabulous, everything is great, and you'll like it, there's a queer person!"

Amanda Thrasher: 22:49 Just the one, though. \*laughter\* I mean, it is important that we're continuing our reputation of being the gay podcast.

Danielle Hall: 22:56 You're the only person who thinks we have that reputation!

Amanda Thrasher: 22:58 No, we do. \*laughter\* Name the last book we read without a gay character in it!

Danielle Hall: 23:03 I try not to read books without gay characters in it.

Amanda Thrasher: 23:06 See, you know why? Because you're on the gay podcast. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 23:09 So I went into it with this recommendation from Carly in my head, and I was like, "Okay, alright, there are at least two queer people. They're here." And then for 75% of the book, you think Isaac is dead. And I'm like, "Carly, I don't think you understand." \*laughter\*

Amanda Thrasher: 23:28 Oh, I still think it would have gotten credit for it.

Danielle Hall: 23:30 For the dead husband?

Amanda Thrasher: 23:32 Yeah.

Danielle Hall: 23:33 Eh.

Amanda Thrasher: 23:33 Why not? Everybody else is dead.

Danielle Hall: 23:35 What? That's not, not true... Yeah. Lots of dead people, yeah.

Danielle Hall: 23:41 So, overall? We enjoyed this book. We believe that it has a strong place in any classroom and classroom library.

Danielle Hall: 23:49 Thank you so much, Carly, for this recommendation.

Amanda Thrasher: 23:52 Yay, Carly!

Danielle Hall: 23:53 Yay, Carly! And if y'all have recommendations for us, you can reach out to us on Instagram or Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you! Don't forget to grab your copy of next week's book, *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo, via the link in our show notes. And if you're enjoying this show, leave us a review on iTunes. Happy reading!