

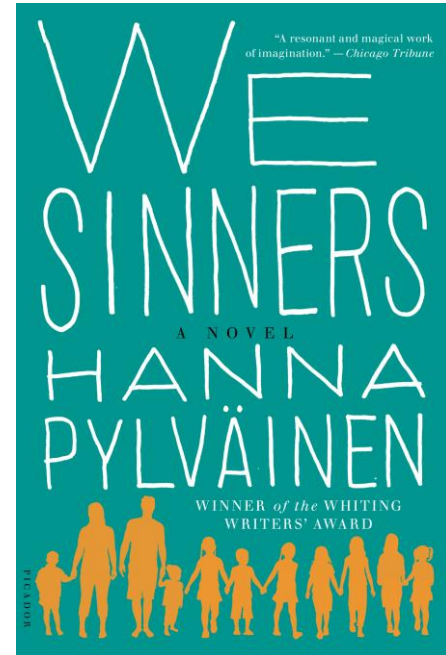
PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

We Sinners

by Hanna Pylväinen

1. Each chapter of *We Sinners* is told as a different episode from a member of the Rovaniemi family. How do the chapters contribute to the overall narrative, and why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way?
2. We meet Brita in the beginning of the novel when she is a teenager and again when she is a married mother of seven. She often seems to resent her fundamentalist religion, and yet she outwardly appears to be the model believer. Why does she choose to adhere to the religion? What is the significance of having her perspective shown twice in the book, and is there any significance in the fact that she is named after Laestadius's wife?
3. Warren exhibits anger problems that lead him to lash out on his family. We learn however, that he chooses not to be like his own father who used to quietly and constantly express his disappointment. In what ways does Warren ultimately resemble his father? Why does he choose to accept the position as minister of the church despite his feelings of inadequacy?
4. Examine the relationships between parent and child in the book. Is it inevitable for children to become like their parents, or do they often stray from the mold? What accounts for this outcome?
5. We see the Rovaniemis express their inner desires for worldly things that are banned within their religion. Is there a difference between wanting to sin and actually committing the sin?
6. Describe Pirjo. What role does she play in the family and how does she handle the conflicts that arise within the family? Tiina asserts that "You can lose your faith anywhere. You just have to trust your kids." Do you think Pirjo trusts her children to do what is best for them?
7. Why is it so hard for Tiina to leave the church and tell her family that she is no longer a believer? Do we sometimes have to give up our own beliefs in order to protect those we love?
8. Forgiveness is a major theme throughout the book. In Laestadianism, fellow believers are able to forgive one another and absolve each other of sins. What does it mean to truly forgive, and do you think the Rovaniemis are able to forgive one another despite all of the pain and resentment within the family?
9. Even after Julia leaves the church, she feels empty and completely lost. She tries to find fulfillment in her relationship with Will, but ends up feeling even more neglected and depressed. Why do you think she feels this way and what is missing from her life now that she is free to do everything she couldn't do before?
10. How do the Rovaniemi children defy expectations? Think of Nels, Simon, and Leena. How are their lives restricted by their intransigent faith as children, and do they remain restricted as adults? How do their experiences in childhood shape their fates?



11. Jonas Chan first attended the church to become closer to Uppu, yet later became a member despite Uppu's distaste for the religion. What do you think attracted Jonas to the faith? Why does it take an outsider joining the church for Uppu to finally leave?
12. Discuss the roles of the women vs. men in the novel. In a religion where a woman's main purpose is to be a wife and mother, how do the female characters break out of this construct?
13. The novel ends with the story of Gunna who lived during Laestadius's time. What is the significance of this chapter tied into the whole of the book? What is the author trying to say in having her reject the faith?

About the Author

Hanna Pylväinen graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her MFA from the University of Michigan, where she was also a postgraduate Zell Fellow. She is the recipient of a MacDowell Colony residency and a fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She is from suburban Detroit.



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