## redemption

Can a ruthless criminal ever hope to win the love of a boy whose parents he brutally murdered? And can the boy find a way to forgive his parents' killer? In this novel set at the southern tip of Chile, the story's characters examine the true meaning of trust, love, grief, betrayal, and ultimately, forgiveness.

about the book

In a desolate landscape in Southern Chile, a boy, his parents' murderer, and a wealthy stranger from the city struggle to confront their pasts and ultimately experience the healing power of love and forgiveness.

"It's not easy to be alive. . . . It's complicated, twisted and kinked, just like the dead trees of the Pampas." (p. 100) No one knows better than Paolo Poloverdo how difficult living can be. After Angel Allegria appears at his family farm and murders his parents, the young boy

THE KILLER'S TEARS

Anne-Laure Bondoux
WINNER OF THE PRIX SORCIÈRES
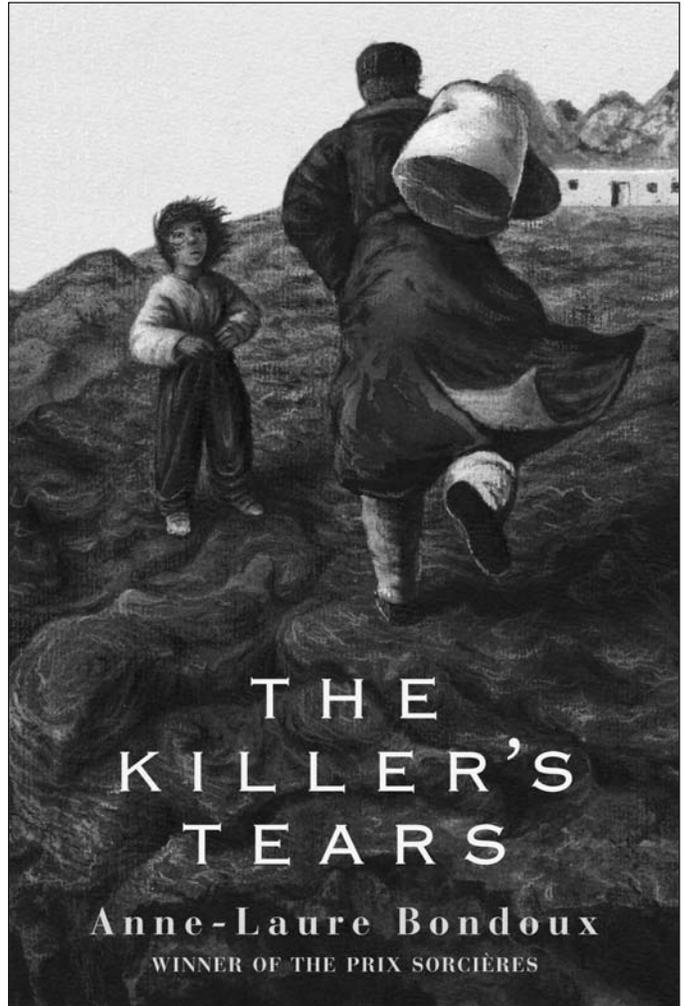
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finds himself in the care of both his parents' killer and Luis, a wealthy gentleman from the city trying to escape his own inner demons. With two unlikely surrogate fathers, Paolo learns that love, beauty, and ultimately, forgiveness can heal the most grief-stricken heart, and that wisdom can be found even in the worst of circumstances. And for Angel and Luis, the love and trust found in the heart of an innocent boy offers them a chance to redeem what is left of the lives they so desperately want to escape.

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questions

The concept of forgiveness is one of the major themes in *The Killer's Tears*. Challenge students to make a list of five to ten actions that they deem to be forgivable. Next ask them to come up with five to ten actions that they deem to be unforgivable. Write both lists on the board, and begin a debate about how circumstances can change one's notions of what can and cannot be forgiven. Remind students to consider these "gray areas" while reading *The Killer's Tears*.

Parenting/Fatherhood

- Shortly after Angel moves into the Poloverdo home, he begins to take on parenting responsibilities, both physically and emotionally. Examine with students ways in which Angel looks out for Paolo's well-being.

- Paolo possesses an innate intelligence and survival instinct. When he realizes that Angel is going to kill Luis, he calls Angel "Papa." Discuss with students how this event both saves Luis's life and strengthens the bond between the murderer and the child?

- Ask students how Paolo's decision to kill the fox cub helps to cement their relationship, and why they think Paolo chose to save the man who murdered his parents. In what other ways do Paolo and Angel bond throughout the story?

- How is Angel's decision to entrust Paolo to Ricardo's care an "act of love"? Why does Paolo see it as a betrayal?

- Have students reread Chapter 24. Then discuss each character's feelings in terms of the parent-child bond that has formed between Paolo and Angel. What does Angel mean when he yells out, "I was born the day I saw you!"?

Separation/Loss/Grief

- The three main characters, Paolo, Angel, and Luis, all experienced the loss of a father very early in their lives: Paolo's by murder, Angel's by disease, and Luis's by neglect and abandonment. Ask students how these early separation experiences influence their decision making.

- How does the death of the fox cub represent the end of Paolo's childhood innocence?

- Why does Paolo place a handful of dirt in his pocket upon his departure for the city?

- Discuss the theme of rebirth as it pertains to Paolo's feelings of grief and loss described on page 72.

- Reread the epilogue. Discuss why Paolo destroys the table and how this act is necessary for him to move forward with his life. What does he mean when he says the table is "dead"?

