

## Book Club Discussion Guide



*Pluck by Donna Morrissey, Page 1 (April 2022)*

# Pluck: a memoir of a Newfoundland Childhood and the Raucous, Terrible, Amazing Journey to Becoming a Novelist

By Donna Morrissey

### About the author:

It was my good fortune to have been born and raised in an outport of 12 houses, and where we were only allowed to talk to six of those. It made for a real small growing up environment, but if you put a bell-jar over that place you'd come to understand every kind of conflict! Simply to say, people are complex, relationships even more so. The wealth of learning evoked in such a small culture (can we say that – a small culture??) will continue to feed me and my writing throughout this life and perhaps others.

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“We are of our own making,” my mother always lectured. No doubt. Which is why we all have a unique story to tell. I’ve learned how we all live within myth, and one of the keys to meaningful living – and good writing – is to find that myth playing out within us, or within a character. And then bridge that myth to everyday life. Sometimes while thinking about my story, or that of a character’s, I falter. And should I continue to falter or get too lost within a feeling, I turn to the writings of the greats with the hopes of learning about whatever that feeling was that I got lost in.

Sometimes, I simply turn to my mum who I carry within me, and query such thoughts as, ‘Mom, when you buffs the down off the birds before cooking them – how is it you holds them so gently?’ And as she answers....’So’s not to break the skin, Donna, and sap the oil from the meat. The bird might be dead, but he’s still your supper...’

I write her words...Most times our greatest teachers are those who walk along the same shores as ourselves.

May God bless the Beaches in White Bay, Newfoundland.

Source: Author’s website: (<https://donnamorrissey.org/> )

### About this book:

When Donna Morrissey left the only home she had ever known, an isolated Newfoundland settlement, at age 16, she was ready for adventure. She had grown up without television or telephones but had absorbed the tragic stories and comic yarns of her close-knit family and community. The death of her infant brother marked the family, and years later, Morrissey suffers devastating guilt about the accidental death of her teenage brother, whom she’d enticed to join her in the oilfields. Her misery was compounded by her own misdiagnosis of a terminal illness, all of which contributed to crippling anxiety and an actual diagnosis of PTSD. Many of those

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events and themes would eventually be transformed and recast as fictional gold in Morrissey's novels.

In another writer's hands, Morrissey's account of her personal story could easily be a tragedy. Instead, she combines darkness and light, levity and sadness into her tale, as her indomitable spirit and humour sustain her. Morrissey's path takes her from the drudgery of being a grocery clerk (who occasionally enlivens her shift with recreational drugs) to western oilfields, to marriage and divorce and working in a fish-processing plant to support herself and her two young children. Throughout her struggles, she nourishes a love of learning and language.

Morrissey layers her account of her life with stories of those who came before her, a breed rarely seen in the modern world. It centers around iron-willed women: mothers and daughters, wives, sisters, teachers and mentors who find the support, the wind for their wings, outside the bounds given to them by nature. And it is a mysterious older woman she meets in Halifax who eventually unleashes the writer that Morrissey is destined to become.

Source: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/>

### Discussion Questions:

(General nonfiction questions to get book club discussions off to a good start.)

1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c:
  - a. What observations are made in the book? Does the author examine economics and politics family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?

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b. Does the author criticize or admire the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?

c. What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?

2. What is the central idea discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific?

3. Do the issues affect your life? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?

4. What evidence does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual—based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?

5. What kind of language does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it biased, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?

6. What are the implications for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?

7. What solutions does the author propose? Are the author's recommendations concrete, sensible, doable? Who would implement those solutions?

8. How controversial are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?

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9. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?

10. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?

Source: LitLovers (<http://www.litlovers.com>)