

The Antelope Wife Short Guide

The Antelope Wife by Louise Erdrich

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Characters

Scranton Roy is the son of a Quaker father and a reclusive poet mother. When a traveling drama troupe visits his Pennsylvania community in the nineteenth century, Scranton is smitten by a tall, slender blonde actress who wants nothing to do with him. Angry at her rejection, Scranton enlists in the U. S. Cavalry in St. Paul, Minnesota. After training, his company marches west and raids an Ojibwa village.

Despite Scranton's Quaker heritage, he takes part in the indiscriminate killing and bayonets an old woman. As he pulls the bayonet from her body, he sees his own mother in her. Disgusted with his own savagery, Scranton runs away, but as he flees, he sees a dog with a baby strapped to its body.

After pursuing the dog for several days, he befriends it and begins to care for the baby, whom he nurses as if he were female. Abandoning the army, Scranton builds a sod house for himself and the baby, whom he names Matilda after his mother. When Matilda Roy is old enough for school, she is attracted to her teacher, Peace McKnight, whom Scranton Roy brings into his house and marries. After Matilda's mother, Blue Prairie Woman, comes for her, Matilda Roy leaves Roy, who is saddened by the loss.

However, he has a son with Peace McKnight, who is weakened from the "mottled skin sickness" and dies from a protracted labor.

Roy not only puffs air into the baby's lungs but nurses his son Augustus, just as he has earlier nursed Matilda. Years later, when he is an old man, Roy takes most of his possessions and his grandson, Augustus, and attempts to find the tribe he raided forty years before. Erdrich never mentions any of Scranton Roy's other activities or his end, so that his character, as depicted by the scenes portraying it, is a tracing of passions, from rejected love, to hatred, to love again through Matilda, to an attempt at restitution for his part in killing innocent people.

Blue Prairie Woman is the mother of both Matilda Roy and the twins Zosie and Mary.

According to Cally Whiteheart Beads, who is Blue Prairie Woman's Shewano grandmother, Blue Prairie Woman is called "So Hungry" by her tribe because of her insatiable hunger. Devastated by the loss of Matilda during the cavalry raid on her village, Blue Prairie Woman is so miserable that the tribe renames her "Other Side of the Earth." Seven years later, unable to bear the loss of her baby, Blue Prairie Woman walks west in search of her daughter, leaving her twins to be raised by their grandmother, Midass. Accompanying her is a dog, Sorrow, that she nursed to ease the pain in her breasts when Matilda disappeared during the raid. When Blue Prairie Woman finds Scranton Roy and Matilda, she leaves with Matilda without Roy's knowledge; however, Matilda carries the mottled skin disease that quickly kills Blue Prairie Woman. Before her death, Blue Prairie Woman kills the dog Sorrow that she fed with her own mother-milk; Sorrow's flesh will provide food for her daughter. Blue Prairie



Woman also gives her daughter the same second name she was given by her tribe, "Other Side of the Earth," a name which will be a key to Matilda's destiny.

After her mother's death, Matilda, who is now "Other Side of the Earth," feeds on the dog that drank her mother's milk and lives and travels with a herd of antelope, whom she interests. For Erdrich, Matilda becomes the prototype of the antelope woman, a woman with grace, beauty, and wild passion. Erdrich never specifically states what happens to Matilda after her journey with the antelope, but the fact that her story is known by the Ojibwa suggests that eventually she rejoins the tribe. Her name and her mother's name are given to later daughters of the tribe.

Zosie Roy, the wife of Augustus Roy, and her sister, Mary, are identical twins.

Although Augustus Roy is married to Zosie, he also tries to have an affair with Mary.

Problems arise when he has difficulty identifying the woman with whom he is making love. At first, Augustus can differentiate between the twins because their hair "whirlwinds" spiral in opposing directions.

However, the twins have paradoxical emotions about their relationship with Augustus. Each wants him to recognize her individuality, yet each refuses to allow him the means for that recognition. To keep Augustus from recognizing them by their hair, they arrange their hair in new patterns.

