

The Grass Dancer Study Guide

The Grass Dancer by Susan Power

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Plot Summary

At the center of the story is Harley Wind Soldier, a young Sioux living on a reservation in North Dakota. He is a descendent of Ghost Horse, a heyo' ka or sacred clown who lived in the same area during the 1860s. Ghost Horse fell in love with the beautiful woman warrior, Red Dress. Before they could marry, however, Red Dress lost her life. The legend says ever since that day, the spirits of Red Dress and Ghost Horse have tried to be reunited. Charlene Thunder is the descendent of Red Dress and she feels the pull toward Harley. That feeling is not returned, though, and this poses the first mystery of the novel. Is the legend true? From the beginning pages, it is suggested nothing is as it seems. The Grass Dancer is a series of stories combined to make one tale about the connection between generations spanning more than 100 years. By the end of the novel, the reader can see how the actions of those who came before us can affect our daily lives for better or worse and ultimately, each of us must choose our own path.

Harley Wind Soldier has been carrying a feeling of emptiness where his heart should be. His father and brother were killed in a car accident before Harley was born. He believes his mother has never stopped grieving for her loss and her grief has created a gulf between them. Handsome like his father, Harley nevertheless is something of a loner, always searching for something to fill the emptiness. Charlene Thunder would be happy to take that role, but Harley is not interested. Charlene knows she could use the power she supposedly has inherited from Red Dress to force Harley, like Charlene's grandmother, Anna Thunder, has done with countless men over the years. However, Charlene does not want that for Harley. She hopes he will decide on his own.

Frank Pipe is Harley's best friend and the grandson of the tribe's spiritual leader, Herod Small War. Frank Pipe knows he is likely to take over for his grandfather someday and this security allows him to be a grounding force in Harley's life. Herod is steeped in tradition, a holy man who speaks to spirits as a normal matter of course. His opposite among the community is Anna Thunder, a powerful witch who seems to use her magic only for her own benefit. At first, Anna appears as a totally disagreeable character, mean and bitter. She frightens many because of her apparent disregard for the pain she causes. As the novel progresses, though, the events that came together to make her who she is earns her some sympathy. She has lost loved ones, driven others away and suffered terrible betrayal. Her reactions to these events end up affecting many people in her life, including Harley Wind Soldier.

The events in the novel are told in many voices including those of the major characters. Mystery after mystery is suggested and, as the story unfolds, these mysteries are answered - often with surprising results. In the end, each character is where he or she has chosen to be, even when the choice is difficult.



Prologue-Chapter 1

Summary

Prologue. Henry Burger and his friend, Lloyd, are drinking at the Border Beer bar close to a Sioux Indian reservation in North Dakota. Burger's girlfriend, Jeannette McVay, is a white woman who lives and works on the reservation. Burger has noticed Jeannette is becoming increasingly distant, and he's sure she's planning on leaving him. Burger's friend Lloyd enjoys Burger's discomfort and is adding to it by making sly suggestions insinuating Jeannette is interested in another man. This is Lloyd's way of getting back at Burger for Burger's refusal to give Lloyd money for one of Lloyd's crazy business schemes. Throughout the night, Burger keeps drinking heavily as Lloyd harps on Jeannette leaving Burger and that her new boyfriend is a Sioux Indian - not a white man like Burger. When Burger finally leaves the bar to go home, he is very drunk. So drunk, in fact, that when he gets into his pickup truck, he forgets to turn on the truck's headlights.

Burger drives blindly along the dark road. His drunken mind drifts to the stories he heard through his boyhood of fierce and vengeful Indian warriors. He even remembers a story of an Indian warrior woman who wore a red dress. Before long, the silence of the night and the steady sound of the truck's tires start to lull Burger to sleep causing his truck to swerve onto the gravel shoulder. The gravel kicks up against his truck and Burger's drunk mind imagines he hears the mocking voices of the Sioux men from the reservation as they throw rocks at his vehicle. He responds by yelling out the window at his imaginary foes. This goes on for several miles. When Burger sees two bright lights in front of him, he believes they are the eyes of long-dead Sioux warrior ghosts coming for him. Still very drunk and now enraged, he drives his pick-up straight at the lights which are actually the headlights of an oncoming car. The head-on collision kills Burger along with the driver and passenger of the other car. The people in the other car are Calvin Wind Soldier and his son, Duane. Even though the accident happens shortly before he is born, Harley Wind Soldier has dreams about the accident throughout his life. The dream is always the same; Harley sees broken glass and blood on the faces of his father and brother.

Chapter 1. The year is 1981 and Harley and his life-long friend, Frank Pipe, are setting up their tipi at the Dakota Days Contest Powwow on the Sioux reservation. The Dakota Days three-day social event features traditional Indian dance competitions. The powwows bring together Indians from the oldest to the youngest. Even though he is only seventeen, Harley is already a talented and accomplished dancer.

Charlene Thunder is a young Sioux woman who believes she is in love with Harley. She has also grown up with Harley on the same reservation. She fantasizes about a relationship with Harley over the objections of her grandmother, Anna Thunder. The people on the reservation fear Mercury Thunder and call her a witch because she



practices a selfish magic, or medicine, benefitting herself but harming others. Mercury Thunder is considered very powerful and someone to be avoided.

During the dance performance Harley meets Pumpkin, a young Menominee Indian woman who has traveled from Chicago with three friends to take part in the competition. Pumpkin's red hair, large freckles and green eyes inherited from her half-Irish father give her a unique appearance among the other Indians. Pumpkin is also unique in her desire to perform the grass dance. Although there is no rule stating women cannot do the grass dance, it has always been performed by men.

Pumpkin's striking appearance holds Harley's attention. He realizes he's very much attracted to her. Pumpkin is also strongly attracted to Harley. As the dance progresses, Harley's mother Lydia begins to sing. Song is the only way Lydia Wind Soldier uses her voice. She has refused to speak since Calvin and Duane were killed in the car accident. For all of Harley's life, she has communicated with him and others through shrugs and facial expressions. Lydia's unwillingness to speak to Harley has created a feeling of loss Harley sees as a large, black and empty hole in the middle of his chest. It has been the source of much sadness throughout Harley's life.

After the dance performance, Harley and Pumpkin talk. Harley's positive feelings toward Pumpkin steadily increase. Harley and Pumpkin eventually go off by themselves. Charlene sees them leave and is disturbed by this, especially since she has never seen Harley express interest before in any girl. Harley and Pumpkin drive to a deserted and tumble-down house on the reservation that has become a favorite hang-out with the reservation teenagers. The house is supposedly haunted by the ghost of an elderly white woman to whom the house had once belonged.

Harley and Pumpkin spend the night at the house. During the time they are there, Harley finds himself telling Pumpkin more about himself and the sadness he feels. He is surprised by the ease in which he shares his deepest secrets. Pumpkin also shares her own feelings. Pumpkin tells Harley that she is giving him a bit of her spirit to put in the empty place in his chest. She assures him she will now always be a part of him. At one point, Harley sees the ghost. He is not frightened but wonders why he sees the white woman crying while she strokes Pumpkin's hair.

The next morning, Pumpkin and Harley return to the powwow. On the final day of the powwow, the dance winners are announced. To no one's surprise, Pumpkin takes first place in the grass dance. She wins a trophy and prize money. Her winnings and that of one of her friends from Chicago are enough to pay for the car trip to the next powwow on the circuit.

Pumpkin and her three friends begin the drive to the next event. During the drive, the weather changes into a heavy rain. Within minutes, the road becomes slick with rain. As the driver tries to slow down, the car spins out of control and sails off a ledge and into the air. When the car lands, it is almost crushed. Pumpkin and her friends are killed.



When Harley hears the news from Herod, Frank, and another Sioux man named Leonard, he feels as if he is once again empty inside. Even so, he hears Pumpkin's voice telling him she will always be in him.

The next day, Herod asks Frank and Harley to take him to the site of the accident so he can say a prayer for Pumpkin and her friends. When they arrive, the place where the car had fallen is surrounded by flattened grass. Herod tells Frank and Harley the area looks like the powwow grounds Herod saw as a boy. There, the male grass dancers would dance until the grasses lay flat in preparation for the powwow celebration. As they are leaving, Harley looks over his shoulder and catches a glimpse of four figures dancing to tamp down the grass.

Analysis

The Prologue and Chapter 1 introduce the main characters whose stories will be revisited throughout the rest of the novel. The novel begins with the dreams Harley Wind Soldier has of the deaths of his father and brother. Since the novel begins with an explanation of the events preceding the deaths of Harley Wind Soldier's father and brother, the reader can conclude Harley Wind Soldier is a key character and will play an important role in the story. The reader can also assume there is a mystery around the car accident. Even before the novel gets underway, there is a hidden question for the reader: How can someone dream of an event that happened before they were born? The question also leads to the suggestion that dreams, ghosts, and the myths of the Sioux are an essential part of the story to follow. The reader does not know yet why Henry Burger's memories of a woman with a red dress are important, but there are hints this woman is one of the many mysteries that are a part of the overall storyline.

Chapter 1 further establishes the basic relationships between the people whose lives will intertwine over and over again as the story progresses. The reader does not yet know how all the characters relate to each other, but it is clear the relationships exist. The reader also does not know the significance of things or events that might seem to be important only in a particular place. For example, the name of the white woman whose ghost inhabits the deserted house where Pumpkin and Harley spend the night is never mentioned. Who is she? What does she have to do with the story? Why is Harley able to see her? Anna Thunder appears to be Charlene Thunder's guardian. Where are Charlene's parents?

