

Discussion Questions

Closer by Sea by Perry Chafe

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?
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 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?

Questions from Simon and Schuster Reading Group Guide