A Piece of the World by Christina Baker Kline

Kline imagines the life story of Christina Olson, the subject of Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World," describing the simple life she led on a remote Maine farm, her complicated relationship with her family, and the illness that incapacitated her.


About the Author: Christina Baker Kline was born in Cambridge, England. She received a BA in English from Yale University, a MA in literature from Cambridge University, and a MFA from the University of Virginia. Her essays and articles have appeared in several periodicals including The San Francisco Chronicle, the Literarian, Coastal Living, More, and Psychology Today. She is the author of several novels including Sweet Water, Desire Lines, The Way Life Should Be, Bird in Hand, Orphan Train, and A Piece of the World. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Christina Olson’s life is limited by her parents, her illness, and the realities of a rural life in the first half of the 20th century. But she does make decisions that affect the course of her life. What are some of the major consequences of Christina’s choices? Which choices did you agree with, and which did you disagree?

2. Consider Christina's relationship with her parents and her relationship with Mamey. What does Mamey offer Christina that her parents do not? What are the limitations of that relationship? How do Christina's brothers have different relationships with both Mamey and their parents?

3. How do the poems of Emily Dickinson engage with the themes of this novel?

4. How might Christina’s life have been different if Walton had actually married her? What do you think their marriage might have been like?

5. What does Christina’s behavior toward her brother reveal about her character?

6. What is it about Andy that compels Christina to share very private world with him? Why does she allow him to paint her, and why does she like being a model more than Al does?

7. What draws Andy toward Christina? How are they similar? How does Betsy’s relationship with each influence the relationship with the other?

8. Discuss the ways in which Andrew Wyeth’s iconic painting, Christina's World, interacts with this story. Were you familiar with the painting before you read the novel? How did that familiarity (or lack of familiarity) color your reading of the novel?

9. Which parts of Christina’s life are probably based on biographical fact? What parts do you think the author added? Did your reading of Kline's Author’s Note at the end of the novel change the way you thought about any aspect of the book? What about seeing the painting at the end of the novel?
10. Would you characterize Christina as an unlikable narrator? Why or why not?


12. The majority of historical fiction revolves around important or influential figures – monarchs, cultural beacons or warmongers. Christina, by contrast, lives a “quiet, ordinary life.” How does Kline extract drama and complexity in Christina’s character?

(Questions provided by Reading Group Guides)