The Prologue and Chapter 1 also firmly establish the importance of Sioux tradition, history, and culture to some of the modern day Sioux. The spirit world is never far away. Ghosts and magic are as real to many of the key characters as is the physical world of grass, rocks, food, and air. The author also introduces strong examples of symbols possibly representing specific things. For example, the black tears Harley paints on his face to dance. Readers are invited to wonder why he chooses those symbols.

As the reader completes the Prologue and Chapter 1, it is clear *The Grass Dancer* is a series of stories woven together like colorful threads. These threads are the stories of



people both in the present and in the past. As the reader becomes familiar with the characters, each person's contribution to the present will be more clearly understood.

Vocabulary

dubious, infidelity, hyperventilate, powwow, valedictorian, predominantly, tentative, spectral, internalized, iridescent, Yuwipi, invocation, unencumbered, epileptic, fervently, metronome, irksome, immobilized, intertribal, segued, oblivious, provocatively, omnipotent, capitulate, exhilarating



Chapter 2

Summary

The year is 1977. Harley Wind Soldier, Frank Pipe, and Charlene Thunder are all members of teacher Jeannette McVay's eighth-grade social studies class at St. Mary's School on the Dakota reservation. Jeannette is very earnest in her desire to become a real part of her Indian students' world. She tries very hard to understand their culture, even to the point of trying to transform herself physically to look more like them. She is naturally a very light-skinned blonde, but she has dyed her hair black so it is more like her students'.

Harley and the other students find Jeannette's attempts funny and sad at the same time. Harley notices Jeannette has bruises on her face that she has tried to cover up with make-up. It is clear to Harley Jeannette's Indian boyfriend has beaten her.

During one of the class periods, Jeannette asks each student to tell something of their shared history, perhaps share something about themselves. This is very much against Dakota culture. People do not share private things about their families with non-family members. Frank Pipe decides to tell a children's story about Iktomi, a clever spider. He knows his classmates will recognize the story, but Jeannette will not. He also knows his classmates will understand why he is telling the story instead of speaking about himself or his grandfather. As he speaks, though, he remembers a different story about what happened when he attended a Yuwipi ceremony with his grandfather. Frank believes the spirits responded to his grandfather's call.

When it is Charlene Thunder's turn to talk, she shyly tells another story from Sioux legend. Like Frank, though, she is remembering other things. She thinks of a time when her grandmother put a spell on a young Sioux man so he would do anything she wanted. The young man dislocates his shoulder after falling from the grandmother's roof. Charlene recalls her grandmother was totally uncaring and unconcerned. The event reminds Charlene of Anna Thunder's selfishness.

Harley then stands up and surprises himself by making up a story on the spot. The story turns out well. When Jeannette asks him where it came from, Harley just shrugs. He doesn't want to tell her he made it up. Jeannette assumes it's a legend of the Sioux people.

After class is over, Harley and Frank help Herod Small War clean his yard. Herod tells Harley about Harley's ancestor, the warrior Ghost Horse. Herod explains Ghost Horse was heyo'ka and he was also a fearless fighter on the battlefield. Herod tells Harley Calvin Wind Horse was the same way when he fought in Korea and adds Harley comes from a long line of soldiers among the Sioux. Harley then decides to imitate Ghost Horse and be heyo'ka as well. This makes Frank angry because he feels Harley is just



playing a game instead of truly understanding and respecting the tradition of heyo'ka. Finally, after a particularly frustrating day Frank punches Harley in the nose breaking it.

A few days later, Harley sits along the bank of the Missouri River and remembers the story Herod told about how Christianity came to the Sioux through the music of piano that had come up the Missouri on a riverboat. Harley can envision the scene so clearly it's as if it is happening right in front of him.

Analysis

In Chapter 2, the reader is given clues to some of the mysteries suggested in Chapter 1. More information about the main characters is provided by taking the reader back in time a few years to when Harley, Frank, and Charlene were younger. The characteristics Harley and Frank show as older teenagers are clearly seen even as eighth grade students. Charlene, though, is different. The younger Charlene is shy and self-conscious around Harley. The reader also sees the basic differences in personality between Charlene and her grandmother. The contrast between the two leads the reader to see Mercury Thunder as a thoroughly unpleasant person. Her selfishness is emphasized and the reader understands Charlene's grandmother has had this trait for quite a while.

Jeannette McVay takes a more prominent role in Chapter 2. The reader sees her through the eyes of her students and also through her own eyes. It is clear although Jeannette's intentions are honest and honorable, she often misses the heart of what she's trying to understand. In fact, it appears at times she is trying to be more Indian than her Indian students. This leads the reader to question why this would be so. What is it about the Sioux culture that Jeannette finds so compelling? Does she have a realistic view of that culture or is it, instead, her view of what she thinks that culture represents? In Chapter 2, the reader learns a little more about Jeannette McVay and understands this person is likely to have a continuing role during the rest of the novel.

Chapter 2 also sheds some light on Harley's father, Calvin. The reader learns Calvin was a soldier who fought in Korea and he is one of a long line of fearless Sioux warriors which includes the famous Ghost Horse. This is the first reference to Harley's ancestor and the way in which Herod tells Harley Ghost Horse's story reinforces Herod's role as an elder who accepts as perfectly normal his close contact with the spirits of the ancestors. To Herod, the spirits are always there whether they choose to show themselves or not. It is clear to the reader Herod inhabits a world rich with tradition and history and he accepts his place in that world.

In this chapter, the young Frank Pipe introduces a theme that is an important thread for this novel. He points out things aren't always what they seem. This has proven true thus far and will continue to be the case throughout the rest of the story.



Vocabulary

embankment, Wakan Tanka, receptacle, compelling, commiserated, misadventures, quaking, retribution, shimmered, constellation, lacquered, adamant, cajoled, minutiae, downtrodden, penchant, menagerie, heyo'ka, aberrant, contrary, ambiguity, cavorting



Chapter 3

Summary

The year is 1976. Herod Small War is awakened from sleep by his life-long friend, Archie Iron Necklace. Archie is waiting for Herod's nephew Aljoe to deliver the prize Archie won at one of the reservation bingo games. The prize turns out to be a black and silver Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Frank and Harley have come with Aljoe and help to unload the motorcycle. Even though Archie is not an experienced rider, he jumps on the motorcycle and takes off down the driveway in a spray of gravel. He is showing off for Alberta for whom Archie has always had a secret crush.

At first, Archie excites all the onlookers with his wild riding. Very soon, though, Archie loses control and the motorcycle slips out from under him. It sails over a fence into a pen with a very large Brahma bull. The bull proceeds to kick and stamp on the bike. Within minutes, the motorcycle is crushed beyond repair.

The next morning, Archie approaches Herod to interpret a dream Archie had. Herod and Archie prepare a sacred Yuwipi ceremony. The spirits show Herod Archie's dream, which is a time in 1877 when four young warriors had been surrounded by cavalry soldiers. This time, though, Herod sees himself, Archie, Harley, and Frank as the four young warriors. Herod's vision continues as the young warriors attempt to escape the soldiers. Eventually, the earth itself opens up to form the medicine hole or sacred passageway as a way to escape the soldiers. The spirits tell Herod he will once again find the medicine hole.

After the Yuwipi ceremony, Herod tells Archie they must take Frank and Harley and look for the medicine hole. They pack food and blankets for shelter and leave on horseback. When a storm blows up, they take shelter in a deserted house. Herod recognizes the house that once belonged to the white woman, Clara Miller. Herod had worked briefly for her when he was a young man. Although he was married at the time, he was having disagreements with Alberta. Clara is much older than Herod, but the two eventually have a physical relationship comforting to them both.

As the four shelter in the house, Herod realizes the stories everyone tells of the ghost of the sturdy white woman are actually about Clara Miller and this house. After everyone falls asleep, Herod awakens to see Clara's ghost. He asks her if he will find the medicine hole. Clara points to a vision of the four warriors and they tell Herod he is the medicine hole.

Analysis

Chapter 3 is narrated by Herod Small War. Through his experiences, the reader learns more about the Sioux elder, his way of thinking, and his view on his very spiritual world. It is Herod's direct experiences revealing to the reader the identity of the white woman's



ghost first mentioned in Chapter 1. The relationship between Clara Miller and Herod Small War has a great impact on the young Herod. The concept of forgiveness is introduced and carried through the chapter.

Once again, Herod's close association with the spirit world is reinforced through the description of the events taking place during the sacred Yuwipi ceremony. In this chapter, the reader learns much more about the purpose, preparation, and what happens during a Yuwipi ceremony. To Herod and Archie, the world of the spirit is real. Dreams are one of the ways the spirits speak to people. Dreams are things that need interpretation because they usually carry a message and Herod is the person to whom most of the Sioux turn to when they need an explanation for a puzzling dream. This further defines the role a Yuwipi man like Herod takes within his community. When Herod asks the spirits for that interpretation, he fully expects to receive an answer.

Archie Iron Necklace is also more fully described. He is first mentioned in Chapter 1 during the dance competition. In Chapter 3, his importance to Herod as a long-time friend is revealed as well as Archie's feelings towards Herod's wife. The reader is given a fuller picture of the personalities and character traits of Herod, Archie, and Alberta. By the end of the chapter, the reader better understands how these three elderly people contribute to the overall story being told in *The Grass Dancer*.

Vocabulary

caulking, plaguing, gruel, precariously, ramshackle, haunches, dilapidated, preoccupied, spellbound, wheelies, emerged, addled, dehydration, superstitious, quavering, quivered, cheatgrass, appease, churning, glistening, testament



Chapter 4

Summary

The year is 1969. Margaret Many Wounds is dying. Her twin daughters Lydia and Evelyn are with her during this time as well as her five-year-old grandson, Harley Wind Soldier. Although Lydia has continuously lived on the reservation, Evelyn had long ago left the reservation to live in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her husband Philbert. There has always been an unspoken competition between Lydia and Evelyn. Even though they are twins, they look and act very different. Evelyn sees Lydia as the beautiful "good daughter" who does everything right and is Margaret's favorite. Evelyn is more rebellious. She is surprised, then, when Margaret tells her she has always been the favorite. Lydia is, as always, silent.