When Augustus gives Zosie a gold ring, she senses its purpose and only wears it once. Then, Augustus tries burning each sister in hopes of producing an identifying scar, but his "accidents" never permanently mark the twins. Missing the communion of "twinship," Mary and Zosie resent the separation that Augustus has caused. Finally, when the frustrated Augustus marks Zosie's earlobe when he nearly bites it off during an act of love, the sisters respond by making him disappear, presumably by eating him.

As older women, Zosie and Mary's resistance to identification extends to Rozina Whiteheart Beads and her daughter, Cally.

Rumors abound of their existence and their residence, making it nearly impossible for Cally to find them, to know which one she addresses, or even which one is her real grandmother. Both do ornamental bead work, and as Erdrich describes their weaving and sewing, they appear as the fateful bead workers of the Ojibwa myths.

Klaus Shawano, the brother of Frank and Cecille Shawano and the husband of Sweetheart Calico, is one of the most frequent first-person narrators in Erdrich's novel since four of the 23 narratives bear his romantic perspective. Born during World War II, Klaus takes his first name from a German prisoner of war. The reader meets Klaus at a powwow where he works part-time as a trader selling jewelry and other works of craftsmen. When he first sees Sweetheart Calico and her three grown daughters, Klaus experiences an intense longing much like a romantic love based not only on attraction but on barriers and separation. Through enticements, Klaus separates the mother from her daughters and takes her east with him to Minneapolis, literally binding her with the



fabric sweetheart calico. In part Sweetheart Calico is Klaus's prisoner; in part she is imprisoned by the city. Because their love is mutually destructive, they both become alcoholics. Klaus, who loses his job at an Indian-owned sanitation company, pursues a vagrant life under freeway underpasses when Sweetheart Calico leaves him. When a sober Klaus helps his wife to leave Minneapolis for the west, he frees himself from alcoholism and her from an urban life that crushes her spirit.

Sweetheart Calico is the mother of three daughters and the wife of Klaus Shawano, but more important to the story, she is one of the antelope women. Such women, says Jimmy Badger, an old medicine man, "appear and disappear. Some men follow the antelope and lose their minds." When Klaus Shawano takes her away from a western powwow to Minneapolis, he separates her not only from her daughters but from the land and existence she loves. The only cure for their all-consuming but destructive love, for Klaus's alcoholism and for Sweetheart Calico's misery is Klaus's willingness to give Sweetheart Calico her freedom.

Through tears Klaus watches her "slender back, quick legs" and "staggered leaps" as Sweetheart Calico enters the western wilderness which rescues her from the overwhelming emphasis on the commodification of life in a materialistic Minneapolis.

Rozina Whiteheart Beads is one of few Erdrich characters who makes a successful transition from Indian reservation to white metropolis; she is a teacher and then a lawyer. The wife of Richard Whiteheart Beads, whom she divorces, Rozina later becomes the wife of Frank Shawano. With Richard Whiteheart Beads, Rozina has twin daughters: Deanna, who dies in childhood, and Cally. When Frank Shawano develops cancer and is not expected to live, Rozina plans to live with Frank and care for him during his illness. Her husband Richard, who is grief stricken, tries to commit suicide by breathing the carbon monoxide from his truck. Although Richard changes his mind, Deanna, their daughter, crawls into the truck when he abandons it, falls asleep, and dies. While Rozina blames Richard for Deanna's death, she blames herself as well.

She not only separates herself from Richard, but from Frank, who recovers from cancer. Many years later Rozina marries Frank, but on her wedding night, Richard shoots and kills himself. Despite the shocks of her daughter's death and Richard's suicide, Rozina's marriage to Frank works. For both of the men who love her, Rozina evokes the kind of passion felt by the men who love the antelope women.

