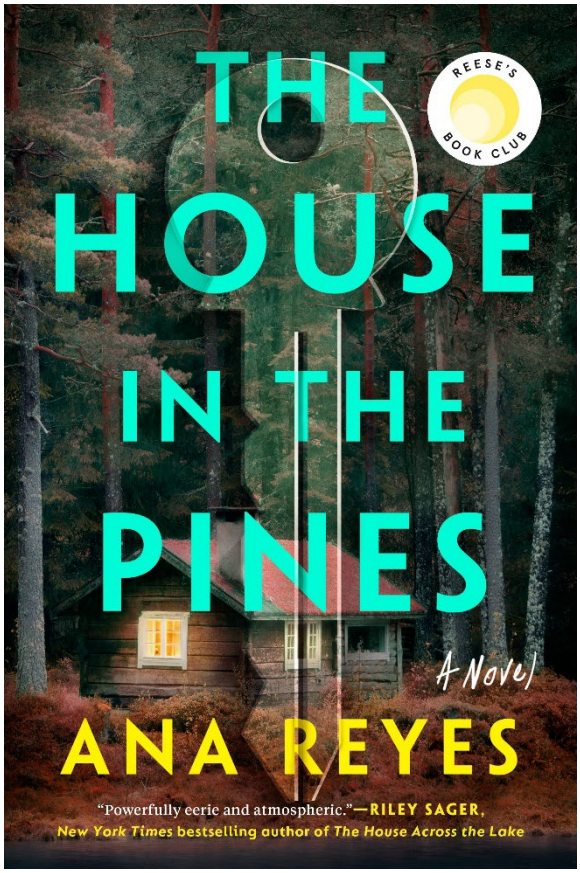
book discussion kits

House in the Pines
by Ana Reyes

Martin County Library System Book Discussion Kit:

The House in the Pines by Ana Reyes



Included in the Kit:

- Book summary
- Author biography
- Discussion questions
- Recipe suggestions

Book summary

Maya was a high school senior when her best friend, Aubrey, dropped dead in front of the enigmatic man named Frank whom they'd been spending time with all summer.

Seven years later, Maya lives in Boston with a loving boyfriend and is kicking the secret addiction that has allowed her to cope with what happened years ago, the gaps in her memories, and the lost time that she can't account for. But her past comes rushing back when she comes across a recent YouTube video in which a young woman suddenly keels over and dies in a diner while sitting across from none other than Frank. Plunged into the trauma that has defined her life, Maya heads to her Berkshires hometown to relive that fateful summer—the influence Frank once had on her and the obsessive jealousy that nearly destroyed her friendship with Aubrey.

At her mother's house, she excavates fragments of her past and notices hidden messages in her deceased Guatemalan father's book that didn't stand out to her earlier.

To save herself, she must understand a story written before she was born, but time keeps running out, and soon, all roads are leading back to Frank's cabin. . . .

Utterly unique and captivating, The House in the Pines keeps you guessing about whether we can ever fully confront the past and return home.

(Source: https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/*)*

House in the Pines
by Ana Reyes

Meet the Author



Ana Reyes is the New York Times bestselling author of Reese's Book Club pick The House in the Pines. She has an MFA from Louisiana State University and teaches creative writing. She lives with her husband in Easthampton, Massachusetts.

(Source: https://www.anareyeswriter.com/*)*

Discussion Questions

1. Maya shies away from true intimacy by withholding important information from Dan. How does finally telling the truth about her alcohol dependence and Klonopin withdrawal, as well as Aubrey's death and her suspicions about Frank, change Maya's relationship with Dan?
2. Maya's experience with addiction ranges from always liking "a good buzz, ever since the first time [Aubrey] swiped a pint of her mom's vodka and they drank it stirred into Sunny D" to rationalizing "her dependence in so many ways, telling herself it wasn't a lie, just an omission; that she kept the pills in an aspirin bottle for convenience, not to hide them." How does Maya's dependence on various substances serve to keep her isolated in her adult life?
3. Dr. Barry, Maya's one-time therapist, says, "The unwell mind is rarely capable of recognizing its own illness"; he also tells her the mind will try to explain what it does not understand by creating patterns. Is Maya a reliable narrator, even to

herself? How much does she trust what she perceives and remembers, and how much does she doubt her own intuition? Did you have faith in her perceptions?

4. Technology and social media play an important role in Maya's attempts to learn the truth about Frank. Do you think events would have played out differently if younger Maya had been able to research Frank online? Or would his sway still be as strong, regardless of all the information available?
5. The author emphasizes the importance of sharing stories. When Maya meets Dan, she feels the "intimacy of being with someone who loved the same stories." Maya and Aubrey connect in English class while doing a project on Emily Dickinson. Brenda tells the story of meeting Jairo repeatedly, until it takes on a fable-like quality. But Maya also realizes she "might as well have handed Frank a key to her head and her heart the day she told him the story of her dead father." How do stories allow these characters to open up to one another? Is this sharing of self through stories always for the best or can it have more sinister consequences
6. How is Frank able to read Maya and prey on her vulnerability? What patterns can Maya discern in her experiences with Frank?
7. Maya is described as "half Guatemalan, a quarter Irish, and a quarter Italian"; she "looked Hispanic but had grown up with a single white mom and knew very little about her family in Guatemala." By the end of the novel, how does Maya begin to integrate her Guatemalan roots, connect with her father, and understand this part of her history?
8. Inherited trauma is woven throughout Maya's story: her father's violent death and Guatemala's tumultuous history, her aunt Lisa's mental illness, even the PCBs

that poisoned the Housatonic River and Silver Lake. How does the author plant seeds of hope that it's possible to move beyond the damage of the past?