Although Margaret has been a Catholic for much of her life, she rejected that religion in her final weeks. Margaret decided to return to the religion of her ancestors. One night, Lydia and Harley have returned to their own home on the reservation. Evelyn and Philbert are sleeping on the floor in Margaret's kitchen. Margaret hears the shuffling of feet in her bedroom and sees many people sitting on wooden chairs all around her bed. They look like an audience. She knows they are ghosts or spirits.

Margaret begins to tell them the story of her first husband to whom she was married for only two years. They had no children. Then Margaret begins to talk about 1942 when she worked in Bismark, South Dakota, at the prisoner of war camp. She met a Japanese doctor who was volunteering at the camp. Margaret and the doctor begin a relationship.

When Margaret discovers she is pregnant, she leaves Bismark and returns to the reservation. She tells everyone on the reservation she was married to a Canadian Indian who had been a champion rodeo rider and who had left her when he found out she was pregnant. She lied because she wanted her daughters to be regarded as full-blooded Indians.

Evelyn is shocked because she and Lydia never knew this truth about their past. Evelyn is angry because her beliefs about her supposed Indian rodeo rider father has shaped many of the decisions she made in her life, including her choice of husband. She is also angry because she had many times asked Margaret for their family's history and Margaret had never discussed it.

Margaret dies quietly and sooner than expected. She watches her spirit move away from her body. Evelyn and Lydia prepare Margaret's body, dressing her in the traditional clothing she had requested.



Analysis

Chapter 4 brings new surprises to the reader regarding Harley's ancestors as well as shedding further light on Lydia herself. The reader learns Lydia has a sister who has left the reservation to pursue her future in a large city. Evelyn's view of Lydia paints a more complete picture of the person who is just introduced in Chapter 1. Evelyn gives a deeper explanation of why Lydia might have chosen to stop speaking.

The biggest surprise, however, is the information that Lydia and Evelyn are only half Indian. Now Evelyn knows the secret but Lydia, and therefore, Harley, do not. Again, the concept of ghosts and the unique spirituality of the Sioux culture are explored. Margaret is not at all disturbed by the ghosts gathered at her deathbed to hear her story about her daughter's father. Additionally, Harley is just as accepting of this spirit world through the influence of his grandmother.

One important concept explored in this chapter is the idea of the things people use to define themselves. For all of Evelyn's life, she has believed she is the daughter of a daring Canadian Indian rodeo rider. Her perception of this man as passionate and independent has shaped her view of herself. This extends even to her choice of husband. Now that she has learned she is actually the daughter of a Japanese doctor, it is suggested Evelyn's view of herself will be challenged. Equally important, the reader knows from previous chapters that Harley considers himself the direct descendent of Sioux Indians on both his mother's and his father's sides. Harley remains ignorant of the fact that one of his grandfather's was Japanese. His perception of himself as a full-blood Sioux defines his life choices. It is clear even at the young age of five, Harley is readily embracing his Indian heritage and its spiritual meanings through his close relationship with his grandmother Margaret.

Vocabulary

gristle, emaciated, serrated, tentacles, incurious, exquisitely, monogram, dogged, inevitably, prodigal, conceited, unyielding, spectacles, suspended, crescent, anecdote, undulating, conches, dentalium-shell, tranquility, gritty



Chapter 5

Summary

The year is 1964 and Crystal Thunder is a senior at Saint Mary's High School. She considers herself an outcast because of the feelings the other Sioux have for her mother, Anna Thunder. Crystal's relationship with Anna is complicated. For the most part, Crystal has positive memories of her young childhood. Anna was affectionate and loving. As she grows older, though, she begins to wonder why the other Indians dislike Anna so much. She also begins to wonder where her father is.

When Crystal was fifteen years old she learns her father is buried in the Catholic cemetery. Crystal learns he died in 1946, the year Crystal was born. When Crystal goes home she confronts Anna about her father. To Crystal's surprise, Anna doesn't immediately dismiss the subject. Anna explains he was a Korean War veteran who was mentally damaged by his experiences. Anna gives Crystal some information, but not everything. She tells Crystal her father died a week before Crystal was born, but she will not say any more about it.

At school, Crystal is attracted to another outcast, a Scandinavian boy named Martin Lundstrom who walks with a limp. Soon the two are a couple and they face even more criticism both from the Indians and the whites. Martin asks Crystal to marry him after graduation. Crystal agrees, even though she is terrified of what her mother will say.

Crystal becomes pregnant and tells Martin they can be together after the child is born. As Crystal feared, Anna is angry at the situation. She expected Crystal to stay with her to learn to use Anna's power. Crystal tells Anna she wants no part of it. Anna demands if Crystal leaves, she must leave behind her unborn daughter. Anna tells Crystal she wants "a soul for a soul." Crystal agrees.

When Crystal gives birth to a daughter as Anna has predicted, she is not allowed to hold the baby. Instead, Anna drugs Crystal causing her to fall into a deep sleep. When Crystal awakens, she is wrapped up in quilts and is in the back seat of Martin's car. Martin finds her like this. Martin asks about the baby, but Crystal lies and tells him the child died. Even though Crystal is sad she has lost her daughter, she also feels her spirit is free for the first time in her life.

Crystal and Martin get married and move to Chicago where Martin has a job. Crystal is happy in her new life, even when Martin's mother moves in with them. Slowly Crystal and Martin's mother develop a close and loving relationship.

Analysis

Crystal Thunder is the narrator in this chapter. Through her experiences, the reader discovers the answers to some earlier mysteries. New mysteries are also introduced.



The reader learns Charlene Thunder's mother is likely Anna's daughter, Crystal. The baby Crystal leaves behind is not named in this chapter, but it is a logical conclusion on the part of the reader to assume the baby is Charlene. This chapter also sheds some light on Anna Thunder as a person. The reader learns Anna was a loving mother to Crystal, but also Anna has long been the object of tribal gossip. There remains the question of why Anna is so disliked. One possible reason is explained by Crystal when she says her mother had too many boyfriends. This would have been looked down upon by the more conservative reservation women. Still, there is a suggestion the tension between Anna and the other members of the tribe might have yet another source.

Whatever has happened to Anna, she is already a bitter woman with little patience for others. She can be cruel as seen in her reaction to Crystal's relationship with Martin Lundstrom. Anna uses hard and insulting words to describe Martin's disability. Although Crystal does not see herself as being particularly able to withstand Anna's powerful personality, Crystal does everything possible to keep Anna's influence and control out of Crystal's future with Martin. This includes the huge sacrifice of leaving behind the baby daughter Martin believes has died at birth.

In Crystal's description of the early years of her marriage to Martin, the reader can see Crystal has established a positive life for herself away from Anna's control and influence. Martin's mother becomes like a mother to Crystal.

This chapter also invites the reader to wonder if Crystal and Charlene will ever reunite. Will Charlene ever meet her parents? What has happened to Crystal and Martin while Charlene was growing up under the care of Anna?

Vocabulary

bristling, candidates, exasperation, surveillance, lurched, symmetry, equilateral, elliptical, transfigured, scandalized, begrudged, silhouetted, lurid, tresses, magma, umbilical, amulet, interrogate, tactile, liberated, fluted, relented, vermilion, paregoric, distraught



Chapter 6

Summary

The year is 1961. Jeannette McVay comes uninvited to Anna Thunder's door. Although Anna doesn't invite Jeannette into the house right away, Anna feels she must do so in the name of traditional Sioux hospitality to strangers. Jeannette tells Anna she is a graduate student from Pennsylvania. She wants to learn more about Sioux traditions, culture, and language. Jeannette explains she had originally hoped to study with Herod but he would not let her participate in the Yuwipi ceremonies because she's a woman. Jeannette didn't like Herod's attitude so he suggested Anna Thunder as a source of information on the things Jeannette wants to know.

At first, Anna is resistant to Jeannette's probing but she believes Jeannette can sense the power Anna has inherited from her ancestor, Red Dress. Anna agrees to Jeannette moving into Anna's house.

Anna tells Jeannette the story of Anna's ancestor, Red Dress and the Sioux warrior, Ghost Horse. Anna tells Jeannette Calvin Wind Soldier is a descendent of Ghost Horse. When Calvin drives Jeannette back to Anna's home after Jeannette tries to force her way into Herod's Yuwipi ceremony, Anna decides to put a claiming spell on Calvin to force him to come to her. Even though Anna is much older than Calvin, she tells Jeannette she is righting a wrong in history.

One night, Anna puts her claiming spell in motion. Even though her body is still at her house, she travels as a spirit to Calvin's home and tries to claim him based on the bond between their ancestors Red Dress and Ghost Horse. She fails because of interference from Herod Small War. Later, when the entire tribe is attending a funeral, Anna sets up another spell attracting Calvin to his sister-in-law, Evelyn.

A child is the result of the affair between Calvin and Evelyn. This greatly troubles Jeannette as she finally realizes the extent of Anna's power. Jeannette decides to leave Anna's house. Anna isn't done with Jeannette, though. She places a spell on the unknowing Jeannette that will force Jeannette to stay on the reservation regardless of how much she struggles with herself to leave.

