

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID LAROCHELLE

What inspired you to write *It's a Tiger!*?

My desire was to write a story where the book itself was the main character and talked directly to the reader. In earlier drafts, the book asks to be taken off the shelf and says how good it feels to have its pages turned. My editor loved the action/adventure element of the story, but thought the book-as-narrator theme would be confusing to very young kids. It was difficult to give up this aspect (that was my initial inspiration for the whole book!), but in the end, my editor's suggestion made it a stronger, more engaging story.

"I interviewed many tigers. Fortunately, just like the title character, none of these tigers were interested in making me their dinner."

What do you hope your readers take away from this book?

My hope is that young readers and listeners will have fun, laughing and shouting out loud with the narrator, "It's a Tiger!" I hope that the adults who share this book with young people will also have fun, reading it with plenty of dramatic expression!

How long did it take you to write *It's a Tiger!*?

I began working on this project in 2003. I sent it to my agent at the time who told me "it's not what editors are looking for," so I filed it away. Three years passed, and when I no longer had an agent, I dug the story out again and sent it to an editor at Chronicle who was very interested. The manuscript went through many changes (including revising its original unmemorable title "Book" to the more exciting "It's a Tiger!"), and I had to give up my initial desire to also be the book's illustrator, but in 2012, ten years after I started, the book was published.

What do you like most about the book?

I love Jeremy Tankard's vibrant illustrations. He captured the energy of the story and created a beleaguered tiger who is dynamic without being too scary. I also love hearing how well this book works as a read-aloud for story time.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

As far back as elementary school I loved writing and illustrating my own books. I majored in art and English at St. Olaf College, concen-

trating on children's literature. When I was turned down for a job as an illustrator by Hallmark Cards, I became a fourth grade teacher in Coon Rapids instead. Four years later I received my contract for my first children's book, and decided to see if I could make a living as an author and illustrator...which is what I've been doing ever since.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

Minnesota has an especially strong, nationally recognized children's literature community. We have amazing independent children's bookstores, The Loft, Children's Literature Network, the Anderson Center's Celebration of Children's Books in Red Wing, The Alphabet Forest at the State Fair, and so many other opportunities to learn and to celebrate children's literature. Being surrounded by so many talented, generous authors and illustrators provides me with encouragement and inspiration in a career that is often solitary and filled with rejections.

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I love playing board games, working and creating puzzles, going to live theater, and hiking in Minnesota's State Parks.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature



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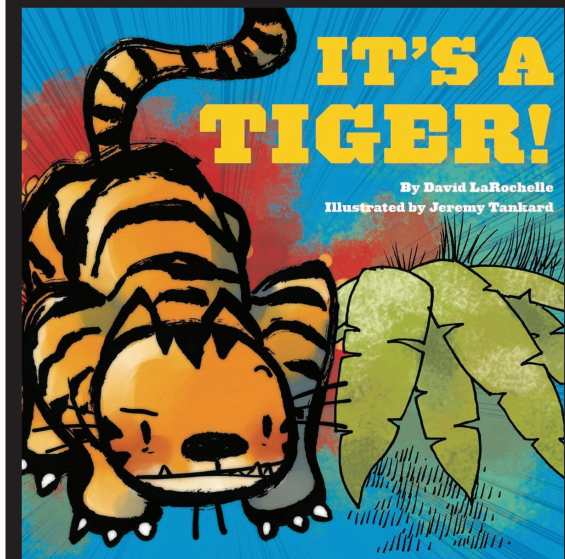
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Children's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Books For Africa



It's a Tiger!

by David LaRochelle
Illustrated by Jeremy Tankard

CHRONICLE BOOKS

It's a Tiger!



SUMMARY

Have you seen a tiger around here? No? Phew, then that's okay. I guess we are safe reading a book, right? A nice, safe book, with a cozy dust jacket and pretty pictures and a title that— Wait a minute... Kids and parents alike will rejoice in this lively read-aloud picture book, as the main character runs into (and away from) a tiger over and over again while the plot gets sillier and sillier.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would YOU like to meet a tiger in person?
2. Do you think this was a scary book, or a funny book, or both?
3. Notice how the words in this book are many different sizes. Why do you think that is the case?
4. If you were going to make up your own story about being chased by an animal, which animal would you choose?
5. What do you think is going to happen next at the end of the book?
6. How do you think the illustrator created his pictures? (Jeremy drew the images with ink, then scanned them into the computer and colored them digitally.)
7. Try drawing your own tiger (it doesn't have to look like Jeremy's at all!).
8. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?



ABOUT DAVID LAROCHELLE



A former elementary school teacher, David LaRochelle has written or illustrated over twenty-five books, including picture books, puzzle books, craft books, and a book for young adults. He is the author of the previous Minnesota Book Award winning title *The Best Pet of All*. David visits many schools around Minnesota and the Upper Midwest each year to talk about his books. He lives in White Bear Lake.

