

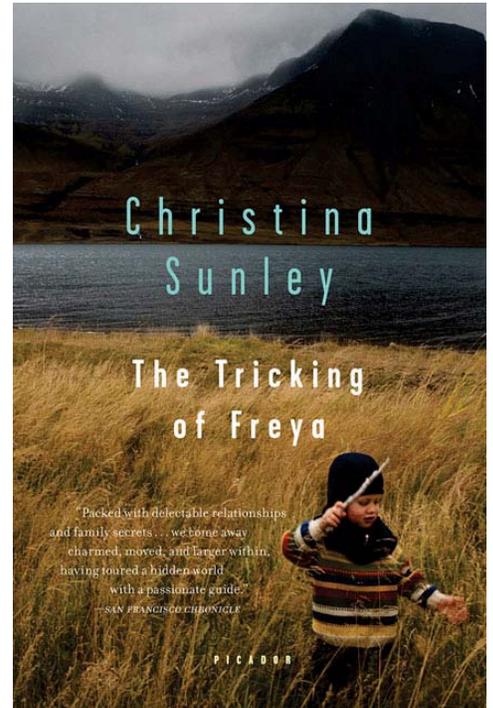
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Tricking of Freya

A Novel

by Christina Sunley

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Tricking of Freya* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Tricking of Freya*.

About the Book

Freya Morris is living in New York, far removed from her family and her past, when she is summoned back to the formative place of her youth, a remote Canadian village called Gimli, where her Icelandic ancestors settled long ago. Her ancient grandmother, a woman who knows all the family stories, now clings to life. In Gimli, Freya picks up the thread of a secret--one that leads her through her history and ultimately back to Iceland. Along the way, we learn the story of her early visits to Gimli, the truth about her exuberant, mercurial aunt, and the full scope of a tragedy that shattered her childhood in an instant.

A vivid, moving story of an immigrant family and the culture of a little-known nation, *The Tricking of Freya* is “astonishingly accomplished . . . a bewitching tale of volcanic emotions, cultural inheritance, family sorrows, mental illness, and life-altering discoveries” (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*).

About the Author

Christina Sunley grew up hearing stories about her Icelandic grandparents and the massive emigration that followed a 19th century volcanic eruption. She has visited Iceland for extended stays to research and write this novel. Her short fiction has appeared in literary journals, and she has taught memoir writing and fiction at universities. She now lives in the San Francisco Bay area.

Discussion Questions

1. This is in many ways a story about an immigrant community and the experience of living far from one’s homeland. How do the Icelandic immigrants at Gimli remain connected to their Icelandic heritage? How do Freya’s ideas about her ancestry evolve throughout the story?
2. Do you think Freya is more like her mother or Birdie? What aspects of each does she inherit?
3. Do you think Anna is right to keep Freya at a distance from Gimli as a girl, and from her Icelandic heritage in general? Do you think she’s better off for having been raised by Anna?
4. What role do myths play for the characters in this story? Why do you think they are so important to the Icelanders and the Icelandic emigrants?
5. Do you think Birdie has Freya’s best interests at heart during the time they spend together? Is she able to love Freya? Do you see any ways in which she’s a good influence?
6. What are the differences between Icelandic and Canadian (or American) culture in the novel? In what ways is Freya American? In what ways is she Icelandic?
7. Consider the passage about adulthood on page 197 that begins, “Before my mother died...” What does adulthood mean to the different characters in the story, to Freya, Birdie, Anna? How does Freya’s definition of it shift during the story?
8. What is the significance of the story of the tricking of Gylfi (pp 203-206)? Why do you think the author based the story’s title on it? What are some of the secrets and tricks that change the course of Freya’s life?
9. Why is Freya reluctant to return to Gimli for Sigga’s 100th birthday?
10. Late in the story it’s revealed that Freya has cyclothymia, a mild form of bipolar disorder. Was there evidence of the illness in her behavior throughout the story? Have you had any contact

with bipolar disorder in your own life? Did you find the portraits of Birdie and Freya convincing?

11. How does it affect the reading experience to have the narrator addressing her imagined cousin? Why do you think the author chose this method for this story?

12. In the end, how do you think Freya feels about Birdie? Does Birdie deserve to be forgiven? Do you have more sympathy for her, or for Anna?

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