Frank Shawano is the older brother of Klaus and Cecille and the second husband of Rozina Whiteheart Beads. During World War II the Ojibwa kidnap a German prisoner of war whom they plan to kill to make up for the death of one of their men during the war. To win his freedom, the German bakes a blitzkuchen, a cake so delicious that the tribe not only lets the German go free, but adopts him. Baking this cake becomes an ideal for Frank when he becomes a baker.

He attempts the cake many times, but his most successful blitzkuchen is the wedding cake he bakes for his own wedding, when he discovers the cake's missing ingredient, fear. The most common image of Frank is feeding others; he has a talent for love that is



evident in his relation to Rozina, his brother Klaus, his brother's wife Sweetheart Calico, and Rozina's children. He provides for others, but he manages to preserve their dignity while helping them.

Cancer temporarily kills the easy laughter of this nurturing man, but the laughter is reborn when Rozina presents herself as a surprise—and very personal—anniversary present for him at the same time as he arranges a surprise party for her.

Richard Whiteheart Beads, the first husband of Rozina and the father of Deanna and Cally, has worked as a sanitation engineer. Because Richard frames Klaus for illegal dumping on tribal lands, Klaus is falsely arrested by federal agents. On learning of Rozina's plan to leave him for Frank, Richard's obsession with Rozina and his drunken behavior lead to his daughter Deanna's accidental death. Planning to asphyxiate himself, he is responsible for Deanna's asphyxiation when she hides in the truck running in his garage. Richard accepts the blame for Deanna's death, but his guilt as well as his separation from Rozina lead him to alcoholism. When, after many years, Frank and Rozina finally marry, Richard interrupts the wedding with a second failed suicide attempt when he almost jumps over a cliff. On the night of Rozina and Frank's wedding, Richard finally succeeds in killing himself: he shoots himself in front the hotel door of the newlyweds. Once Deanna is dead and his wife leaves him, Richard's life is virtually determined, but this destined end is entirely his own choice. As the omniscient narrator of the last section of the novel says, Richard "would have died in his sleep on his eighty-fifth birthday, sober, of a massive stroke, had his self-directed pistol shot glanced a centimeter higher."

Cally Whiteheart Beads, who, when eighteen, calls herself Cally Roy, is Deanna's twin sister. Cally misses Deanna deeply, and nearly a year after Deanna's death Cally almost dies herself from an unnamed fever while she lives with her mother and her grandmothers on the reservation. At eighteen, seeking more freedom, Cally goes to live with Frank Shawano and works for him at his bakery. Her presence leads to the reunion of her mother and Frank and their eventual marriage. While living with Frank, Cally develops a sisterly relationship to Frank Shawano's baby sister, Cecille.

Though Cecille, a kung fu teacher, is older than Cally, Cecille partially fills the role that Deanna once had in Cally's life. Like Klaus, Cally is a frequent narrator; she delivers four of the twenty-three narratives.

As a child she describes her discovery of her mother's illicit life with Frank. As a young adult she describes her mother's reunion with Frank and the preparations for their marriage. Her attempt to discuss the secret of her naming with her grandmothers leads to the discovery of both her and Deanna's true names; she is Blue Prairie Woman and Deanna is "Other Side of the Earth."

The most unusual character as well as the most unusual narrator is Cally's dog, "Almost Soup." Saved by Cally's love from becoming dinner, the dog addresses an audience of his peers with humorous tips for survival among the dog-eating Ojibwa. "Almost Soup" ties together several ideas in the text: hunger and unusual foods, such as father's milk,

dog flesh and human flesh; Cally's almost fatal illness after Deanna's death; and Rozina's reactions to Deanna's death and Cally's illness.

Social Concerns

The action of Louise Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife*, which spans more than a century, traces guilt and love through several generations of three families, the Roys, the Shawanos and the Whiteheart Beads. One of the character-narrators of the novel, Cally Whiteheart Beads, summarizes the novel as follows: Family stories repeat themselves in patterns and waves generation to generation, across bloods and times. Once the pattern is set we go on replicating it. Here on the handle the vines and leaves of infidelities.