Learn more about the author at www.davidlarochelle.com



Minnesota Department of
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Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and Council of Regional Public Library Service Administrators (CRPLSA). Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

25TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH PATRICIA KIRKPATRICK

What inspired you to write *Odessa*?

In 2006 I received a writing fellowship and began traveling to western Minnesota to see and write about the prairie. A year later I was diagnosed with a brain tumor and underwent surgery for a non-malignant meningioma. As I recovered, my challenge was to link my experience with the subjects of history, natural history, and neuroscience. I became fascinated by the overlapping language of geography and anatomy: words like *core*, *current*, *stem*, *fissure*, *wall*, *map*, *dome*, *lobe*, *layer*, and *mantle*. I also wanted to put the Persephone myth in a Midwestern setting.

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I travelled and visited the prairie; I also read poetry, history, natural history, neuroscience, and memoirs about brain trauma and recovery.

What do you like most about this collection?

I'm pleased that *Odessa* uses a variety of forms and voices to explore what I once heard someone call experience at "the site of a tearing," whether personal or communal. For me *Odessa* is

a lyric notebook of voices "in extremis;" voices and utterances which, in the process of "changing the place home is," encounter wonder and terror and are forced to confront change.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I wrote poetry as a child, starting in second grade, under the influence of a wonderful teacher. Then for a long time, in high school and college, I didn't write at all. In my senior year of college I decided I wanted to be a poet. Since then there have been long, difficult periods of silence yet every major decision in my life has been influenced by the desire to write. I mostly have made my living as a teacher and an editor; I've also published essays, reviews, interviews, and curricula.

"For me *Odessa* is a lyric notebook of voices 'in extremis;' voices and utterances which, in the process of 'changing the place home is,' encounter wonder and terror and are forced to confront change."

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I moved here after college, understanding that writers were here. The literary community has grown in range, numbers, and diversity since then but writers and readers continue to be here, as well as libraries, museums, book stores, theaters, and support for the arts. I was active in Marly Rusoff's Dinkytown bookstore as the Loft was being formed; moved to San Francisco for ten years, then returned.

I've taught in various colleges, been a board member of the Loft and Saint Paul Almanac, and worked with writers in the Hmong, Dakota, and Somali communities. I appreciate the contributions of publications like *Water-Stone Review*, where I was poetry editor for ten years, *Hungry Mind Review*, and *Riverbank Review*. I've walked the prairie and swam in the lakes, and I've been fortunate to receive grants and fellowships for my work.

These experiences, landscapes, and communities have sustained me as a writer, deepened my commitment to language and literacy, and informed my understanding of how art can inform daily life.

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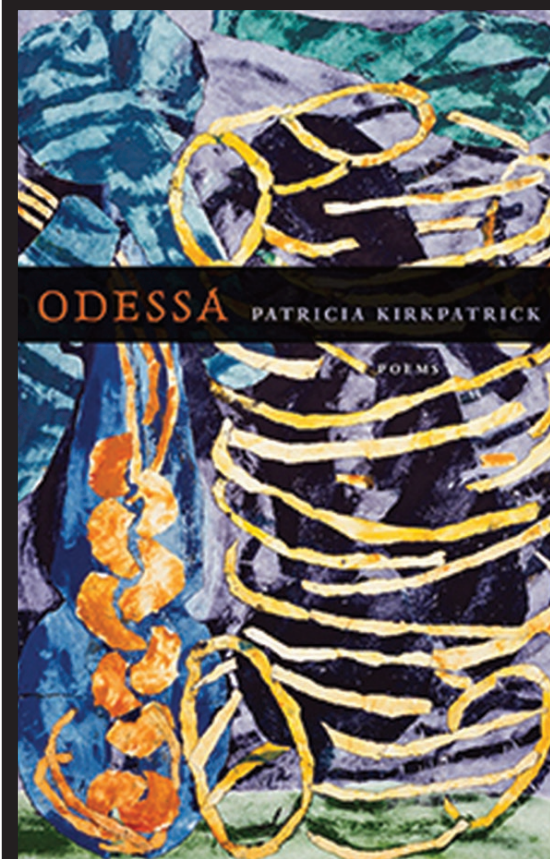
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Poetry Winner

Category sponsored by
Wellington Management, Inc.