Analysis

Anna Thunder narrates this chapter. The reader is given the opportunity to better understand how this complex character thinks and how she views herself in relation to others. The reader experiences the young Jeannette McVay through Anna Thunder's eyes. Anna provides the perspective of Jeannette McVay's early history on the reservation. This includes the previously unknown relationship with Anna Thunder. The reader also learns why Jeannette stays on the reservation even though she has apparently told many boyfriends she is leaving. This information makes the situation



described in the Prologue clearer for the reader as the reader remembers Henry Burger's description of Jeannette telling him she want to leave. That description has heightened meaning now that the reader knows what is influencing Jeannette's presence on the reservation.

This chapter begins to tie some threads together that have been suggested in earlier chapters. The reader learns the details of the story of Red Dress and Ghost Horse. There is also the surprising discovery that Calvin Wind Horse has fathered a child with Lydia's sister, Evelyn. According to the information provided in this chapter by Anna, this child is a direct result of Anna's powerful medicine. The reader is also presented with a new mystery. Who is the child? There are enough clues from the first chapter that the reader is likely to make a good guess regarding the child's identity.

Herod and Anna are presented as powerful medicine people but as two faces of that power. In Herod's case, he practices "good" medicine that helps people. Anna, on the other hand, uses her power to achieve what she wants regardless of how it affects others. In fact, she has very little regard for what Herod does. Although she recognizes he is powerful, she feels she will still win against him.

Anna Thunder is a very complex character in this book. Because she has shown she can be kind and loving, the reader is likely to continue to wonder how Anna became as she is. This is one of the mysteries that has been carried though the book from the very first chapter. One answer is that Anna has been the holder of powerful magic all her life and has always used that magic for selfish purposes. The other possible answer is that Anna has suffered some life-altering experience that changed her in some way.

Vocabulary

porcelain, intoxicated, hampered, tarnished, chaperones, passé, pariah, anguished, vestiges, percolating, lodestone, acrid, profound, nemesis, manipulations, conceived, furtive, desecrated, oppressive, moony



Chapter 7

Summary

The year is 1964. Lydia Many Wounds speaks of her relationship with her twin sister, Evelyn, who she greatly admires. When the other members of their community would point to Lydia and mention her beauty, Lydia would think of her sister's liveliness of spirit and think her the more beautiful.

Lydia drives home from work one cold, winter night. She narrowly misses hitting a snow-covered lump in the road she at first thinks is a snow drift. When Lydia gets out of her car to check, she sees it is Calvin Wind Soldier. He is drunk and collapsed in the road. Lydia manages to get him into her car and drive him to his home, a small shack. Lydia prepares a fire in the stove to warm them. Although normally shy, Lydia does not feel that way around Calvin. She has been in love with him since she was a 10-year-old girl and he was a young soldier going into the Korean War. As Calvin warms up and begins to awaken, Lydia tells him where he is. Lydia ends up staying the night with Calvin. The next day, Lydia doesn't tell Evelyn what happened between her and Calvin. She is not ashamed, she simply wants to keep the event to herself. She has Calvin's promise they will marry and she wears the Silver Star Calvin was awarded for his service in Korea as a temporary symbol of their engagement.

Lydia and Calvin are married two months later. During the night of their wedding, Calvin has a nightmare where he calls out the name of Red Dress. Lydia feels jealous, even though Red Dress is just a ghost.

Calvin soon stops drinking. He gets a job with the tribal police and builds a good life with Lydia. When Lydia urges Calvin to tell her about Red Dress, he tells her that Red Dress appeared to him when he went for his vision before going into the army. Red Dress warned Calvin about Anna Thunder and her scheming.

Lydia is bothered by nightmares that started a year after her marriage. Anna Thunder is the cause of the nightmares. When Lydia finally stops the nightmares, she is faced with the fact that Calvin has had an affair with Evelyn. After Evelyn gives birth to Calvin's son, Duane, she completely removes herself from her sister and Calvin. Soon, the people on the reservation believe Duane is Lydia's son. Although Lydia feels a responsibility to Duane, she does not love the child.

One month before Lydia is due to give birth, Duane becomes ill. His crying and screaming wear on Lydia until, late that night, she tells Calvin to take Duane out of the house for a while. That is the night Calvin and Duane are killed in the car accident. Even though Herod tells Lydia a drunk driver was responsible, Lydia decides it was the power of her own voice and her anger that caused the tragedy. She decides she will no longer speak to anyone because she does not want to unleash the power of her killing voice. She will become Silent Woman.



Analysis

In this chapter, the reader has an opportunity to see specific situations and other characters through the eyes of Lydia. In an earlier chapter, the reader learned Evelyn envied her sister and believed Lydia was Margaret's favorite daughter because Lydia always seemed to follow the rules. The narrative in this chapter, though, shows Lydia actually envied Evelyn her rebellious and independent nature and, in fact, believed Margaret favored Evelyn for these reasons. As the novel has progressed, it further emphasizes the statement presented in an earlier chapter that things may not be what they seem. The perspective of each character on the same events brings a different view, helping the reader to better understand what has been going on. Also, each character seems to have one or more secrets to which only the character has the answer. For example, everyone in the community, including Harley Wind Soldier, believes Lydia has stopped speaking out of grief for the loss of Calvin and Duane. The truth, however, is Lydia blames herself for their deaths because she was impatient and told Calvin to take Duane away for a while. It is her guilt that makes her decide that her voice is too powerful and she should no longer speak. Also, Harley is convinced Lydia especially mourns Duane when just the opposite is true. Lydia did not have any special deep feelings for the boy who was not really her own son.

As in some of the other chapters, the author uses symbolism to bring a reader's notice to a particular idea. In this chapter, Lydia giving the heart-shaped cookie to Calvin instead of Evelyn is a symbol for Lydia's movement from her sister being the dearest to her to Calvin taking that spot.

It is important the reader understand a Silver Star is awarded to U.S. Army soldiers who demonstrate valor in action against an enemy. In Calvin's case, this would imply he demonstrated an act of particular bravery while he was in Korea. When Calvin gives the medal to Lydia, the author suggests the medal is the only thing of value Calvin has to give to her at the time. However, the message to the reader is that Calvin performed some unknown act of bravery for which he was recognized, even if Calvin does not speak of this himself.

Also worth note is the continuing idea of ghosts and how the past influences the actions of characters in the present. When Calvin points out Red Dress is looking out for him and trying to protect him from Anna Thunder, he is telling the reader he's aware of what Anna Thunder is trying to do and why. The idea that Lydia was too "tame" for her mother, Margaret, is suggested which explains why in Chapter 4, Margaret said Evelyn was her favorite.

Vocabulary

commotion, appendectomy, beaux, profusion, straddling, treacherous, pendulum, shimmied, tarpaulin, insulated, crimson, brume, gelid, spontaneity, forthright, circumspect, musing, devastating, scrawny, nimbly, defiance, flatware, disinfectant, stereotype, perimeter



Chapter 8

Summary

Anna Thunder narrates this chapter set in 1935. At this time, she is a young mother who has recently lost her husband. Anna's niece, Dina, is visiting. She is helping care for Anna's four-year-old son, Chaske. Anna is beading a dress for Dina to wear at a powwow dance competition.

After Dina leaves that night, Chaske begins to cough. As his coughing gets steadily worse, Anna realizes he needs a doctor. Dina and her mother, Joyce, stop by Anna's house to pick up the dress Dina wants to wear to the powwow. Anna hasn't finished it because of Chaske's illness. Anna asks Joyce to get Dr. Kessler and Joyce agrees. Through the long night, Anna waits as Chaske gets worse. At first, Anna imagines Joyce getting the doctor but, soon, she sees a different vision. She sees Joyce and Dina at the powwow and Joyce is watching Dina dance. Chaske dies that night. Anna realizes Joyce never went for the doctor at all.

Anna feels numb in her grief but deeply angry as well. For three days, she labors and sews red beads on almost every surface of the moccasins that Dina was supposed to wear during her traditional dance. When she is finished she walks to Dina's house. Anna asks Red Dress for her help, then begins to call Dina with her mind. Dina comes out into the winter night in her nightgown. She is under Anna's spell. Anna puts the moccasins on Dina and then commands her to dance. Dina dances uncontrollably until she dies that night. She is found the next morning, clinging to a tree.

Analysis

Anna Thunder has been an important character throughout the novel. Thus far, she has been presented as a bitter woman who misuses the power she has inherited from her ancestor, Red Dress. In this chapter, the reader learns of the events that triggered Anna's anger and the choices she made leading her to become the person described in the book's earlier chapters.

In Anna's narrative, it is clear to the reader she was once a loving mother who had a healthy respect for the power of her ancestor, Red Dress. Although Anna had lost her husband to an accident, she was not overly angry or vengeful. She accepted the loss and grieved as a normal person would. Anna approached many things with a healthy sense of humor. This would include the hardship associated with the drought that Anna describes.

Readers should know this drought was the beginning of what came to be called the Dust Bowl that devastated large areas of the Plains during the 1930s. The loose dry topsoil of open farm fields all across the Great Plains blew in huge clouds for miles and coated everything with grit and dust. It was a time of great hardship for many



Americans. Although North Dakota would have been the northern tip of the Dust Bowl, Anna's description of the dust that covered everything is the same as many others living through the worst drought that had ever hit the United States.

When Anna loses her son, Chaske, because of the betrayal of a person she considered a friend, Anna moves towards the bitterness and anger defining her personality later in life. The betrayal drives Anna to call on the power she has from Red Dress. Her anger at Joyce and Dina leads her to choose to use that power for revenge. This begins the path of action separating Anna from the other members of her tribe. They begin to view her with suspicion and fear. Lost in her own anger, Anna doesn't care. The power becomes the most important thing to her and this choice is played out in the narratives from the earlier chapters.