There, a suicidal tendency, a fatal wish.

On this side drinking. On the other a repression of guilt that finally explodes.

The novel begins in the latter part of the nineteenth century when Quaker Scranton Roy enlists in the U. S. Cavalry after being spurned by a woman he desires. As his company enters an Ojibwa village, Roy's contempt for the Indians escalates to frigid hate, and he bayonets an old woman. Tugging at the bayonet in her wound, he envisions his own mother instead of the Indian and runs away. As Roy runs, he sees a dog with a child on its back escaping from the village. After many days he befriends the dog and nurtures the child, whom he miraculously nurses and raises as his daughter, Matilda Roy. When Roy marries Peace McKnight, a school teacher, and Matilda and Peace bond as if they were sisters, the family seems complete. Meanwhile, however, the girl's birth mother, Blue Prairie Woman, has survived the cavalry raid and is tormented with longing for her missing child. Years later, when Matilda is seven, Blue Prairie Woman abandons her twin daughters to find the daughter who has been lost to her. Despite the passage of time, Matilda instinctively recognizes that Blue Prairie Woman is her mother, and without hesitation she leaves the father who has nursed her. The bond between mother and daughter is closer than that between father and child.

Years later, tormented by guilt for his part in the raid and his continued longing for Matilda, Roy and his grandson Augustus bring an offering of Scranton's possessions to assist the Ojibwa. Augustus falls in love with an Ojibwa girl, Zosie, and her identical twin, Mary.

The story of *The Antelope Wife*, is a paradigm of narratives, all of which involve either rejection in love, or a love based on romantic longing either for a child or lover, or hatred of oneself or of others. These passions are not confined to one generation but seem to be an action of an inherited fate covering many generations. Erdrich begins each of the four parts of her novel with myths of female twins who, sewing patterns with colored beads and quills, are similar to the Greek fates creating the patterns of future lives. The novel opens with a brief myth, "Bayzhig:"

Ever since the beginning these twins are sewing. One sews with light and one with dark. The first twin's beads are cut-glass whites and pales, and the other twin's beads are glittering deep red and blueblack indigo. One twin uses an awl made of an otter's



sharpened penis bone, the other uses that of a bear. They sew with a single sinew thread, in, out, fast and furious, each trying to set one more bead into the pattern than her sister, each trying to upset the balance of the world.

In the "Niswey" myth, the blue and green quills are identified with the grandmother of the Shawano family; two of her descendants, Frank and Klaus, are major characters who love women through separation and longing. In the "Neewin" myth, the "whiteheart beads" receive their ruby-red color from the addition of molten gold. Because they are drawn to the beads' color, "bright as summer berries," the beader's children eat the beads and keep the beader from completing her design; thus, the beader kills her children. Later, these beads are identified with another lover, Richard Whiteheart Beads, and the myth foretells the death of Deanna, one of his twin daughters.

Most of the action of the novel occurs in Minneapolis between the end of World War II and the 1990s. Unlike previous Erdrich novels, where misery for full-blood and mixed-blood Indians seems to be associated with cities, in *The Antelope Wife* the Native American characters seem to live successful lives as part of a larger urban society—as lawyers, bakers, and sanitation engineers.

Like European immigrants who carry their European heritage into their American identities, Erdrich's Ojibwa are also influenced by their Native American roots. In *The Antelope Wife* the contemporary Ojibwa are shaped by passionate longings influenced by the past even as they pursue contemporary urban careers.



Techniques

In an essay in *American Literature*, Catherine Rainwater isolated several characteristics in Erdrich's novels that make them different from the typical American novel.

In *The Antelope Wife*, for example, while time is present, ceremonial time is more important. Readers will find that establishing historical sequences in any kind of chronological order in *The Antelope Wife* is difficult. Instead of presenting scenes according to chronology, Erdrich presents them according to theme; thus, various story lines are interrupted to bring in new characters or events which relate to the theme rather than to the narrative order.