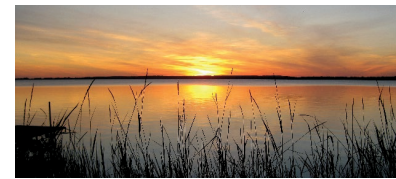


Odessa

by Patricia Kirkpatrick

MILKWEED EDITIONS

Odessa



SUMMARY

A grim prognosis, brain cancer, leaves the speaker in Partrica Kirkpatrick's *Odessa* fighting for her life. The tumor presses against her amygdalae, the "emotional core of the self," and central to the process of memory. In poems emotionally charged but void of sentimentality, Kirkpatrick creates from loss a dreamlike reality. *Odessa*, "roof of the underworld," a refuge at once real and imagined, resembles simultaneously the Midwestern prairie and a mythical god-inhabited city. In lines bearing shades of Classical heroism, Kirkpatrick delivers a personal narrative of stunning dimension.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where does your life experience intersect with the poems in *Odessa*?
2. What was your first association with the place name 'Odessa'? Does that association influence your reading of the book?
3. Choose a poem in *Odessa* that most compels or challenges you. What images stay with you from that poem?
4. In your own words, describe this book to a friend. What is *Odessa* about? What links the poems in the book? What about the book most surprised you?
5. What is the consequence of employing different pronouns or points of view in the book?
For example, some poems are written in the first person using the pronoun "I"; other poems are written in the third person using "she."
6. What unique questions does the topic of brain surgery bring up?
7. Where is the sound of the language in *Odessa* most exciting or musical for you?
8. Are you aware of various poetic forms in *Odessa*, such as free verse, the sonnet, or the blues? How do the various forms affect your reading of the poems?
9. How did *Odessa's* references to the Greek/Roman myth of Persephone affect your interpretation of the poems?
10. What did you learn about poetry and language from reading *Odessa*?

ABOUT PATRICIA KIRKPATRICK

The recipient of the first Lindquist & Vennum Prize for Poetry in



2012, Patricia Kirkpatrick is the author of *Century's Road*, as well as several chapbooks of poetry. Her work has appeared widely in journals, including *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Antioch Review*, and in several anthologies, among them *She Walks in Beauty: A Woman's Journey Through Poems*, edited by Caroline Kennedy.

Learn more about the author at www.patrickirkpatrick.com



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A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID HOUSEWRIGHT

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I take the research required to write my novels very seriously. Some authors will tell you that “it’s only fiction.” They’re wrong. It’s a real story about real people in the throes of real emotions. It becomes fiction when you put something on paper that makes readers stop and say, “That’s not right.”

For *Curse of The Jade Lily*, I studied international art theft, the efforts of insurance companies to retrieve stolen art, museums and their security systems, the history of jade, and so on. I also study investigative techniques of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, but after 15 books I’m starting to catch on.

What do you hope readers take away from *Curse of the Jade Lily*?

There’s an old saying: “If you are from where they are from and you are taught what they are taught, you’ll believe what they believe.” I work very hard to give readers a true sense of Minnesota and the people who live here.

What do you like most about your award-winning book?

I like to think that I deal with the same themes and issues that you will find in so-called “literary fiction”—political corruption, chronic unemployment, the dying of the Great Plains, institutional prostitution, family dysfunction, and much more. But I also hope that I combine this with a compelling story.

“Some authors will tell you that ‘it’s only fiction.’ They’re wrong. It’s a real story about real people in the throes of real emotions. It becomes fiction when you put something on paper that makes readers stop and say, ‘That’s not right.’”

Has writing always been a part of your life?*

Pretty much. I actually wrote my first book when I was in the sixth grade. It was called *Swinging Danger*. It was eight pages long — four chapters — all about a kid who builds a rope swing despite his parents’

objections, falls off, and breaks his wrist. And yes, like most first novels, it was highly autobiographical. I’ve been a writer ever since, working on my high school and college newspapers, working for the sports department of the Minneapolis Tribune at age eighteen, writing for other newspapers, then advertising copy and so on and so on.

What are you currently writing and/or what’s an inspiration you have for a future book?

I am always working on something new—look for *The Devil May Care* around June of 2014. As for inspiration—if you need inspiration, you’re in the wrong business.

What is your biggest dream for your writing career?

This is the dream—to keep writing and make a living at it.

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you’re not writing?

Well, baseball doesn’t watch itself.

*Question and answer from a *Wild River* Review interview with David Housewright.

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Genre Fiction Winner

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Marvin Windows and Doors

A McKenzie Novel

CURSE OF THE JADE LILY

DAVID HOUSEWRIGHT

EDGAR AWARD—WINNING AUTHOR OF *HIGHWAY 61*

Curse of the Jade Lily

by David Housewright

MINOTAUR BOOKS/ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

Curse of the Jade Lily

SUMMARY

In David Housewright's ninth novel in the award-winning P. I. Rushmore McKenzie crime series, thieves steal the 200-year-old Jade Lily from a Minneapolis art museum and then offer to sell it back for one third of its insured value — \$1.3 million. But there's a catch. They demand that unlicensed P. I. Rushmore McKenzie act as go-between.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature of obsession? Why would so many different people chase after the Jade Lily, knowing that ownership comes at such a steep price?
2. What do you think about Heavenly Petryk? Is she really as amoral as she seems?
3. What is McKenzie's motivation – not specifically for retrieving the Jade Lily, but overall?
4. What is your interpretation of Herzong? Do you believe him to be 'good' or 'bad'?
5. What theories did you have regarding the mystery? Who did you think stole the Jade Lily, and why?
6. Does Rushmore believe himself to be a “doer of good deeds?” How much of his gruff manner is an act? How much is self-delusion?
7. Do the allusions to places and things in Minnesota add to or take away from the story?
8. How does family figure into Rushmore's character?
9. Have you read other books in the series? How does following one character have an impact on

your understanding of the books? If you haven't, do you now feel compelled to do so?