Vocabulary

burrowing, silted, blueprint, doomsday, paring, notorious, sanatorium, consumptive, rampant, donned, clapboard, dispensable, accumulated, atrophied, shriveled, unpredictability, magpies



Chapter 9

Summary

The year is 1864 and Red Dress narrates this chapter. She begins with a description of Father La Frambois, a Jesuit missionary. He has been coming around to her tribe for several years, preaching the Christian Gospel. Although Red Dress is grateful he has taught her to read, write, and speak English, she refuses to let him baptize her in the Missouri River. The priest has no respect for the Dakota traditions and beliefs, which are everything to Red Dress.

Despite the priest's best efforts, he is unable to convert even one of Red Dress's tribe. A large part the tribe's resistance is because of what Red Dress's father had seen happen to other tribes who traded with white people. These tribes became dependent on the goods the white people brought. Red Dress's tribe still carries on life in the traditional manner. She tells the priest they will not be degraded like the other tribes.

Red Dress has a dream she believes is the spirits telling her she should travel to Fort Laramie, a U.S. Army outpost. She is not sure what her goal is, only that she must go. That spring, Red Dress leaves accompanied by her 16-year-old brother, Long Chase and a pumpkin-colored dog called Spotted Dog. Shortly after they leave camp, Ghost Horse presents Red Dress with a buffalo-hide shield decorated with a picture of a woman in a red dress holding a thunderbolt. The shield also had rattlesnake rattles dangling from the bottom edge. Ghost Horse is a strong warrior who acts as her tribe's heyo'ka, a sacred clown. Ghost Horse loves Red Dress and wants to marry her on her return.

At the fort, Red Dress introduces herself to the sentry as Esther and her brother as Joseph. She also shows the soldier the silver crosses she wears in her ears. This leads the sentry to believe that the visitors are Christian Indians. The sentry gets the fort's chaplain, Reverend Pyke. Red Dress becomes a type of secretary to him. Even though this gives her entry into the world of the soldiers and others in the fort, she hates every minute of the deceit. Red Dress hopes every day she will learn from the spirits why she is supposed to be at the fort.

Red Dress becomes friendly with a young widow at the fort, Fanny Brindle. Fanny decides to get some of the fort residents to help her put on a play. Red Dress helps Fanny with the production and meets Lieutenant Royal Bourke, Captain Philander Merritt and Lieutenant Lemon Van Horn. These are the three soldiers who will play the lead roles in the play. The play is a success and Red Dress attends the small party after the play. While Red Dress is at the party, she believes she receives a message from the spirits to finally take action.

During her time at the fort, Spotted Dog has always been with Red Dress to protect her. He acts almost like a human guardian. When Red Dress leaves the party, Spotted Dog



leads the way back to the small house where Red Dress and Long Chase are living. As Spotted Dog and Long Chase sleep, Red Dress goes where a tall cottonwood tree stands. Soon, Lemon Van Horn stumbles to her. Red Dress wraps one of her hairs around a button on his tunic and then leaves. The next day Reverend Pyke finds Van Horn hanging from the cottonwood tree. He rages Van Horn has killed himself and that it is a great sin.

Soon after, Philander Merritt meets the same fate. This time, after the discovery Pyke chops down the cottonwood tree. Red Dress receives another message from the spirits and she goes to the fort, slipping past the sentries. She meets Royal Bourke who then hangs himself from an upper floor porch railing. After Bourke is discovered, Pyke keeps to himself in his office.

One night after Long Chase left for a buffalo hunt, Reverend Pyke comes to Red Dress's door. He rages at her, accusing her of wickedness and saying he would not fall under her spell. When he raises his pistol and fires, Spotted Dog leaps and takes the bullet. As Red Dress comforts the dying dog, Pyke shoots her and kills her. Her spirit follows Pyke as he leaves and she sees the spirits that commanded her have also commanded him and he is forced to shoot himself.

Red Dress's spirit remains to see all that follows once Long Chase returns from the hunt. Long Chase begins the trek back to his village with the body of Red Dress. Ghost Horse brings three ponies to Red Dress's father and claims he will marry the spirit of Red Dress. Ghost Horse places Red Dress's body near the top of a burr oak tree after placing a plum pit in her mouth. Over the next year, he keeps her spirit company. Finally, he goes to war and is killed during battle. However, when his spirit is freed, it goes directly to the ancestors and Red Dress is left behind to watch the living. This is where she remains.

Analysis

In this chapter, the full story of Red Dress is revealed. Through her narration, the reader understands the vast gulf that existed between the Indian way of thinking and that of the white missionaries and soldiers. The reader sees the white missionaries have no concept of the culture or spiritual life of the Indians they are trying to convert. While the Indians of Red Dress's community continue in the old ways, Father La Frambois blindly stumbles over their traditions and demonstrates no respect for the people he has stayed with year after year.

The reader also learns of the opinion Red Dress and her community have of other Indians who have accepted contact and trade with the white soldiers. She describes how they lose the path of their traditions as well as their pride and self-respect. This is particularly apparent when she comes to the village close to Fort Laramie. When Red Dress and Long Chase enter the fort, Red Dress's narrative makes it clear that the soldiers have no idea what Red Dress really thinks. She is below their notice, like one



step above an animal. To Red Dress, though, Pyke and the soldiers are the ones who smell bad and behave poorly.

Red Dress's observations explain a great deal about the early interactions between the Indians and the white soldiers and settlers. There have already been many battles fought between the two peoples and the Indians are steadily losing. When they lose a battle, they eventually lose the core of who they are as well. The reader sees that the culture Red Dress belongs to is far richer than the priests and soldiers are willing to recognize. This revelation helps the reader develop a sense of sympathy to what has happened to Red Dress's descendants whose stories have been told in earlier chapters. When Ghost Horse places the plum pit in Red Dress's mouth, it explains the references to the scent and taste of plums being tied to the presence of Red Dress in so many of the earlier chapters. This is especially true in those chapters focused on Anna Thunder, Red Dress's descendent.

In this chapter, there remains a mystery. Spotted Dog is a pumpkin-colored dog devoted to Red Dress, giving his life to try to save hers. Chapter 1 describes Chuck Norris, another pumpkin-colored dog who is devoted to Harley Wind Soldier, a descendent of Ghost Horse. Also, the character to whom Harley is drawn and who gives him a bit of her spirit is a red-headed Indian girl named Pumpkin. The reader is left to puzzle whether there is a link between the dog and person of the future and the Spotted Dog who lived and died with Red Dress.

Vocabulary

appellation, potency, totems, viper, impromptu, dispassionate, thurible, obstinately, perverse, humiliation, apprehended, parchment, euphoria, vacillating, derision, pemmican, malodorous, foliage, simulated, artlessness, divan, inscrutable, vanquishes, sneered, candor, forlorn, onerous



Chapter 10

Summary

It is 1981. Mercury Thunder remains an uncomfortable presence in Charlene's life. She often wakes to find her grandmother's hand placed on Charlene's chest above her heart. Charlene feels the weight and never knows if Mercury is giving something to her or taking something away. Now that Charlene is older, her grandmother is ever more insistent that Charlene does not need to learn more in school. Instead, she needs to be passing the tests Mercury sets for her.

When they arrive at the powwow, Charlene seeks out Harley Wind Soldier. She tells him she is sorry about Pumpkin's death. Harley tells Charlene how different Pumpkin was from anyone he'd ever met. When Harley comes to the dance floor, he wears the clothes of a grass dancer in Pumpkin's colors of red, orange and yellow. Charlene knows Harley is dancing to honor Pumpkin. Charlene jumps up to leave, angry and hurt.

Charlene decides to embrace the power Anna keeps telling her she has and casts a spell of her own. She makes cupcakes that will attract to her whoever eats them. Bringing these cupcakes to school, she gives them to six boys in her class. By the end of the day, all six are waiting for her at her locker. She suggests they go somewhere. Although Charlene believes she can control them, she has set in motion something that quickly goes out of control and Charlene gets hurt.

Charlene awakes to feel the sun on her face. She sees two women in the room. One is a white woman with silver hair. The other is Red Dress. When Charlene tells the women that she didn't want what happened, Red Dress tells her that she misused the medicine or power she has been given. That if she is selfish with it, the power will be selfish in return and hurt her. She suggests that Charlene should put the power behind her. Charlene agrees.

When Charlene returns to school, she speaks with Jeannette McVay who is the school's guidance counselor. Charlene asks for a transfer to a new home room. Charlene sees that Jeannette no longer tries to look like a Sioux woman. However, it is clear that Jeannette has a better and more realistic understanding of the people among whom she's lived for so long. Jeannette agrees to Charlene's request without asking for an explanation.

The following week, Charlene finds on her homeroom desk an envelope with a newspaper clipping in it. The clipping describes a special work of art by a woman living in Chicago named Crystal Lundstrom who was Crystal Thunder before she married. When Charlene sees the photograph of Crystal she recognizes similarities between her face and Crystal's. She believes she is seeing a picture of her mother.



Charlene goes to Jeannette and asks for help to contact the woman in the photograph. Jeannette finds the number and Charlene calls. When a woman answers, Charlene identifies herself. The woman on the phone says she is Crystal Lundstrom and she is Charlene's mother. After the initial shock, the two start talking. At the end of the conversation, Crystal asks when Charlene will be coming to Chicago.

Jeannette tells Charlene not to return to the home of her grandmother because Mercury Thunder will know what has happened and prevent Charlene from leaving. Charlene spends the night in Jeannette's office and leaves the next day to travel to Chicago. When Charlene gets on the bus that will take her to her mother and father, she imagines her grandmother growing smaller and smaller. Charlene falls asleep and, in her dream, sees Pumpkin flying outside the bus windows. She is waving at Charlene. Charlene hears Pumpkin's words coming from her own mouth. They are words of forgiveness. Charlene is not sure whether Pumpkin is forgiving her or if Charlene is forgiving herself.