Marriages and divorces and powwows seem to operate tunelessly. Because of Erdrich's use of tribal kinship, readers are frustrated when trying to determine family relations in an era of the nuclear family. Thus, Frank Shawano nurtures Sweetheart Calico and Cally Roy whether or not they are clear family relatives. Instead of a central character or hero or heroine, Erdrich develops approximately a dozen characters but infuses them with no sense of priority or privilege. Male characters are no more important than female characters, although most of the women are stronger than the men. In *The Antelope Wife*, no central character demands our sympathy in the way that characters such as Huck Finn or Tom Jones do.

Instead of a clearly marked narrative point of view or authorial perspective, Erdrich uses four first-person narrators, Klaus Shawano, Cally Roy, Rozina Whiteheart Beads, and the dog, Almost Soup, as well as omniscient first- and third-person narration. Thus, establishing what is true in the novel becomes a real challenge, particularly when the reader realizes that some stories have been told and retold many times, such as the stories regarding Scranton Roy and his grandson Augustus. Fabulous incidents from myths and folk tales, such as Scranton Roy's nursing Matilda and his son, and female characters such as Blue Prairie Woman's having a deer husband, are mixed with day to day real events so that Erdrich establishes a baffling but rich reality.

Erdrich's symbolic art has always been rich in her novels, and *The Antelope Wife* is no exception. Story elements melt down to symbolic details, such as Erdrich's subtle identification of several female characters with the antelope. Thus Erdrich emphasizes in her descriptions of Sweetheart Calico or Matilda physical descriptions of legs and haunches and similarities between the antelope's movements and theirs. Matilda's needs as a baby make Scranton Roy desperate in caring for her. Eventually the baby's hope for nourishment leads to father's milk, as Scranton Roy replaces his careless hatred of Indians with love for a specific Indian child. The concern for naming and the skills of the namer are a part of this symbolic method, since the Ojibwa true names are keys to identity. The names seem to operate in harmony with the header women who are Ojibwa fates determining a character's destiny.

The four mythic sections of the novel, which describe the action of two women whose ornamental bead and quill work is an analogue to the Greek fates, introduce a structural

element to *The Antelope Wife* that is unique to this novel. In previous novels, Erdrich has followed one or two characters in one of her story chapters. In *The Antelope Wife* a chapter is woven of more than one story line. "Northwest Trader Blue," Chapter 18 of the novel, begins with a Christmas description by Cally of her grandmothers, but it is interwoven with patches of the story of Augustus's love for Zosie and Mary, Rozina's cooking, a description of the dinner table, and Zosie's stories about the blue beads. The chapter ends with a description of Sweetheart Calico's desire to leave Minneapolis, a description which may actually be a dream by Cally. Erdrich forces her readers to make connections between the disparate story lines of her novel. Thus, the weaving symbol becomes a narrative strategy of weaving story lines.

Themes

Erdrich traces several passions through several generations. Anger at rejection, guilt, and longing appear to be fated for many of her characters. Just as Yeats in "Among School Children" questions how to tell the dancer from the dance, Erdrich's first-person omniscient narrator, at the end of the novel, questions: Did these occurrences have a paradigm in the settlement of old scores and pains and betrayals that went back in time? Or are we working out the minor details of a strictly random pattern? Who is beading us? Who is setting flower upon flower and cut-glass vine? Who are you and who am I, the beader or the bit of colored glass sewn onto the fabric of earth?" As with Yeats, the question is unanswered, although threads of connection tie many characters together.

Female twins abound in this novel: two sets of identical twins named Zosie and Mary; Rozina and her undescribed twin sister who has died; and Deanna and Cally.

The unidentified beaders in the four mythic sections of the novel are twins as well.

