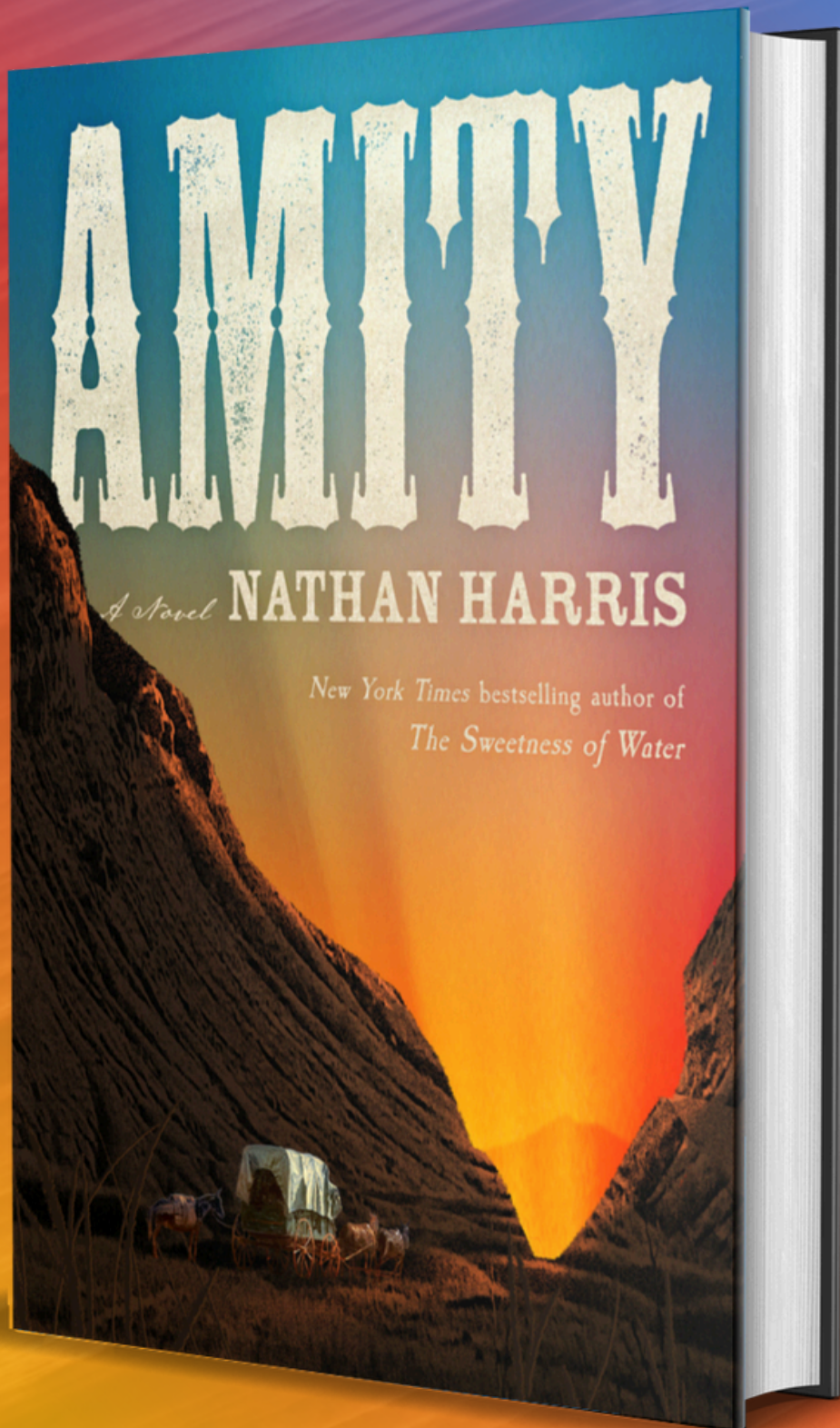


Book Club Kit



A Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

One day, while writing this novel, I found myself on a horse in Texas. I hadn't ridden a horse since I was a child, and I hadn't been in the desert, so far from society, in many years. It was a surreal occasion, but it did its job. I began to feel what, perhaps, Coleman or June might have experienced in *Amity*—drawn into a strange land, untethered from the world they knew, from the lives they'd grown used to.

I hope that sensation, in some small way, reaches you as well. Beyond that, I hope you feel what these siblings might have felt during their travels—their desperate desire for freedom, their bravery to venture on, no matter how far, in search of the peace they sought. For me, getting on that horse transported me into the past, but I don't think it was necessary. If reading has taught me anything, it's that you don't always need to ride the horse, if you will. Imagination alone can do the trick.

So I hope *Amity* draws you through time, into an unfamiliar land, and takes you on a journey you won't soon forget with characters you can't help but grow close to. I imagine Coleman and June will remain with me for quite some time. I hope they remain with you, too.