Analysis

Throughout the previous chapters, Charlene Thunder has been presented as a character with a "foot in both camps." Although she is the descendent of Red Dress and her power, she has not embraced her grandmother's abuse of that power. At the same time, she feels the desire to be accepted by the rest of her tribe and out of the shadow of Anna Thunder. In this chapter, Charlene as a person becomes clear to the reader. She is now poised on the threshold of adulthood. The reader sees she has the basic compassion and sensitivity Anna Thunder lost long ago. These characteristics end up being more powerful than the medicine power she has inherited from her grandmother and Red Dress. Even though Charlene does use the medicine, she quickly learns an abuse of the power can have very bad consequences. Unlike her grandmother, Charlene decides those consequences are not worth the risk.

When Red Dress appears to Charlene in Charlene's dream, the reader also learns the real message Red Dress has had for all her descendants. This is that the power is not from Red Dress, but is from the spirits that worked through her. This power used for selfish means will corrupt the user, as has happened with Anna Thunder. Charlene's decision to break that cycle is what finally frees her.

This chapter also shows the reader the changes in Jeannette McVay. The fact that Jeannette is no longer trying to be more Indian than the Indians says a great deal about Jeannette's personal growth. Charlene's request for a transfer to a different homeroom allows Jeannette to exercise her hard-won wisdom first by not forcing Charlene to speak about what happened to her and second by providing the help and support Charlene needs to finally escape the control of her grandmother. It is brave of Jeannette to insist Charlene not go back to Anna Thunder's house.

In this chapter, the reader is clearly shown the difference between the full and apparently happy lifestyle represented by Crystal Lundstrom, her husband and mother-in-law and the bitter, selfish lifestyle of Anna Thunder. When Charlene calls Crystal, she



is given a choice between the world of her mother and the world of her grandmother. Charlene makes the positive choice of reaching out to a life free of selfish magic, bitterness and rejection. Crystal represents hope and that is the choice Charlene finally makes. She leaves behind everything Anna Thunder stands for and chooses, instead, the freedom of a new start with the mother and father she has never known. It is as if Charlene is taking back the life Anna Thunder stole from her when she forced Crystal to leave behind the infant Charlene.

Vocabulary

abdomen, gloated, unaccountably, bowlegged, potluck, peyote, penetrating, cascading, radiating, accelerator, ointment, muscatel, hematite, subdued, deferential, laconic, tapestry, obliterating, reluctant, dribbling, amoeba, stylized, flinched



Chapter 11

Summary

The year is 1982. Frank Pipe and Harley Wind Soldier have recently graduated high school. Frank has accompanied his grandfather, Herod Small War, to the powwow being held at the North Dakota Prison Rodeo. Mercury Thunder is there as well. Jeannette has come with her five-month-old daughter, Gloria Betty Holy Hand. To Jeannette's delight, her daughter looks like a full-blood Dakota/Sioux. Herod teases Jeannette about this, but points out it's important the baby learn about the cultures of both parents, not just Jeannette's Sioux husband.

Frank is beginning to understand his grandfather's spiritual life better. He is looking forward to learning more about it and making it his life's path as well. Frank has spent some time talking to his cousin Aljoe who is in prison for robbery. Aljoe has embraced the Christian religion. When Frank mentions this to Harley, Harley dismisses Aljoe's belief as nothing more than a scam. Frank is concerned about Harley's mood which has remained somber for a year since Pumpkin's death.

Harley is feeling at loose ends. He doesn't see his purpose in life. He believes he falls short of everyone else who seems to be good at something, even if that something is not particularly important. As he leans against one of the outer walls of the prison, he has a vivid vision of all the people who have passed through the prison's entryway. He sees horse thieves, bootleggers, murderers and other criminals. Harley sees them in great detail down to the distinctive physical features of their faces. He does not recognize how wonderful it is that he has these visions in the first place.

Frank is busy with Herod setting up the powwow. Everyone seems busy to Harley so he takes Chuck Norris and leaves for a while. He sits in the back of his truck and drinks a large amount of warm beer. Soon, he is short-tempered, even with the little dog. In a short time, Harley becomes drunk to the point of staggering. He does realize he needs to change clothes for the dance so he returns to the rodeo and powwow areas.

Harley's mother, Lydia, has worked for years on her traditional Dakota dress. She has based the design of the dress on a picture her mother had given her of a dress that had once belonged to Lydia's grandmother but now was on display in a museum in Chicago. Lydia had scraped and saved for the special beading that she had carefully sewn on the dress. Even the moccasins were designed like her mother's wedding slippers. She even wore the snakeskin belt Herod had made for Calvin Wind Soldier so many years ago. Since she will not speak, Lydia is relying on this special clothing and her dancing to tell Harley the story of his past.

Harley's hand is unsteady as he paints his face for the dance making the thunderbolts on his cheeks blurry at the edges. Even though alcohol and other substances are strictly forbidden at the prison rodeo, Harley believes he can fool anyone who sees him. As



Harley heads to the dance area, he sees one of the rodeo clowns who immediately notices Harley has been drinking. He offers Harley the big red clown nose. Harley laughs as he pushes it on his face.

When Harley enters the dance area he plays the fool. He staggers like he is almost falling and corrects his movement just before he falls. He sends crazy war whoops into the air. Lydia walks up to Harley and looks at him in disgust. Without warning, she slaps him across the face with enough force to knock him off his feet. Stepping over him, she walks up to Frank Pipe who tells her he will make sure Harley gets home. Lydia is shamed and leaves the powwow.

When Harley awakens, he is at Herod's home. Herod is preparing a sweat lodge ceremony for Harley to get rid of the sickness that has gripped him. When Harley enters the sweat lodge, he sees Frank, Archie Iron Necklace, and Bill Good Voice Elk. Harley is deeply ashamed of his behavior the night before. Once the sweat lodge process is completed, Herod suggests Harley fast and pray for a vision.

Harley stands in the same pit Calvin Wind Soldier had used 30 years before. He tells Wakan Tanka he doesn't know how to pray, but he will try anyway. That night he has a vision of four mounted warriors who stand on the rim of the pit. One of them pulls Harley from the pit and puts him up behind him on his pony. They gallop across the open plains until they reach the area where a young Harley had helped Herod Small War search for the medicine hole. The warriors tell Harley he must crawl by himself through the hole to the other side. When he does, he sees his grandmother Margaret Many Wounds who had died when Harley was just five years old. Harley thinks he is in heaven, even though Margaret tells him he is not. Harley sees others from his past. He meets his now grown-up brother, Duane, who speaks to him. Harley meets and speaks with Calvin, the father he had never known. Finally, Harley meets Ghost Horse.

Harley stays in the pit and continues to pray. On the final night, Red Dress visits him. She explains to him what the grass really represents: the hair of conquered warriors that was taken during battle. She tells him when he does a grass dance, he is dancing a rebellion.

On the fourth dawn, Harley hears the voices of his friends and relatives singing an honor song for him. There is another voice Harley does not at first recognize. He feels anger because he believes an outsider has been invited where only those closest to him should be. Then he realizes the new voice singing is his own.

Analysis

The previous chapter allowed the reader to understand Charlene Thunder truly and the challenges she had to face. In this final chapter, Harley Wind Soldier finally comes to terms with who he is and where he fits in his culture and his community.

Throughout the book, Harley's feeling of being disconnected from his mother and from others in his community has been a major influence in his life decisions. Harley's story



has been one of loss. He lost his father before he had a chance to know him. He feels an intense connection to Pumpkin, then immediately loses her to an accident. He spends his life feeling guilt that he is in some way responsible for Lydia's choice not to speak. Even though he is handsome and gifted with visions, Harley is unable to see his own value.

This chapter pulls together all the characters and events that have been touched on in earlier chapters. The reader has always known Harley is a key character in the story both as himself and as a descendent of Ghost Horse. However, there has been mystery after mystery woven together to form the tapestry that is the story of Harley, Charlene, Herod, Lydia, and the others. This final chapter solves the remaining mysteries, including what being a "grass dancer" really means. It takes Red Dress to explain the purpose of the streamers the dancers wear and what the dance truly celebrates. When the reader discovers this, it gives a new meaning to all the chapters that have come before.

Red Dress and Ghost Warrior are the links that bind each generation that follows. The hardships and misunderstandings the Dakota people faced in the ongoing battles with the white settlers and soldiers is carried on in different ways into the modern years. The stories of Anna Thunder relate how the Indians on the reservation were viewed by white farmers and how the Indians themselves viewed others. Different perspectives are continuously introduced and slowly interwoven to form the final picture.

Harley's search for his vision pulls in bits and pieces from earlier chapters. This includes everything from the young mounted warriors first mentioned in Herod's narrative to the encounter with his father and brother who have so greatly influenced Harley's life even though their lives had ended before Harley was born. The author pulls together all the pieces and knots them in the person of Harley Wind Soldier. The last line of this chapter is very important because it shows how Harley becomes one with both his past and with his present community and loved ones.

Vocabulary

penitentiary, arbor, latticework, bower, maneuvered, recess, predator, cradleboard, lineage, kerosene, compiling, filament, vulnerable, scam, reconcile, impulses, synthesized, skirmishes, recalcitrants, carmine, arrogance, protuberance, flaunt, regalia



Characters

Harley Wind Soldier

Harley Wind Soldier is a seventeen-year-old Sioux Indian boy living on a Sioux reservation in North Dakota. The tragic deaths of his father and brother just weeks before Harley was born have haunted him throughout his life. Harley is respectful of the traditional stories and beliefs of his people. At the same time, he feels separate and apart. He is searching for the true meaning in his life.