Rozina and Cally long for their missing twins, while the second generation Zosie and Mary twins resist separate identification by others. The relationship of twins in the novel is stronger than any bond that any of these women might have with others. In fact, all relationships between women are stronger than relationships which contain men, whether be it between husband and wife or father and child. When Matilda's mother comes for her, she leaves the foster father who nursed her almost unthinkingly. The need for female bonding is so great that after Deanna's death, Cecille serves as an older sister to Cally.

Along with the emphasis on female relationships goes the idea of the female need for freedom. It is from this theme that Erdrich gets the name of her novel. Blue Prairie Woman's first husband is a deer; she is the first of several antelope wives. Matilda wanders freely with a herd of antelopes. When Klaus first sees Sweetheart Calico and her three daughters, he states that "they float above everyone else on springy tireless legs."

Sweetheart Calico's longing to return to the freedom of the west, a freedom which does not include a human husband, is a part of this theme.

There is an unusual focus on food throughout the novel. Some of the imagery arises from Frank's career as a baker and his attempt to bake blitzkuchen, the cake that saved the life of the German P.O.W. who baked it. "Almost Soup," Cally's dog and the narrator of two sections of the novel, is barely saved from being eaten by his puppy cuteness and Cally's intercession with either Zosie or Mary. After Augustus Roy bites Zosie, he disappears, and Zosie and Mary gain weight. Not only does their weight gain suggest that they have eaten Augustus, but Cecille asks, "So what did you do with him? Who took the first bite?"



Erdrich depicts various kinds of hunger throughout the text: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The most common emotional response Erdrich presents is longing. Blue Prairie Woman longs for her daughter; Sweetheart Calico longs for her daughters and her western sky; Klaus Shawano longs for Sweetheart Calico; Richard Whiteheart Beads longs for Rozina, when they are separated, and for Deanna after her death; Frank longs for Rozina when she is guilt ridden following Deanna's death; Cally longs for Deanna; and Rozina longs for Frank and Deanna. As Zosie says about the northwest trader blue beads, "I came to understand that my search for the blueness called northwest trader blue was the search to hold time." Possession of the beads in one of the mythic stories is only part of the problem. One must know his own true name, a magical name which the elders give to a child, usually during an initiation ceremony, or, otherwise, according to Zosie's story, the beads will kill their owners of "longing."

Unlike previous Erdrich novels, such as *Love Medicine* or *The Bingo Palace*, where the lives of Ojibwa seem to be better on the reservation than in cities, the Minneapolis experiences of Frank, Rozina, Cecille, and Cally seem to be more positive than not.

Frank is successful as a baker; Rozina as a teacher and then a lawyer, and Cecille as a kung fu teacher; and Cally sees more possibilities for her future in Minneapolis than on the reservation. Richard, Klaus, and Sweetheart Calico suffer in the city, but only Sweetheart Calico seems affected by separation from western reservation life.

Richard is an alcoholic and commits suicide, but his failure as a person is not tied to the urban experience but to his failed relationship to Rozina and his guilt concerning Deanna's death. Klaus's alcoholism is not tied to the urban experience either but to his love of Sweetheart Calico which does much to ruin both of their lives.

Literary Precedents

William Faulkner's linked short stories in such works as *Go Down, Moses* foreshadow the structures that Erdrich creates in her novels. The focus of Faulkner's stories is on the McCaslin family from the pre-Civil War past to the novel's present in the twentieth century. Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife* deals with more families, but the historical sweep of the novel is similar to Faulkner's. Animals like Old Ben the bear in Faulkner and the dog Lion provide symbolic aspects of wilderness and human behavior just as Erdrich's antelope women do in *The Antelope Wife*. As Faulkner's novel leaves gaps in action and story line for readers to make connections, so does Erdrich in *The Antelope Wife*. Faulkner's novel is a moving account of the racial dilemmas in the South, while Erdrich deals with a Native American reality midway between the reservation and the city, Minneapolis. Faulkner critically examines the psychological effects of the problems of racism, while Erdrich's Ojibwa are torn between older tribal identities and their lives and careers in a contemporary urban Minneapolis. Despite many stories of failure, Erdrich's novel seems hopeful that the Indians will make their way. While Cally describes the Ojibwa lives as "scattered like beads off a necklace" in Minneapolis, she also sees the necklace of those lives "put back together in new strings, new patterns."

