

READERS GUIDE

Madapple

Thought-provoking and shocking,
Madapple is a page-turning
exploration of human nature and divine
intervention—and of the darkest corners
of the human soul.

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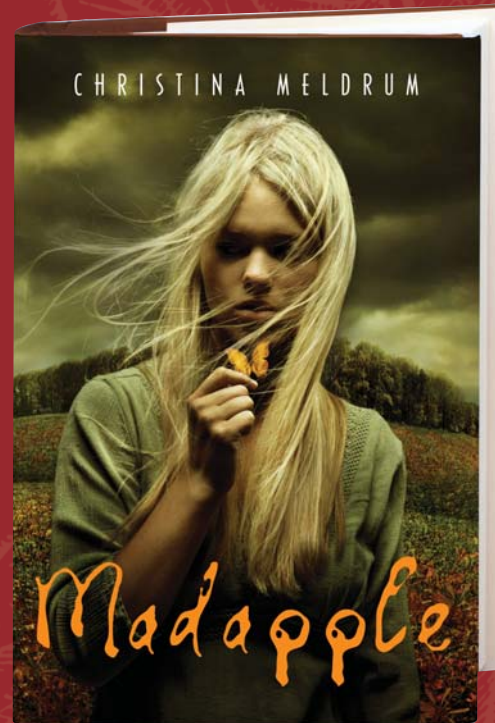


ABOUT THE BOOK



Aslaug Datter knows nothing of her past. She has lived her entire life in isolation with her inscrutable mother, Maren. Together they gather and study plants, learn various languages and explore many different religions. Aslaug knows more about mythology and ancient worlds than she does about the “outside” world in Bethan, Maine, where she lives.

When Maren dies a strange and sudden death, Aslaug is thrust



into a life filled with shocking revelations. She is a suspect in her mother’s death, and the more her story unravels, the more questions unfold: About the nature of Aslaug’s birth. About what she should do next. About whether divine miracles have truly happened. And whether, when all other explanations are impossible, they might still happen this very day.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Maren teaches Aslaug that “science describes the world; it doesn’t explain it.” (p. 16) Describe Aslaug’s world. Discuss how Maren and Aslaug’s lifestyle is especially disturbing to outsiders like Lens Grumset, a neighbor who feels that they may be into witchcraft. How might Aslaug explain her world to outsiders? How is Aslaug unprepared to deal with the outside world that she seeks after her mother dies?
- Aslaug has a troubling relationship with her mother. At one point, Maren asks Aslaug if she is plotting to fly away. Discuss how living in isolation makes Aslaug more interested in discovering the outside world. Why doesn’t she run away? Trace Aslaug’s search to understand her mother, even after Maren’s death. Describe Aslaug’s reaction to her mother’s death.
- The details of Aslaug’s birth are mysterious. Why won’t Maren identify Aslaug’s father? Draw a parallel between Hester Prynne, the main character in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Maren. Why does she hide the book from Aslaug? Debate whether Aslaug, like Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*, is a symbol of shame and a punishment for her mother’s sin.
- Maren teaches Aslaug many languages. Explain the irony in Maren’s belief that “the more languages you learn, the more free you will be in your thinking.” (p. 58) Discuss what she means when she says, “Words oversimplify reality.” (p. 58)
- *Sin, knowledge, and the human condition* are themes in *The Scarlet Letter*. Discuss these themes as they relate to *Madapple*.
- Maren claims to be an atheist. Yet, she spends hours studying the Torah, the Kabbalah, the Koran, and the Bible. What is she searching for?
- Sara and Maren’s *fader* was a botanist and mythologist, “interested in what he thought was the interweaving of nature and the divine.” (p. 165) Explain his influence on Maren. Sara felt that her *fader*’s interests were “misguided.” Contrast her beliefs with those of Maren’s. Debate the good and evil in Sara’s chosen life. How might Aslaug’s experiences with two trials and a complicated life on the “outside” affect her religious views? Discuss whether she is likely to find that place where science and religion meet.
- Trace Aslaug’s search for identity before and after her mother’s death. Explain what Rune means when he says to her, “But your context may become your prison.” (p. 245) At what point does Aslaug miss her mother? What does Aslaug mean when she says that Maren was her “Artemis”? (p. 307)
- Discuss the structure of the novel. How does the trial keep the reader engaged in Aslaug’s story?
- Explain the title of the novel.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

“*Madapple* is one of the most accomplished books I’ve read in the past few years—and one of the most original. It’s bizarre and disturbing and there are no taboos it doesn’t break.

Part mystery, part suspense, part exploder of any religious idea you’ve ever had, this sophisticated YA recounts one 17-year-old girl’s strange and isolated upbringing, and the even more twisted world she encounters after her mother’s death, when she lands with family she never knew existed. Soon she’s sucked into a web of complicated, long-buried family secrets that reveal her past is darker than she’d ever imagined.

Virgin births, poisonous plants, religious fervor, and mysterious deaths all play a role in this deeply compelling tale with an unreliable narrator. You won’t be able to put it down until the last, mind-blowing page and you won’t believe this extraordinary book was written by a first-time author.”

—Michelle Frey, Executive Editor, Knopf Books for Young Readers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: Victor Hong

Christina Meldrum earned her Juris Doctor from Harvard Law School. She has worked for the International Commission of Jurists and as a litigator at the law firm of Shearman & Sterling. She currently lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her family.

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