10. Is the ending an honest reflection of true life?



ABOUT DAVID HOUSEWRIGHT



David Housewright has worked as a journalist covering both crime and sports; an advertising copywriter and creative director; and a writing instructor. He is a three-time Minnesota Book Award winner and has received the Edgar Award for his crime fiction.

Learn more about the author at www.davidhousewright.com



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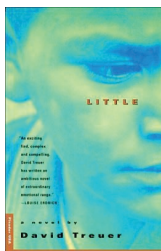
SUMMARY

Part memoir, part journalism, part history, this is novelist David Treuer's first full-length foray into the world of nonfiction, where his novelist sensibilities take *Rez Life* far beyond a clinical description of the confusing and generally misunderstood reservation system.

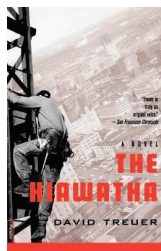
He covers the arrival of the European colonists to the birth and growth of the modern day system like all good histories should be told – as a story, infused with interviews with neighbors and anecdotes about growing up on Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota.

Through Treuer's own experiences and his extensive research, the reader begins to understand reservations as complex and ever-changing, and as an important entity on emotional, legal, and spiritual levels. We leave him knowing that – like the book itself – 'rez life' will always be resistant to any kind of categorization, and the people who live it are here to stay.

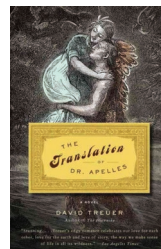
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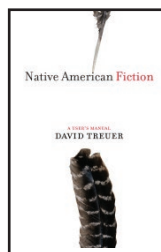
LITTLE
1995



THE HIAWATHA
1999



**THE TRANSLATION
OF DR. APELLES:
A LOVE STORY**
2006



**NATIVE AMERICAN FICTION:
A USER'S MANUAL**
2006

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General Nonfiction Winner

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An Indian's Journey Through Reservation Life

"Powerful, important reading."
—Kirkus Reviews

Rez

Life

DAVID TREUER

Rez Life:
An Indian's Journey Through Reservation Life

by David Treuer

ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS

Rez Life



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What problems do communities face on the reservations? Off? How have they changed?
2. What does 'sovereignty' mean for reservations, emotionally and legally, and what does it mean to you? Do all these definitions match? Should they?
3. What place do memories have in the book and in our own lives?
4. Where is the line between memory and history? Is it distinct? Is it important?

5. Have reservation issues touched your life? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. Family and heritage are clearly important in *Rez Life*. How do your relationships with your family and heritage dictate the manner in which you live your life? Does this feel like a responsibility or a blessing? Both?
7. Change is almost as hard to affect as it is to accept. What changes have reservations undergone since their inception? Do you think reservations should attempt more change? Where and why?
8. What role does the United States Government play in reservation politics?
9. Nationalism and a kind of isolationism are both themes in *Rez Life*. How do reservations provide community and support and how do they take it away?
10. Do you find the end of the book is ultimately uplifting? Why or why not?

ABOUT DAVID TREUER



Raised on Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota, the son of a holocaust survivor and a tribal court judge, David Treuer attended Princeton University after graduating from Bemidji high school. There he worked with authors Toni Morrison, Paul Muldoon, and Joanna Scott.

After graduating in 1992 he published his first novel, Little, in 1995, which was a recipient of a Minnesota Book Award. Since then he has had work published in Esquire, TriQuarterly, The Washington Post, the LA Times, and at Slate.com.

He has a PhD in anthropology and is a professor of literature and creative writing at USC, splitting his time in between Leech Lake Reservation and Los Angeles. His third novel, The Translation of Dr. Apelles, was named the Best Book of the Year by The Washington Post, TimeOut, and City Pages. He is the recipient of the Pushcart Prize, and fellowships from the NEH, Bush Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

Learn more about the author at www.davidtreuer.com



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A CONVERSATION WITH GEOFF HERBACH

What inspired you to write *Nothing Special*?

Nothing Special is the second book of three (*Stupid Fast*, *Nothing Special*, and *I'm With Stupid*) about this kid, Felton Reinstein. I was inspired to do the series because my almost-teenaged son suddenly grew a bunch, grew hair on his legs, and started smelling funky. At the same time, he flat-out stopped reading, which scared me. I decided to write something I thought he'd like.