Harley is a descendent of the famous warrior, Ghost Horse, who lived in the middle of the 19th century. As such, Harley is playing a role in the mysterious love story between Ghost Horse and Red Dress that has lasted for generations. He is gifted with visions he does not realize carry such importance both to himself and to his community. In the end, though, Harley learns who he really is in his heart and accepts his place in his culture and community.

Frank Pipe

As the grandson of the Indian community's spiritual leader, Frank Pipe feels himself a part of his culture and tradition. He is Harley's closest friend, having grown up with him. While Harley is tall and handsome, Frank is much shorter and slight of build. Despite this, he exhibits an enormous energy that allows him to excel in sports and attract his share of the girls. He understands Harley, but is also confused by Harley's obvious loneliness and sense of distance from the others in his tribe.

Throughout the book, Frank acts as a steadying influence on Harley. When Harley gets too far off the path, it is usually Frank who helps set him aright. Frank is not perfect, of course, and has his own questions about his future. However, he is the counterpoint to Harley and a valued friend.

Charlene Thunder

Charlene is a descendent of Red Dress. Charlene's connection to Red Dress and Red Dress's supposed powerful medicine is through her grandmother, Anna Thunder. Charlene is very much attracted to Harley Wind Soldier and has been for most of her life. He does not return the feeling, though. Charlene has been raised by her grandmother who is considered the tribe's witch. This is not a compliment to her grandmother even though the community recognizes the old woman has a great deal of power. Although Charlene has not done anything herself to earn fear from the community, she is somewhat shunned because of her grandmother.

Throughout the story, Charlene struggles with the life her grandmother wants for her and the life Charlene might want for herself. Her grandmother's power and control over



Charlene's life is very strong. As with other characters in the book, Charlene has mysteries surrounding her life. As the story unfolds, Charlene pieces together the answers to her own mysteries and, in the end, makes the choice that will free her to live a life she wants.

Anna Thunder

Anna Thunder is a full-blood Sioux woman who has lived on the reservation her entire life. She has always been talented with the intricate sewing of beads on various items of clothing like moccasins and dresses. People from other tribes and white collectors travel distances to purchase the items she makes. For her own tribe, though, she is better known for the strong powers, or medicine, she has inherited from her ancestor Red Dress. She is feared and shunned by the other members of the community because of how she uses these powers. Because of different experiences in her life, though, Anna has learned not to care what others think. She puts her efforts into using her powers to suit herself.

Anna is raising her daughter, Charlene, and wants Charlene to learn the uses of the power. She sees this as Charlene's destiny and pressures Charlene at every turn to learn the spells and become like Anna. For the most part, Charlene resists this pressure even though it is very difficult to stand up to her grandmother.

Herod Small War

Herod Small War is the tribe's yuwipi, or spiritual leader. He is very much a traditional Dakota and lives comfortably with the constant presence of spirits with whom he consults as needed. He is the opposite of Anna Thunder in that he represents strong medicine used for the good of others and not for his own goals.

When the story opens, Herod is an old man who has seen a great deal and is a large part of the lives of the other characters. He has secrets of his own the reader gradually learns. Herod acts as the voice of tradition for Harley, Frank and the others. His good humor and hard-earned wisdom help Harley make the right choices that will define his life.

Crystal Lundstrom

Crystal Lundstrom is Anna Thunder's daughter and Charlene's mother. When Crystal falls in love with Martin Lundstrom, she wants to marry him and leave the reservation and move to Chicago. Anna Thunder knows of this and demands Crystal leave behind the unborn child she is carrying. Worn down by Anna all her life, Crystal agrees. She sees this as the only way she can escape Anna's power and influence. Crystal's success in building a good life for herself away from Anna provides a safe place for Charlene to go when Charlene finally decides to escape Anna and everything for which Anna stands.



Although Crystal is related to Red Dress as much as her mother, Crystal does not pursue any of the powerful medicine Red Dress has supposedly given to her descendants. Crystal sees how much this power has corrupted her mother, Anna, and she wants nothing to do with it.

However, like Anna, Crystal becomes very skilled with intricate beadwork. It is this skill demonstrated in a beaded version of the famous painting of the Last Supper that finally provides the means for Charlene to find the mother she never knew.

Jeannette McVay

Jeannette is a white anthropology graduate student who travels from Pennsylvania to the Dakota reservation. She is initially captivated by Anna Thunder, seeing her as a powerful medicine woman. Jeannette is totally taken up with her perception of the Sioux/Dakota culture, language, and way of life. However, her perception only touches the surface of the true Dakota way of life. At points in the story, she tries to be more Indian than the Indians to the point of dying her hair black and having her students at the reservation school form a circle in the class room so they can communicate as their ancestors once did. The fact that she gets most of these things wrong makes her a source of amusement to the Indian community.

Jeannette's heart is in the right place, though. She may have much to learn but she has a sincere desire to understand the culture and people with whom she lives. This takes many years but, in the end, she succeeds. It is Jeannette who provides the means for Charlene to make the decision to leave the reservation and escape her grandmother.

Lydia Wind Soldier

Lydia is Harley's mother. She is a strikingly beautiful woman who chooses not to speak after her husband Calvin and son Duane are killed in a car accident. The real reasons for Lydia's silence are kept secret until later in the story, but it is Harley's incorrect perception of the reasons that cause him a great deal of sorrow. Lydia only uses her voice to sing at powwows. Her voice is so wonderful that members of the community bring recorders so they can play her songs back later in their own homes.

The Indians in her community see Lydia as everything a full-blood Sioux woman should be. The secret is that Lydia is not a full-blood Sioux but had a Japanese father. Lydia never discovers this secret, though, as her mother Margaret Many Wounds takes the secret to her grave. Only one person knows the truth, and that is Evelyn Many Wounds.

Evelyn Many Wounds

Evelyn is Lydia's twin sister. They are not identical twins, though. While Lydia is tall and beautiful, Evelyn is much shorter with a less attractive face. However, Evelyn is much



more the rebel and her strong personality attracts many boyfriends. Evelyn spends her life envious of the tall, beautiful Lydia. Evelyn's perception is that Lydia is their mother's favorite daughter. This perception drives much that Evelyn does with her life. Evelyn and Lydia grow up thinking their father was a Canadian Indian rodeo rider. It is only by accident Evelyn overhears Margaret's speaking to the spirits and telling them the truth of her twin daughters' father who was a Japanese doctor. This knowledge upends everything Evelyn has believed about herself as well as the decisions she has made in her life, including her choice of husband. Evelyn never tells Lydia what she has learned.

Red Dress

Red Dress is a Dakota woman who lived during the middle of the 19th century. This is the time when the white settlers and soldiers are solidifying their hold on the Indian lands throughout the U.S. She is the daughter of one of her village's leaders. She has learned to speak English, read, and write through the efforts of a Jesuit priest who visits her village each winter. Although he hopes to convert Red Dress and her tribe, he fails.

Red Dress and her community have avoided getting caught in the trap of trading with the white people. Her community pursues the old ways in everything from their cooking utensils to weapons. Red Dress represents the traditional Dakota people and it is through her that the reader learns exactly how badly the white soldiers and settlers misunderstood the culture they were conquering. Red Dress sees the soldiers as people who are threatening her culture. When she feels she is being instructed by the spirits to go to Fort Laramie, she goes. She causes three soldiers to kill themselves because she believes it is the power of the spirits working through her. These soldiers are simply people who will no longer present a threat to her community.

It is Red Dress, Ghost Horse and the legend surrounding them that informs much of the storyline in *The Grass Dancer*. Different characters in the book interpret the person of Red Dress, her actions, and her power in their own ways. In the end, though, Red Dress tells her own story and the reader learns the real truth of the woman and her times.

Ghost Horse

Ghost Horse is a handsome and famous warrior who was a member of Red Dress's tribe. He chose to become a heyo'ka, or sacred clown. He falls in love with Red Dress and wants to marry her. When her body is brought home from Fort Laramie, he marries her spirit instead and keeps watch over her body for a full year. The legend surrounding him and Red Dress is that the two spirits are still looking for each other through the generations that follow. However, it becomes clear near the end of the book that it is Red Dress who is really watching over her descendants. When Ghost Horse is killed in battle, his spirit leaves the earth. Red Dress is tied to her descendants. This provides an explanation why Charlene, the descendent of Red Dress, is so taken with Harley, the descendent of Ghost Horse.



Objects/Places

Sweat Lodge

Herod Small War conducts cleansing rituals in a sweat lodge. Men and boys come to the lodge to renew their spirits, but also to take part in rituals where Herod speaks to the spirits.

Decorative Beading

Beading is a popular form of decoration among the Dakota and is an important part of traditional dress, especially for the dance competitions. Anna Thunder and Crystal Lundstrom are particularly skilled at carefully sewing the tiny beads onto moccasins, dresses and sashes. Some works of beading can take years to complete.

Powwow

These are social gatherings for Indians of many tribes. Competitions in traditional dance are held at powwows. The music includes drumming and chanting.

Rattlesnake Rattles

Rattles are often used as hair and clothing decorations. Some Indians, like Red Dress, were considered "beloved of snakes." When Red Dress wore rattles, it was to honor this special relationship with snakes.

Moccasins

These are types of traditional footwear often made from buffalo skins. The skins would be cut to fit a particular person's feet. The sides were sewn with sinew or strips of leather. Moccasins were often painted with special symbols and decorated with colorful patterns made of beads.