At the time that *Go Down, Moses* was written, Faulkner's South of the 1940s had yet to address its racial problems.

Related Titles

While earlier Erdrich novels feature characters who appear in all or many of her first five novels, such as Lulu Nanapush and Marie Kashpaw, the only connections to Erdrich's earlier novels in *The Antelope Wife* is Rozina Whiteheart Beads' brief mention of a Pillager woman early in the novel and several narrators depictions of places on the eastern Ojibwa reservation or details about the Ojibwa in Montana. Erdrich develops new families in *The Antelope Wife*; the novel is a fresh start in a familiar world.

What seems likely is that Erdrich will return to many of the new characters in *The Antelope Wife* in the same way that she developed characters from her earliest work *Love Medicine* to her previous novel, *Tales of Burning Love*. The Twin Cities and parts of North Dakota and Montana compose Erdrich's fictional world just as Faulkner's world is encompassed in his fictional county of Yoknapatawpha, Mississippi. While Faulkner's major concerns are race and class, Erdrich tells stories similar to those of first generation immigrants to the United States. The dilemma for her Ojibwa is similar to that of the European who is loyal to a foreign national identity at the same time he attempts to become an American. Erdrich's Ojibwa experience a dilemma of loyalty to tribal customs and values while at the same time they merge into an urban American identity. In earlier novels, such as *Love Medicine*, life on the reservation is difficult, but better than life in the cities, such as Minneapolis. In *The Antelope Wife* characters lead successful lives in Minneapolis; Ojibwa pursue mainstream careers, and the issue of intermarriage with other races is a given, not a matter of shame as it sometimes appeared in her previous works.

IDEAS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION Multiple narrators and a non-linear narrative structure are just two of the nontraditional elements that Louise Erdrich employs in *Antelope Wife*. Because such elements may be unfamiliar to many readers, it can be helpful to create a time line of the important events in the novel. Next make a list of characters and their relationships, paying careful attention to kinship lines and the recurrence of twin girls. Use the time line and the list of characters to help answer the discussion questions below, or as starting points for other examinations of the text.

1. Part of Erdrich's project in *The Antelope Wife* is to trace character traits through multiple generations. Starting with *Blue Prairie Woman*, trace her character traits through succeeding generations of Ojibwa women in *The Antelope Wife*. In your own family, going back to your grandparents, if possible, try tracing behaviors and gestures from generation to generation. Does it seem sometimes as if we have inherited behaviors and gestures?
2. How do Ojibwa cultural practices contradict urban ways for contemporary Indians in the city?
3. What goes wrong with Rozina's marriage to Richard Whiteheart Beads?

What is attractive to Rozina about Frank Shawano?



4. How do Richard and Rozina Whiteheart Breads handle the guilt they feel regarding Deanna's accidental death? How does the way each character handles his/her guilt reflect his/her character?

5. What does Richard Whiteheart Breads hope to accomplish by his suicide attempts?

6. Odd things are eaten with odd consequences. What does the blitzkuchen signify? Why would Zosie and Mary eat their lover, Augustus? What significance do these events have to the novel as a whole?

7. Characters such as Sweetheart Calico and Blue Prairie Woman are almost symbolic abstractions in the way that Erdrich describes them. What is the purpose of such characters?

8. Almost Soup's advice to Ojibwa dogs, the story of the P.O.W. baker, Klaus, and the first anniversary party of Rozina and Frank Shawano are hilarious. What is the basis of Erdrich's humor?

9. Erdrich uses elements of myth, folktale, and realistic narrative in *The Antelope Wife*. She follows several characters, not simply one or two. She employs several different narrative perspectives.

Because of her use of these techniques, is her novel confused? If not, what holds it together?



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