

## A Piece of the World

William Morrow

By Christina Baker Kline

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### Introduction

To Christina Olson, the entire world was her family's remote farm in the small coastal town of Cushing, Maine. Born in the home her family had lived in for generations, and increasingly incapacitated by illness, Christina seemed destined for a small life. Instead, for more than twenty years, she was host and inspiration for the artist Andrew Wyeth, and became the subject of one of the best known American paintings of the twentieth century.

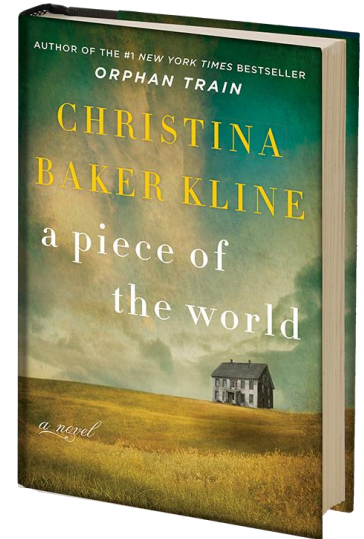
As she did in her beloved smash bestseller *Orphan Train*, Christina Baker Kline interweaves fact and fiction in a powerful novel that illuminates a little-known part of America's history. Bringing into focus the flesh-and-blood woman behind the portrait, she vividly imagines the life of a woman with a complicated relationship to her family and her past, and a special bond with one of our greatest modern artists.

Told in evocative and lucid prose, *A Piece of the World* is a story about the burdens and blessings of family history, and how artist and muse can come together to forge a new and timeless legacy.

This edition includes a four-color reproduction of Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Christina Olson's life is limited by her parents, her illness, and the realities of a rural life in the first half of the 20th century. But she does make decisions that affect the course of her life. What are some of the major consequences of Christina's choices? Which choices did you agree with, and with which did you disagree?
2. Consider Christina's relationship with her parents and her relationship with Mamey. What does Mamey offer Christina that her parents do not? What are the limitations of that relationship? How do Christina's brothers have different relationships with both Mamey and their parents?
3. How do the poems of Emily Dickinson engage with the themes of this novel?



4. How might Christina's life have been different if Walton had actually married her? What do you think their marriage might have been like?
5. What does Christina's behavior toward her brother reveal about her character?
6. What is it about Andy that compels Christina to share her very private world with him? Why does she allow him to paint her, and why does she like being a model more than Al does?
7. What draws Andy toward Christina? How are they similar? How does Betsy's relationship with each influence the relationship with the other?
8. Discuss the ways in which Andrew Wyeth's iconic painting *Christina's World* interacts with this story. Were you familiar with the painting before you read the novel? How did that familiarity (or lack of familiarity) color your reading of the novel?
9. Which parts of Christina's life are probably based on biographical fact? What parts do you think the author added? Did your reading of Kline's Author's Note at the end of the novel change the way you thought about any aspect of the book? What about seeing the painting at the end of the novel?
10. Would you characterize Christina as an unlikeable narrator? Why or why not?
11. Is *A Piece of the World* a "New England" novel? To what extent do the characters and the setting take into account their New England roots?
12. The majority of historical fiction revolves around important or influential figures—monarchs, cultural beacons or warmongers. Christina, by contrast, lives a 'quiet, ordinary life.' How does Kline extract drama and complexity in Christina's character?