Guilt/Remorse

- After living just a brief time with Paolo, Angel gradually begins to come to terms with his brutal past. Discuss with students examples of Angel's initial struggle with feelings of guilt and remorse. How does Paolo's presence influence a shift in Angel's heart and conscience?

- When the chipped pitcher shatters on the floor, Angel is overcome with sorrow. Explain why Angel reacts in this way. What does the pitcher symbolize?

- At the first visit to the bank, Angel wonders, "Would the [security] camera see through him and guess what he really was?" (p. 51) At this point in the story, how do you think Angel would describe himself?
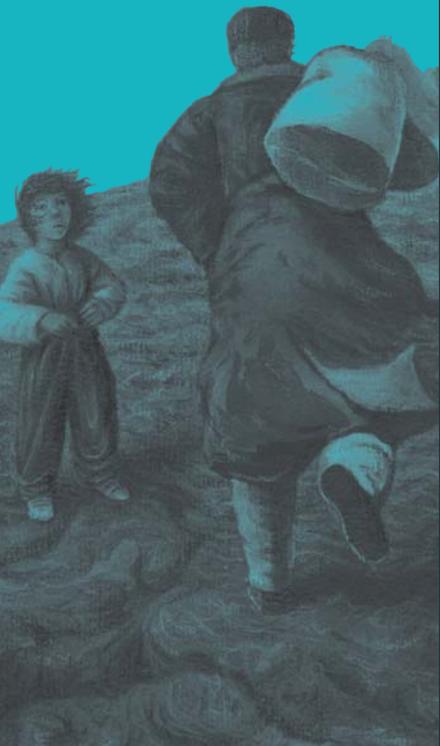
for group discussion

Forgiveness/Redemption

- In chapter three, Angel desperately searches for Paolo and finds him nearly frozen. Discuss with students the feelings that Angel experiences after rescuing Paolo from the cold. How is this experience a crossroads for Angel?

- Angel ponders his own existence, and wonders, "Wouldn't it be fair if he died, even if his death did not avenge all those he killed?" (p. 69) Discuss the issue of the death penalty as a punishment for murder.

- What is the symbolic significance of the spirits of Ricardo's dead children?

- Reread the section in Chapter 25 when Paolo discovers the postcards from Luis. Do you agree with Paolo that "It was a breathtaking way to ask for forgiveness"? (p. 154)

Change/Metamorphosis

- Ricardo "likes metamorphosis," and says to Angel, "Some changes are very subtle. . . . Those which happen in our soul, for example, are not always noticeable." (p. 109) Discuss ways in which the souls of Paulo and Angel undergo a metamorphosis throughout the book.

- How does Luis's criticism of "faraway countries" illuminate his fear of change and his inability to proceed with his life in a positive way?

- Discuss the irony of Ricardo's last load of wood being made into a guillotine.

- In Chapter 24, Paolo realized that "he was no longer a child. This thought had a strange effect on him, as if the transformation had happened suddenly, without his being aware of it." (p. 148) Explain how Paolo could transform from a child to a man without being aware of the change.

- The three main characters are transformed in some profound way by the power and beauty of art. Discuss with students examples of how poetry, painting, and music become healing powers in the lives of the main characters.

Wisdom

- While watching Angel try to save a goat, Paolo wonders, "How could anyone comprehend the universe without first understanding the ways of the people they lived with?" (p. 18) Is the ability to "comprehend the universe" a way to describe wisdom? Why does Paolo perceive Angel's attempts at saving the goat as so incomprehensible?

- In what ways does Paolo show wisdom throughout the story? How do the other main characters—Angel and Luis—gain wisdom as the story progresses?

- After seeing Paolo dancing with the spirits of Ricardo's dead children, Angel is astonished and frightened. Ricardo tells him, "If there is one thing that life has taught me, it's to accept even the most foolish and unthinkable happiness. . . . All the questions you're asking yourself are useless." (pp. 113–114) Discuss this statement. Do you agree with Ricardo's philosophy? Why or why not?

- Discuss the simplicity of this question: "What was simpler than setting apart good from evil, good people from bad, honest people from dishonest ones?" (p. 144) How does it apply to the circumstances of the book and the actions of the characters?

vocabulary/ use of language

Ask students to write down unfamiliar words and try to define them by taking clues from the context of the novel. Such words may include: *meager* (p.4), *jovial* (p. 11), *surreptitiously* (p. 12), *inert* (p. 37), *haughty* (p. 46), *plundered* (p. 47), *grimaced* (p. 50), *surveillance* (p. 51), *talisman* (p. 54), *flux* (p. 94), *naïve* (p. 98), *melancholy* (p. 123)

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internet resources

Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide: Latin America

www.geographia.com/chile/index.html
This Web site provides information about Chile,
including the region around the Strait of Magellan—
the setting for *The Killer's Tears*.

Information About Children and Grief

www.childrensgrief.net/info.htm
This site offers adults information and activities
to help grieving children cope with loss.

Fatherhood Initiative

fatherhood.hhs.gov/index.shtml
This Web site from the United States Department of
Health and Human Services offers information and
research pertaining to parenting and fatherhood.

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about **the author**

Anne-Laure Bondoux was born on April 23, 1971,
in the region surrounding Paris, where she still
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Modern Letters at the University of Paris X—
Nanterre, and during her education, created
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Bayard Presse in 1996. There she worked on
J'aime Lire, a literary, educational publication
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launch of a new kids magazine titled *Maximum*.
She retired from journalism in 2000 in order to
devote her time exclusively to writing, and is the
author of several children's books, including *The
Destiny of Linus Hoppe*, and *The Second Life of
Linus Hoppe*. Bondoux also writes songs for the
theater.

on **the web**

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