May their story, and the story of all those real individuals who made the very same journey that they embarked upon, never be forgotten.

Happy reading,
Nathan Harris

Rattlesnake Cocktail

Ingredients

(Makes 4 Servings)

8 oz rye whiskey
4 oz fresh lemon juice
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup water
Pernod or absinthe (for serving)
4 egg whites, separated
individually



Recipe

Step 1 - Chill 4 coupe glasses in freezer. Bring 1/2 cup sugar and 1/2 cup water to a boil in a small saucepan, stirring to dissolve sugar. Cover and chill simple syrup until cold, at least 1 hour.

Step 2 - For each cocktail, combine 1 egg white, 2 oz. rye whiskey, 1 oz. lemon juice, and 3/4 oz. simple syrup into a cocktail shaker and shake vigorously (without ice) until mixture starts to get frothy. Fill shaker with ice and shake vigorously until outside of shaker is frosty and cocktail is frothy, about 20 seconds.

Step 3 - Rinse a chilled coupe glass with Pernod, then discard the excess Pernod. Strain cocktail through a fine-mesh sieve into glass.



Discussion Questions for Your Book Club

- 1) When *Amity* begins, the Harper family holds sway over Coleman's life in almost every way. Yet in Mexico, the power dynamic is vastly different, with a newfound current of equality between Coleman and Florence in particular. How do they both grapple with it, and with what result?
- 2) So much of Coleman's life is decided by others, whether that be the Harpers, or even Amos Turlow attempting to dictate his decisions upon landing in Mexico, as though Coleman is nothing more than his pawn. Does Coleman finally find control of his own life? Can we track his transformation?
- 3) At times it seems that June and Coleman could not be more different, both in the way they express themselves and the choices they make. What did you make of their relationship? Did their unique dynamic as siblings resonate with you?
- 4) June embarks on her own journey in the desert, finding a new community and new love with Isaac. How is her role in their community defined? Do you think she has found a sense of fulfillment by the novel's end?
- 5) Isaac, in many ways, is caught between cultures and worlds—a Black Seminole living in Mexico. In June, he meets a woman who has been subjected to slavery and a more traditional strand of oppression that has defined her life since birth. How do both of them navigate this clash of identities as their relationship is forged? In what ways do they share commonalities, and in what ways do they struggle to understand the other's way of life?
- 6) Isaac is a free man, but is still subject to the whims of the Mexican rebels and the French government, as well as his allied interests with the Seminoles. Danger presents itself all around him in the work he does for his people and the land he protects. Is the cost of this particular kind of freedom worth the pressures brought about by the lifestyle he leads? Are he and June right to think they must leave Amity, and by doing so leave behind his kin and tribe that have sustained him?
- 7) June and Coleman finally find some sense of solace in Texas by the novel's conclusion. There is an idyllic quality to the home they share with Isaac and their general way of life. Yet the 1860s was also a decade marked by incredible hardship, especially for formerly enslaved Black people. In a time of adversity and oppression, is it possible to feel truly free? Do you see parallels from June and Coleman's experience to other moments in history?
- 8) Whether it be due to the Civil War, The French-Mexican War, or general unrest, nearly every character in *Amity* is the victim of some form of displacement. How do we see the consequences of this phenomenon in the novel? How do characters navigate this issue or process it through their actions and emotions on the page?
- 9) By the end of the novel, Florence has returned to New Orleans to begin a new life for herself. Her journey in Mexico was an arduous one, rife with loss, grief, violence, and by the end, a sense of agency she did not have when set out to find her father. What do you make of the way her relationship to Coleman and June changes? Are June, Coleman, and Florence "closer" by the end of the novel, having been through so much together?
- 10) Coleman, struggling to survive and adapt at every turn while preserving his dignity and livelihood, can sometimes be difficult to read. But by the end, one thing is certain: he wants his story to be documented and sets out to write it. He makes it clear that his primary goal is to share his story with his sister—but might his motivations extend beyond that? He mentions other slave narratives to Ignacio, which could suggest as much. What, perhaps, are the true reasons behind Coleman writing his story in this way? Is it merely a means of reaching out to June, or does Coleman have greater aspirations?

Recommended Reading

From Coleman's Library:

David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

My Bondage and My Freedom by Frederick Douglass

Villette by Charlotte Bronte

Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Clotel: The President's Daughter by William Wells Brown

From the Author's Library:

The Black Seminoles by Kenneth W. Porter

The Southern Exodus to Mexico: Migration across the Borderlands after the American Civil War (Borderlands and Transcultural Studies) by Todd W. Wahlstrom

Dreaming with the Ancestors: Black Seminole Women in Texas and Mexico by Shirley Boteler Mock

The Texas Tonkawas by Stanley S. McGowen

Life of George Bent: Written from His Letters by George E. Hyde and Savoie Lottinville