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I visited the high school in the town where I grew up and asked a lot of questions of students about how they spend their time. I also drove around Fort Myers, Florida, where Felton and his brother end up, and took a lot of pictures, wrote down business names, walked the beach where they walk.

What interesting challenge did you encounter in writing this book?

Other than killing it by dropping my computer? I started writing the book from the little brother's perspective. I battled and battled to get his voice to work as a narrator. Turned out, he was too mature, knew himself too well, had already "come of age" so he was kind of lousy as a YA narrator.

How long did it take to write *Nothing Special*?

It took about a year, total. But...I went to New York for BookExpo America in May 2011 and dropped my computer, which destroyed my hard drive. I hadn't backed anything up. The entire manuscript for the book was on it. I rewrote the thing completely in a very, very dramatic and feverish three weeks in June!

"(My son) flat-out stopped reading, which scared me. I decided to write something I thought he'd like."

What do you hope your readers take away from your book?

Don't be reactionary. Remember, you're not the only one who has problems. Forgive. Love what you do.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I first decided I'd like to be a writer in fifth grade. My first book was published twenty-seven years later, so it worked out. In some ways, *Nothing Special* is about my journey to publication. I had to learn not to write to be published, but because I love writing. Only then was I good enough to get published.

What is your biggest dream, for your writing career and/or another aspect of your life?

I guess I never thought I'd get this far. I'm really excited to keep working, to see what comes.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I love playing Frisbee with my kids, going for runs, and eating enormous amounts of food with Steph, my wife, in several moderately priced Mankato restaurants.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I was already thirty when I stumbled into a class at The Loft. If not for The Loft, I wouldn't be writing at all. I found a hugely supportive, hugely smart writing community at Hamline soon after. Now I teach in the MFA program at Minnesota State, Mankato. These Minnesota institutions have given me the education and encouragement to be a writer. Huge!

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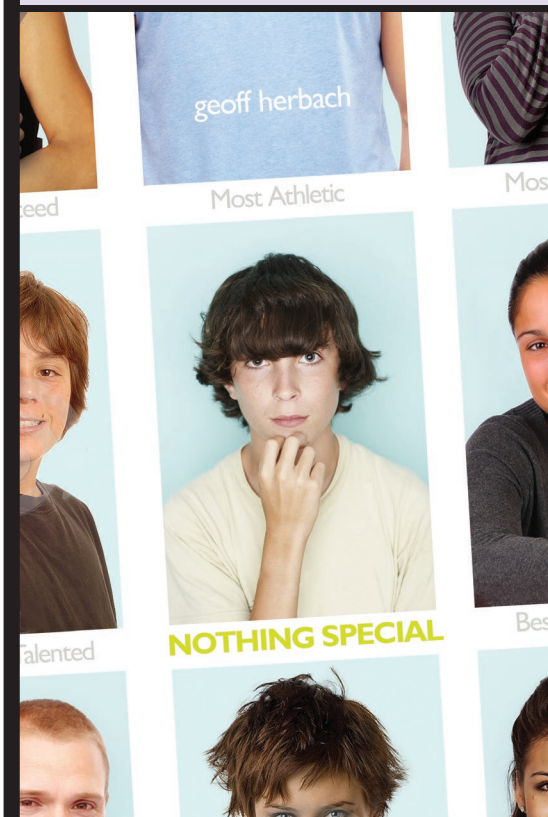
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Young People's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Sit Investment Associates



Nothing Special

by Geoff Herbach

SOURCEBOOKS FIRE/SOURCEBOOKS, INC

Nothing Special



SUMMARY

The second installment in Geoff Herbach's *Stupid Fast* series, *Nothing Special* continues the story of star athlete Felton Reinstein over the summer as he travels to Florida to find his brother. Told completely in letters written by Felton to his girlfriend, Aleah, Felton's travels help him to slowly realize that the things he does and the things that are happening to him are not without consequence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In chapter two Felton gets very excited when the plane takes off. What does this say about who he is?
2. In what ways does Felton lose his identity in the first 60 pages of the book?
3. What is Felton wrestling with when he wonders if Peyton Manning would skip football practices to help his little brother?
4. What does Felton learn from being in Nashville?
5. How are Tovi and Felton similar? How are they different? Does Felton have anything to learn from Tovi?
6. Why do you think Andrew wrote fake emails to Felton?
7. What does Felton learn from his bus trip? What does he get from his short relationship with Renee?
8. Why do you think both Grandpa Stan and Felton act so crazily on the tennis court? What's driving their behavior?
9. Is it okay for someone to consider himself nothing special?
10. How does Felton change during the course of the book?



ABOUT GEOFF HERBACH



Geoff Herbach is the author of the award-winning Stupid Fast YA series. His books won the 2011 Cybils Award for best YA novel, were selected for the Junior Library Guild, and listed in the year's best by the American Library Association, the American Booksellers Association, and many state library associations. Geoff teaches creative writing at Minnesota State, Mankato. He lives in a log cabin with a tall wife.

