

A person is seen from behind, wearing a bright yellow raincoat and a dark blue beanie. They are looking out over a vast blue ocean under a clear blue sky. The title 'Lost at Sea' is written in a large, orange, brush-stroke font across the top half of the image.

# Lost at Sea

“Thought-provoking and propulsive... *Lost at Sea* is impossible to put down.”

—DANIELA PETROVA,  
author of *Her Daughter's Mother*

a novel

**ERICA BOYCE**

# Reading Group Guide

1. From the first page, you learn that the residents of Devil's Purse consider loss to be a way of life. How does this belief manifest itself in the story and the characters?
2. The novel seems first to be focused on the loss of John Staybrook but transitions quickly to its deeper interest—Lacey and the community that surrounds her. Why might the author have chosen to frame Lacey's story in the loss of John?
3. The community of Devil's Purse and John's disappearance is set against the seaside landscape: the rocky shores, thick mists, and rolling waves. How does this story reflect that of the town's?
4. What was the secret that surprised you the most in the book, and how did it change the way you viewed the townspeople of Devil's Purse?
5. Can you describe your feelings toward Matt? Would you be able to characterize him as a good or bad person, and why?

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6. Maureen seems far more invested in finding her daughter's birth parents than Lacey herself. Why might this be the case for Maureen?
7. Annie and Lacey have a very complex bond. Do you understand Annie's choices, both while pregnant with Lacey and while counseling her? Do you think the secrets Annie kept justify Lacey's anger, and why? How do you think their relationship will continue?
8. What do you think is the significance of ending the book with John's death? If you could end it in a different place, where would you?

# A Conversation with the Author

**You have personal experience with the fishing community. Where does that shine through in this novel?**

I do! I've worked for and with fishermen since 2013. Over the years, I've learned that fishermen really are made of tougher stuff; the things they need to do on a day-to-day basis require bravery that most of us couldn't imagine. And their families are equally tough. Everyone who's married or related to a fisherman knows just how risky the job can be, and they have to live with that knowledge every single day. I'm hoping that grit and strength comes through in these characters.

**Your previous book, *The Fifteen Wonders of Daniel Green*, is set in Vermont. *Lost at Sea* takes place in Massachusetts. What about the rural Northeast communities is compelling to you as a writer?**

Well, they say "write what you know," right? I've grown up and worked in these communities my whole life, and it's such a huge part of my identity that it tends to bleed into my writing as well. I think it would be hard for me to do justice to the nuances in the fabric of communities in other parts of the country. So, I tend to stick with small-town New England.

**All of the women in *Lost at Sea* are unique in their strength and perseverance. Is there any one character you see yourself in the most?**

I see myself in Diane the most, even though it's probably not the most flattering thing to say! She's sort of prickly and knows that she is, but she's fiercely loyal to her family. She works hard, and the thing she craves the most is to be really and truly understood.

**If you could meet one character from this book and share some advice, who would you choose, and what would you tell them?**

Honestly, all of these women are wise in their own ways, and I'm not really sure I could "teach" them anything that they wouldn't eventually learn on their own. One lesson that they all struggle with at certain points along the way, though, is that family is really what you make of it and can be found in the most unexpected places.

**If you had to choose a theme song for *Lost at Sea*, what would that song be? On the subject of music, what did you listen to as you wrote this book?**

Is it too literal if I say "Not an Addict" by K's Choice? It's such a beautiful, heartbreaking song, and I think the message goes beyond the substance addictions that Annie and Lacey are dealing with. Almost every character is addicted to something—approval, independence, friendship, whatever—and a good deal of the book is about them learning to accept that about themselves and achieve balance, rather than endlessly seeking that thing out. Also (and here's where my music nerdery comes out), I really like the fact that much of the song is in a minor key, but it ends in a major key. It makes you feel like there's some hope in there

for the future, even when things are feeling pretty bleak, and that's definitely something that I wanted to convey in the book.

As for what I listened to, I wish I had a cool answer for this, but the truth is I can't have music playing while I'm writing. I'm way too likely to get caught up in singing along and not get very much writing done! However, I'll admit I listened to a lot of '90s music in between writing sessions and was super excited to sneak a bit of that into Annie's chapters. Third Eye Blind, Goo Goo Dolls, No Doubt, Alanis Morissette, Foo Fighters, and especially Matchbox Twenty (my eternal favorite). What can I say? I'm a true "early millennial," and I've got some serious nostalgia for that music!

**If you could live in one fictional world, which would you choose?**

Harry Potter's, without question. I mean, right? I'm pretty sure almost anyone who grew up in the late '90s would say the same thing!

**What is one thing that surprised you about becoming a published author?**

Actually seeing my book on the shelves in bookstores has been amazing and surprising! I knew, logically, that they'd be sold *somewhere*, but seeing my name in those stores that I've loved my whole life has been pretty surreal.

*SPOILER:*

**The novel closes with the radio call between Jess and John right before his death. Why did you choose to end the novel in such a sudden moment? What do you hope your readers will feel when they turn the final page?**

Much of the book moves around these concentric circles of knowledge: who knows what about whom and how that all comes to light after John's disappearance. Jess knows the most about what happened to John, but not the why. I wanted to end with the simplicity and clarity of that moment, once all the messy, tangled family stuff had already been revealed. Also, I think it's pretty clear by that point that this isn't the sort of book where John is miraculously found alive, but I wanted to eliminate any doubt before the last page was turned! I hope readers come away with a sense of inevitability—as in, of course that's how it had to end—and a better understanding of who John was.