Sage and Sweetgrass

Bundles of sage and sweetgrass were burned so the smoke could purify a house or person.



Dakota Reservation

The reservation is an area set aside by the federal government for Indian tribes. The Dakota reservation belongs to the Dakota or Sioux tribes.

Carmine

Carmine is a naturally occurring red ore the Dakota used as a decoration for clothing or on their faces.

Internment Camps

During World War II, the U.S. government set up these camps and forced people of Japanese descent to live in them. The Japanese doctor who is father to Lydia and Evelyn was a physician at one of these camps.

Vision Pit

A vision pit is a deep hole dug out of the ground. A Dakota boy or man would stand in the pit for a period of three days without food or water in an attempt to get a vision from the spirits.



Themes

Traditions

The novel covers particular events from 1864 to 1982. From the beginning chapters, the idea of the connection between generations is a major theme. Red Dress and Ghost Horse are the ancestors of three of the book's major characters, Harley Wind Soldier, Charlene Thunder, and Anna Thunder. How these characters react to their perceptions of their ancestors and their culture's history drive what happens to the characters throughout the story.

The story begins with the description of a car accident that takes the lives of Harley Wind Soldier's father and brother. This accident takes place before Harley is born but he imagines the scene and it haunts him throughout his life. This is just one of many visions that Harley deals with on a day-to-day basis. Although Harley is a young man with a foot in the modern world, he is still very much affected by the traditions of his community. The first chapter describes Harley's involvement in traditional dancing. He meets Pumpkin who has traveled with friends to perform a type of dance that has been part of the Plains Indian tradition for centuries. Harley's best friend, Frank Pipe, is trying to learn the traditions of the old ways so he can become a spiritual leader like his grandfather, Herod Small War.

All of the stories included in *The Grass Dancer* interweave the demands of the present in terms of modern life with the traditional culture of the Dakota living on the reservation. Some, like Herod, embrace these traditions. Others, like Evelyn, can't wait to leave them behind. In all of the characters, though, their ancestors' traditions and actions affect their modern descendants.

Friendship

Although Frank and Harley are the same age and are very much modern teenagers, they are different in terms of the extent to which they integrate the old ways of their culture with the modern ways of the world. Frank and Harley are like two sides of the same coin. Like modern teenage boys, Frank is interested in having fun with a lot of girls. Harley, being the more serious type, is less outgoing in that way. However, Frank is more stable in his view of himself and his culture. As such, he can provide a weight that helps Harley stay grounded.

There is some competition between the two boys, but none of it is serious. Their friendship withstands arguments and changes as Frank and Harley move toward adulthood. By the end of the story, their friendship is solidified when Frank helps Harley prepare for his vision. Frank is also among those singing the honor song for Harley when the vision proves to be the exact thing Harley needs to reconcile the old ways of his culture with the new.



Style

Point of View

The novel uses two different types of point of view. Some chapters are written in third-person. The stories unfold from the view of an objective observer. This observer allows the reader to get into the minds of several characters and to see places and activities as if the reader were standing above it all and watching what is going on. This style is similar to watching a movie unfold.

Other chapters are written in first-person. In these chapters, the reader sees the story unfold through the eyes of a particular character. The first-person chapters relate the personal perspectives of Herod Small War, Anna Thunder, Crystal Thunder, Lydia Wind Soldier, and Red Dress. These chapters are important to the overall story because the story is very much about individual perceptions of the same event. For example, the way Anna Thunder sees the events of Red Dress's life are very different from the way Red Dress describes them herself. How Anna Thunder describes her daughter Crystal is very different from how Crystal describes herself.

Switching back and forth from third-person to first-person allows the author to explore this idea of how an individual's perception of an event can shape how that person reacts. It also allows the author to show how a person sees something may not be the reality of the situation at all.

Setting

The setting of the story is mainly on the Dakota reservation over a period of more than 100 years. Even though the individual stories cover a great deal of time, the fact that the stories mostly take place in one location gives the novel a sense of continuity.

The author does not focus so much on the geography of the setting as she does on the people who live there. The same families dwell on the same land over several generations. Others come into and out of the lives of these families, but the reservation provides the stable setting against which their stories are told. The choice of the reservation is a good one because the novel is about the traditions within the Dakota Sioux culture. Although the people's circumstances have changed greatly from the time the Plains Indians roamed free, the modern Indians' ancestors lived on the same land upon which the reservation was formed.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, the language of the novel is standard modern American English. However, many Dakota words are used as well. This gives the reader a feeling of the importance of the language and culture on the characters in the novel. Even the most



modern of the teenagers occasionally uses a Dakota word for "grandfather" or "sacred clown." The author uses these words as a way of communicating that the traditional culture of the Sioux still influences the modern inhabitants of the reservation. The language acts as a link between the present and the past. The author also uses an explanation of the Dakota language through Red Dress's description to inform the reader there were many concepts that could not be directly translated from Dakota to English. This helps to explain why there was so much misunderstanding between the white priests and soldiers and the Dakota peoples.

Structure

The novel is divided up into eleven chapters of varying length. The chapters tell the story using both exposition and dialogue. The author uses the characters' narratives as well as an objective third-person point of view to tell the story. Since a major theme of the novel is perception, the author uses the characters' narratives to further explain events that take place at different points in the characters' lives.

Although the novel has a main plot that focuses on Harley Wind Soldier, it has many subplots supporting the main plot. These subplots act almost like short stories, explaining the history and important events in several of the characters' lives. Everything is intertwined with all of the characters affecting each other in ways that unfold as the novel moves along. The early chapters establish certain views or perceptions as well as some mysteries. As the novel progresses, the mysteries are explained and the reader discovers, like many of the characters, that things are not always what they seem to be.



Quotes

There's nothing here." Harley took her soft hands and pressed them to his heart. (Chapter 1)

Your ancestors didn't do that sort of thing. You should go back to the old ways. They're so beautiful. (Chapter 2)

The spirit warriors smiled, and one of the raised his hand, palm outward; it flashed like a mirror. You are the medicine hole, he said. (Chapter 3)

It isn't fair," Evie whispered angrily. "I begged her to tell me things when I was little, family history, all kinds of stuff. And she would just laugh. Tell me I had to find my own answers in the world. (Chapter 4)

By the time I was a senior at Saint Mary's High School I was a misfit myself, shunned by tribesmen because my mother had too many boyfriends and was rumored to practice Indian medicine. (Chapter 5)

Medicine pulsed within me, shot through my veins, and I don't mean the kind the doctor pumps into the body. I didn't practice good medicine or bad medicine, or a weak magic summoned by poems; I simply had potent blood inherited from my grandmother's sister, Red Dress. (Chapter 6)

Sometimes I will sing for my husband when the drummers play a good honor song. It can be song for warriors or lovers, because Calvin Wind Soldier was both to me. But I do not speak to the people around me. I won't unleash the killing voice, even to soothe my son, who is the only blessing. (Chapter 7)

At least an hour passed, I was sinking into the dark and feeling hope drain away. I could actually feel it, a trickle of heat on my hands. (Chapter 8)

I am hitched to the living, still moved by their concerns. My spirit never abandons the Dakota people, though sometimes all I can do is watch. (Chapter 9)

She sat in the depot eating a peanut butter sandwich, counting the minutes before her bus left the capital, and the state of North Dakota, and Mercury Thunder, whose powers, she hoped, were like a television signal: fading at a distance, dribbling away to nothing. (Chapter 10)

The honor song swelled in Harley's ears, and the united voices comforted him, lifted him up so that he stood tall in the vision pit. (Chapter 11)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Who is Harley Wind Soldier? How does the way in which he sees himself affect his life? What is the link between Harley and Ghost Horse? What responsibilities does he believe he has because of his heritage? How does he see his relationship with Lydia? Does Lydia see their relationship the same way? What is the most important moment in Harley's life? How does it change Harley's future?

Topic 2

What role does Frank Pipe play in Harley's life? How does Frank Pipe view the role his grandfather plays in the tribe's life? What does Frank want to do with his own life? Discuss the differences in personality between Frank and Harley. Why did Frank ask Jeannette to read from Vine Deloria rather than James Fennimore Cooper?

Topic 3

Who is Charlene Thunder? How does she feel about her grandmother? How do her feelings change as the novel progresses? Compare the changes in how she sees herself from the beginning of the novel to the end of the story. How does Charlene feel about Harley? How does this affect what she chooses to do at different points in her life? What clue in the story of Red Dress and Ghost Horse might explain why Harley did not return Charlene's feelings?

Topic 4

Discuss the development of Anna Thunder as a person. What events in her life have influenced her use of her power? What was an important factor in the loss of her son, Chaske? What is the meaning of the taste of plums Anna gets when she performs some of her magic? How is Anna related to Red Dress? How does Anna feel about the way she uses her magic?

Topic 5

Who is Herod Small War? What role does he play in the novel? Discuss Herod's main beliefs about the Dakota traditions and the role of spirits. How does Herod feel about Anna Thunder? What does Herod do to help protect Calvin from Anna's magic? Why does Herod believe that the belt will protect Calvin?



Topic 6

Who is Jeannette McVay? What mistakes does she make in trying to become part of the Dakota culture? Discuss Jeannette's growth within the tribe as the novel progresses. Discuss why her students would find funny the use of James Fenimore Cooper as a reference on Indian culture.

Topic 7

How did Red Dress feel about Father La Fambois? What is the legend of Red Dress and the snakes? What symbols did the spirits use to direct Red Dress's actions at Fort Laramie? Why did Red Dress's tribe stay away from trading with the white people? Who was Long Chase? What was Red Dress's relationship to Ghost Horse? Why did he decide to be heyo'ka?