9. The author writes current scenes in the past tense, whereas past sections are in the present tense. In what ways was Maya more engaged in the past? How has Aubrey's death and her time with Frank affected her?
10. Were you surprised when you learned the truth about Frank's cabin? If not, when did you begin to suspect that something about it was wrong?
11. What did you think of the balance between the past and present sections in the novel? Did the two intersect differently for you as the read went on? Why or why not?

Recipes

Beef Wellington Bites



Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 pounds beef stew meat, cut into bite-size cubes
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 8 ounces baby bella mushrooms, halved
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup dry red wine
- 2 1/2 cups beef stock
- 4 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme
- 3 bay leaves
- 2 sage leaves
- 2 potatoes, peeled and cut in 1/2-inch chunks
- 1 turnip or parsnip (or really anything that grows in darkness underground), optional

- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Directions:

Start with a pot capable of holding up over many years. A Dutch oven for example. Season meat with a

few shakes of salt and pepper. Brown in olive oil over medium heat, stirring now and then for 7 minutes.

Set aside. Note: This step might seem unnecessary but is worth doing if you have the time. (And after

tasting Frank's Forever Soup, you might find yourself with all the time in the world!). Add carrots, celery, and onion. Occasionally stir, 3–4 minutes, until tender. Add mushrooms and garlic. Occasionally stir, 3–4 minutes, until browned. Whisk in tomato paste until it deepens to the color of blood, about 1 minute. Then whisk in the flour and brown that, too, another minute. Add red wine, scraping any bits from the bottom of the pot, reduce slightly. Stir in beef stock, rosemary, thyme, bay leaves, sage, and meat. Bring it all to a boil; reduce heat and simmer until beef is very tender, about 30 minutes. Stir in root vegetables (potatoes, parsnips, turnips) and simmer until tender and stew has thickened, about twenty minutes. Note: twenty minutes minimum. Flavor develops over time. (It's a shame Maya never got to taste Frank's Forever Soup as its flavor is so homey, so comforting, that no one who tastes it ever wants to leave.) Discard all leaves and sprigs. Or leave them in; just don't eat them. Stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper, to taste.

(Source: adapted from recipe https://damndelicious.net/2020/02/29/best-ever-beef-stew/)

Recipes Continuation

Hila's Guatemalan Tamales



Ingredients:

- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 5 pounds tortilla dough (This can sometimes be bought already prepared; otherwise buy masa harina, a fine corn flour available at specialty markets, and add water according to the instructions on the package.)
- 3 pounds pork, chicken, or turkey, bones removed
- 12 ounces pork lard
- 3 pounds of tomatoes
- 3 ancho peppers
- 2 bell peppers, sliced
- 2 ounces pumpkin seeds
- 2 ounces sesame seeds
- banana leaves (about 2 square yards), available at specialty markets
- 1–2 jars green olives

Directions:

Soak the rice overnight and puree it, uncooked, in a blender the next day. Add the pureed rice to the tortilla dough. Place the meat in a large pot and add enough water to cover it. Cook on the stovetop for about 15 minutes, adding salt to taste. Remove the meat from the pot and set aside. Add the broth from the meat to the dough and mix by hand until no lumps are left. Add the lard to the dough, along with salt to taste, and

cook in a large pot on the stovetop over low heat for about 2 hours or until thick enough to hold its shape; it should be about the consistency of play dough. The dough must be stirred constantly while it cooks. (If you have other people around, feel free to ask them to stir.) Boil the tomatoes and peppers in a small amount of water. Brown the pumpkin and sesame seeds by toasting them in the oven or on a burner in a heavy, dry saucepan. Grind the seeds in a blender until they form a fine powder, then stir them into the tomato sauce, along with the salt and a pinch of sugar. Bring to a boil and cook 10 minutes. Add the cooked meat, cut up, and simmer over very low heat until ready to use. Cut the banana leaves into 10-inch squares and boil in plenty of water for 10 minutes. Wipe the leaves clean and toast them in the oven at 350 degrees, about 5 at a time for about 30 seconds on each side to make them more pliable. Spread the dough over each section of banana leaf. Add the sauce, making sure to include a piece of meat and a slice of pepper from the pot, and then add an olive. Put more dough on top and wrap up each banana leaf, tying it with a shred of banana leaf, string, or homemade string from a reed. Wrap tamales in aluminum foil (optional) and add an inch or two of water into a large pot. Heat the water to boiling and then add the tamales and cover the pot. Let steam for 2 hours. You can line the bottom of the pot with extra banana leaves to make sure the tamales don't touch the bottom of the pot and scorch. Serve with: Fresh lime juice and slices of plain white bread, such as Wonder Bread.

(Source: https://www.anareyeswriter.com/; recipe by Hilda Reyes (author's grandmother)