Learn more about the author at www.geoffherbach.com



Minnesota Department of
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25TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH GWEN WESTERMAN AND BRUCE WHITE

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

Gwen did extensive interviews with Dakota elders throughout Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Canada. Bruce did archival research in Minnesota, Washington, D.C., and Canada on written sources on the Dakota people and their connection to the land. Both of us were aided by a number of other people in the work.

“Minnesota is a Dakota place, resonant with the history and experiences of the Dakota people.”

How long did it take?

The research was begun in 2008, under one grant. In 2010 we received a second grant from another source that funded the writing. The major work of writing the book was completed by early 2012. So in all it took more than four years.

What interesting challenges did you encounter while writing *Mni Sota Makoce*?

Westerman: Working with so many sources was interesting, especially when our Dakota oral histories challenged the “established” histories that had been accepted as authoritative sources of the story of our people. It took a number of intense discussions with our research teams to come to an understanding that

this book was to be presented from the Dakota perspective.

White: The most interesting challenge was to overcome the pre-conceptions I had about Dakota history. Much of what had been written about the Dakota people and their connection to Minnesota was simplistic and some of it was wrong. Making a real attempt to look at the history of Minnesota from the point of view of Dakota people was an important challenge. Working with Dakota people throughout the process of writing this book was an important way for me to attain a better understanding of Dakota history in Minnesota.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

Westerman: My earliest memory of writing was scribbling in a book that had questions at the end of each story with lines for the answers. My high school teachers encouraged me to go to college for journalism, and I was part of the editing class for our high school poetry publication. And I always loved to write letters (and still do). I became a technical writer and then a teacher of writing, and kept journals as well as wrote poetry.

White: I have always wanted to be a writer since I was a child. In high school I wrote for my school newspaper. I also kept journals, wrote essays and short stories, and wrote drafts of a few novels. It was not until my late twenties that I began to think of writing about history as a creative process.

What do you most like about the book?

It was very gratifying to find a publisher in the Minnesota Historical Society Press that believed in what we were doing and helped us to make it better.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

Westerman: While my family roots are deep in the Minnesota landscape as the descendant of Dakota people, I was not born here and moved to Mankato in 1991. I felt an instant connection to this place as home. The landscape is prominent in my writing and art, and the cultural heritage of my ancestors and my family is all around me in the history and place names of Minnesota.

White: I have lived in Minnesota since high school. I realized soon after coming to live here that the Native American history of this region was not widely taught or understood by non-Indian people. Over the years I have had the good fortune to be able to work with Indigenous communities throughout the state and this has nurtured my own knowledge of the region, giving me a new perspective on every place I visit when traveling in the state.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children’s Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People’s Literature



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A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

25th Annual



Minnesota Winner

Category sponsored by
Meyer, Scherer and Rockcastle

Mni Sota Makoce

THE LAND
of the
DAKOTA

GWEN WESTERMAN & BRUCE WHITE

Mni Sota Makoce:
The Land of the Dakota

by Gwen Westerman and Bruce White

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS



Mni Sota Makoce



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you learn about the Dakota people in school and how is it different from what is presented in this book?
2. Did you know that the name Minnesota is a Dakota name and that this was the homeland of Dakota people?
3. Are there any Dakota cultural and village sites or burial places near where you live? Have they been protected or interpreted in the history of your community?
4. How have the multiple stories presented in this book affected the way you think about Dakota history and culture?
5. What is the significance of storytelling and the oral tradition in preserving a culture—why do people tell stories? Do stories play an important role in your family?
6. Did you know that there was a Dakota language version of the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux? What do you think about the comparisons between the original English version and the translation of the Dakota version?
7. What have the oral histories and early maps added to your understanding of the way Dakota people thought about the land?
8. Do you tend to identify more with land areas defined by political boundaries or areas defined by natural features? Discuss your personal connections to the places that you know well.
9. To what extent do things such as weather, terrain, and the history of a place shape the culture and the day-to-day lives of individuals who live there? How does the physical nature of the land affect cultural values and mindsets?
10. What is the value of understanding and having connection to one's family and geographical origins over several generations? How might learning about something significant and troubling in your family's history change you?

SUMMARY

The Dakota phrase, *Mni Sota Makoce*, Land Where the Waters Reflect the Clouds, gives the state of Minnesota its name. In this examination of the history of the Dakota people and their deep cultural connection to their homeland, authors Gwen Westerman and Bruce White examine narratives of the people's origins, their associations with the land, and the seasonal round through key players and place names.

ABOUT GWEN WESTERMAN AND BRUCE WHITE



Gwen Westerman, an enrolled member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, is Professor in English and Director of Humanities at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and currently serves as the Executive Director of the Native American Literature Symposium.



Independent historian and anthropologist, Bruce White researches and writes for Indian tribes and government agencies. He is the author of We Are at Home: Pictures of the Ojibwe People, a 2008 Minnesota Book Awards finalist.

Learn more about the author's work at MinnesotaHistory.net



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25TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

A CONVERSATION WITH ATINA DIFFLEY

What inspired you to write *Turn Here Sweet Corn*?

I've had opportunities that are no longer common in our food and farming culture. I wanted to share them and the spiritual aspect of our relationship with the land that feeds us. I wanted to capture the realities of farming life without romanticizing it.

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

For the legal proceeding with the MinnCan pipeline I used court documents and emails from my attorney. The Minnesota Historical Society has archives on organic certification and food co-op history. My mother kept twenty-five years of letters written between her and my grandmother. I interviewed many people who were involved with the food co-ops and organic farming, including my husband, Martin, who has an excellent memory.

How long did it take you to write *Turn Here Sweet Corn*?

Eighteen focused months. I had to learn about writing as I moved through the process and I took classes at The Loft Literary Center. My basic guide was: *What happened? How did I feel then? How do I feel now?*

What do you like most about the book?

I love the kale scenes. Who knew kale could be an active character and a literary metaphor! The accessibility of emotion in the writing allows the reader to feel the characters' experiences and it gives them a jolt. Oh, and hail and clothesline poles and soil and—of course—sweet corn.

"I've had opportunities that are no longer common in our food and farming culture. I wanted to share them and the spiritual aspect of our relationship with the land that feeds us."

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

Writing *Turn Here Sweet Corn* was a cathartic process of self-discovery. My sub-conscious provided the direction for what stories belonged in the book. My conscious mind was the editor who took care of details like word choice and sentence structure. They made a fantastic team as long as they respected each other and stuck to their roles.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

The first drafts had very little personal story; I thought it was self-indulgent and arrogant to write about myself. Teachers at The Loft told me that readers needed to know how I felt, but I didn't understand that, I thought the book was about the farm. Then I had to figure out how to write about my children and other people in a way that respected their privacy yet told the story. I realized I wasn't telling other people's stories, nor the farm's story, but my own, and I had to write from my perspective and experience as their mother, or wife, or whatever relationship we had.

What are you currently writing and what's an inspiration you have for a future book?

I'm working on a prequel to *Turn Here Sweet Corn* that tells the story of the market-garden community of Eagan/Inver Grove in the 1950s and 1960s and how growing up in the midst of it affected my husband Martin as an early organic farmer. It's also a personal memoir about multi-generational patterns with the narrative arc of my matriarchal lineage—that's the really hard one.

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Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner

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TURN HERE →
SWEET
CORN

ORGANIC FARMING WORKS

ATINA DIFFLEY

Turn Here Sweet Corn:
Organic Farming Works

by Atina Diffley

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS



Turn Here Sweet Corn



SUMMARY

Turn Here Sweet Corn is a master class in organic farming, a lesson in entrepreneurship, a love story, and a legal thriller. In telling her story of working the land, Atina Diffley reminds us that we live in relationships—with the earth, plants and animals, families and communities. A memoir of making these essential relationships work in the face of challenges from weather to corporate politics, this is a firsthand history of getting in at the “ground level” of organic farming.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tell about a place in nature that you've connected with.
2. Tell about a loss you've experienced, and if reading *Turn Here Sweet Corn* was healing for you.

3. What do you think about Atina's definition of a farm as a synthesis of the land, the people, and the business? How does this definition dictate our human role in the farm synthesis and our responsibilities to the land and the business?
4. What is the difference between a farm family and a family farming? Why does it matter to Atina? Does it matter to you?
5. What did Atina learn from Grandma and Anita? How were they different from each other? Why are role models so important and how do you serve as a model to others?
6. What can you do in your life to improve your food relationship with the land and nature that feeds you?
7. What impact do the Twin Cities natural food co-ops have on the success of the farmers from whom they buy?
8. What does it mean to steal from our future and burn up the past? Why does it matter? What does Atina mean when she says, “That’s what present time is, the balancing point between the past and the future.”
9. Do you think organic farms are a valuable natural resource? What eco-system services do they provide beyond the food produced?
10. Has reading *Turn Here Sweet Corn* affected your values, beliefs, or future actions? If so, how?



ABOUT ATINA DIFFLEY

Atina Diffley is an organic farmer, public speaker, and author. From 1985 to 2008, she and her husband Martin ran the Gardens of



Eagan, an urban-edge, organic vegetable farm, which he started in 1973. The Diffley's on-farm projects now include breeding of sweet corn cultivars, mentoring beginning farmers, and transitioning conventional land to organic.

Subscribe to Atina's online blog at www.atinadiffley.com



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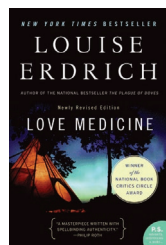
SUMMARY

One Sunday in the spring of 1988, a woman living on a reservation in North Dakota is attacked. The details of the crime are slow to surface as Geraldine Coutts is traumatized and reluctant to relive or reveal what happened, either to the police or to her husband, Bazil, and thirteen-year-old son, Joe.

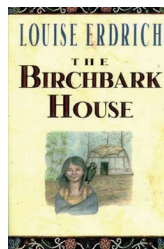
While Bazil, who is a tribal judge, endeavors to wrest justice from a situation that defies his efforts, Joe becomes frustrated with official investigation and sets out with his trusted friends, Cappy, Zack, and Angus, to get some answers of their own.

In this *New York Times* Bestseller and National Book Award winning novel, Louise Erdrich embraces tragedy, the comic, a spirit world very much present in the lives of her all-too-human characters, and a tale of injustice that is, unfortunately, an authentic reflection of what happens in our own world today.

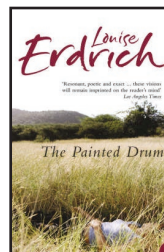
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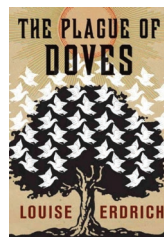
LOVE MEDICINE
(Adult Fiction)
1984



THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE
(Children's Literature)
1999



THE PAINTED DRUM
(Adult Fiction)
2006



THE PLAGUE OF DOVES
(Adult Fiction)
2008

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New York Times
Bestseller



A Novel

LOUISE
ERDRICH
~~~~~  
*The* ROUND  
HOUSE

***The Round House***

by Louise Erdrich

HARPER/HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS

# The Round House



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Much of *The Round House* is written from the perspective of thirteen-year-old Joe. How well do you think Erdrich takes on the voice of a teenage boy? Why do you think she chose not to use multiple voices, as she has in many of her other novels?
2. The round house is a sacred space on the reservation. What does it mean to you that the violence against Joe's mother takes place there?
3. How do Mooshum's stories of Akii and Nanapush add to the narrative? In what ways do you think they inspire Joe on his quest?
4. In many ways, *The Round House* is a coming-of-age story. What are some of the typical elements of a coming-of-age story and how do they fit this book? In particular, how do the relationships between Joe and his parents and Joe and Sonja fit into this theme?
5. Actual and perceived betrayals come up many times in the novel. Discuss how Joe may feel betrayed by his parents and by the tribal authorities, and whether you think these betrayals influenced his actions.
6. Louise Erdrich said that she was inspired by the legacy of violence against Native women and the inability of tribes to prosecute non-natives on their own land. How would the story have been different if Joe's tribe had had sovereignty to prosecute the attack against his mother?
7. Did the reflective passages from an older Joe influence your reading of the story? If so, how?
8. At the end of the book, when Joe's parents are driving him home and they don't stop at the roadside café, Erdrich writes "We passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into our small forever. We just kept going." Do you think they recover from the trauma and guilt of that summer? If so, why?
9. *The Round House* returns to the same territory as *The Plague of Doves*. If you have read *The Plague of Doves*, do you feel it adds more to this story, and why?
10. The strong friendship between Joe and Cappy is an important through-line in the novel. How do they each approach the plan to get even with Lark? Why do you think Erdrich ends the novel as she does?

## ABOUT LOUISE ERDRICH



*Louise Erdrich is a Native American author of novels, short stories, nonfiction, poetry, and children's books. The eldest of seven children, she was born in Little Falls, Minnesota, to parents Ralph Erdrich, a German-American, and Rita Erdrich, of Ojibwe and French descent. Louise grew up in Wahpeton, North Dakota where her parents taught at the Bureau of Indian Affairs School. The oral tradition of Ojibwe storytelling was a part of Louise's*

*life, as were the stories her father told about his family. She has said that listening to her family's stories has in some ways been her most significant literary influence. Both parents encouraged Louise and her siblings to write, her father paying a nickel apiece for their stories.*

*Erdrich earned her BA from Dartmouth College in 1976 and her MA from Johns Hopkins University in 1979. Her literary career has included serving as visiting poet and teacher at the North Dakota State Arts Council, writing instructor at Johns Hopkins University, poetry teacher in prisons, and communications director and editor of *The Circle*, a newspaper produced for and by the Native population in Boston.*

*During the period of 1978-1982, she published many poems and short stories. Her first novel, *Love Medicine*, was published in 1984, followed by *The Beet Queen* in 1986. Erdrich has won many national and local awards for her writing, including five Minnesota Book Awards. *The Round House* also won the National Book Award for Fiction.*

*Erdrich is the 2013 recipient of the annual A. P. Anderson Award, an award that recognizes significant contributions to the cultural and artistic life of Minnesota.*



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