

Lakota Woman Study Guide

Lakota Woman by Mary Crow Dog

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Lakota Woman Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter One, A Woman from He-Dog.....	4
Chapter Two, Invisible Fathers.....	5
Chapter Three, Civilize Them with a Stick; Chapter Four, Drinking and Fighting.....	6
Chapter Five, Aimlessness; Chapter Six, We AIM Not to Please.....	8
Chapter Seven, Crying for a Dream; Chapter Eight, Cankpe Opi Wakpala.....	10
Chapter Nine, The Siege; Chapter Ten, The Ghosts Return.....	12
Chapter Eleven, Birth Giving; Chapter Twelve, Sioux and Elephants Never Forget.....	14
Chapter Thirteen, Two Cut-Off Hands; Chapter Fourteen, Cante Ishta - The Eye of the Heart. .	16
Chapter Fifteen, The Eagle Caged.....	18
Chapter Sixteen, Ho Uway Tinkte - My Voice You Shall Hear; Epilogue.....	20
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	29
Style.....	32
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	35



Plot Summary

Lakota Woman tells the life story of Mary "Brave Woman" Crow Dog. However, her story encompasses the struggle of the Sioux as they waver between embracing the white man's ways and maintaining their ancestral traditions. Mary is a half-blood, having a white father and an Indian mother, who does not feel at home with full-bloods and is not welcomed by whites. Her mother wants to be accepted by whites and live according to their rules. Mary feels ill-at-ease watching her mother try to conform to a society that does not want her. Instead Mary reaches out to her elder family members and the old traditions. As Mary searches for a place for herself in the Sioux nation, she encounters hatred, abuse, love, and finally acceptance.

After spending a summer traveling with a caravan of other Indian youth, Mary finds herself a member of the American Indian Movement. While involved with AIM she meets a man and becomes pregnant. The man abandons her and AIM, but Mary continues to attend rallies and work for the AIM cause throughout her pregnancy. Her son, Pedro, is born during a seventy-one day siege at Wounded Knee amid gunfire. Pedro's birth in the face of the siege is a victory for the Indian nation. He is born on the site of a devastating massacre a hundred years earlier and brings a new wave of warriors to the Indian rights movement.

Mary meets and eventually marries Leonard Crow Dog. Leonard is a respected Indian leader and medicine man. Her life becomes increasingly tied to the old Indian ways as Leonard teaches her how to perform sacred rituals and live as a medicine man's wife. Mary spends some time enjoying the amenities of white life as she follows Leonard around the country while he is shuffled among prisons. Mary enjoys luxuries such as running water, indoor plumbing, and fair pricing, but feels more at home on the reservation beside Leonard. Once Leonard is released from prison and the couple returns to their work as medicine people, Mary realizes that she is full-blood at heart. Mary's story traces the difficulties faced by Native Americans as they try to fit into a world where they are not wanted or exist in a lifestyle that has been taken from them. There is no resolution for Mary and as she says, "Life goes on."



Chapter One, A Woman from He-Dog

Chapter One, A Woman from He-Dog Summary and Analysis

The chapter begins with a Cheyenne proverb that points to the strength of women being the root that holds a nation together. Mary gives birth to her son during the second battle of Wounded Knee in 1875, as bullets fly overhead. She is thrown in jail shortly after the birth, and her baby is taken from her. Mary tells of several Indian women who suffer at the hands of white men. One is shot, one beaten and left to freeze in a snow storm and another is sterilized against her will. Mary herself is threatened at gunpoint many times in her life. It is not easy being an Indian woman.

Life for Indians in general is difficult. They have no jobs and no money so they beat the women and use them for sex. Mary understands the plight of the men, but she feels sorry for the women. Mary Brave Bird is a Sioux from South Dakota. She is a member of the Brule tribe of Lakotas. Her grandfather, Fool Bull, was at the first Wounded Knee. Mary does not know much about her family's role in the fight against Custer because their chief, Spotted Tail, said it was useless to fight. He kept the warriors at camp and did not allow them to ride to the battle. Most of Mary's family has been "whitemanized," and it takes many years for the process to be reversed.

When Mary's mother went into labor with Mary, her mother had to be taken ninety miles to the tribal hospital in Pine Ridge to give birth due to complications. After the birth of her next child, doctors sterilize Mary's mother against her will. Mary is a half-breed, or *iyeska*. She has dark hair and eyes but her skin is white. Mary always waits for summer when the sun tans her skin dark. Mary is a small woman, barely over five feet, but she is tough and ornery because of her white blood. Her husband is a Crow Dog and is full-blooded Sioux. The Crow Dogs are outcasts who refuse the white man's ways and continue living according to the old ways. The history of her husband's family makes up for Mary's lack of legend. The land where they live is legend. They have been fighting for the land for over two hundred years. They continue to fight for it because when the land is gone, so are the people. Now the land is covered with tar paper shacks and people sit around telling stories of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Mary thinks the people cannot live off these old legends forever and will have to make their own legends, even though it is not easy.

This opening chapter is a hodge-podge of background information. Mary gives a basic sketch of her entire life in this first chapter. Although Mary says her family does not have a strong ancestry, she is still a part of the Sioux nation, whose history is full of amazing experiences. Mary's goal in giving such a broad overview of her life appears to establish her place within the Sioux nation and the struggles she encounters to find that place. The reader will come to realize that Mary builds her own legend but as she says, "It is not easy."



Chapter Two, Invisible Fathers

Chapter Two, Invisible Fathers Summary and Analysis

This chapter opens with a song sung at ritual Ghost Dances. Family ties have always been and remain important to the Indian people. The extended family group consists of grandparents, uncles, aunts, in-laws, and cousins, all living together to ensure that everyone is taken care of. Children are taught by several fathers and cared for by multiple mothers. Grandparents provide a large portion of the child care while parents are hunting. The white man purposely destroyed the tiyospaye (or circle of relatives). Each nuclear family was forced onto individual land allotments so the white man's individualistic values could be more easily imposed upon the Indians. Those who refused were pushed farther into isolation. The nuclear family concept does not work for the Sioux culture, as men spend time drinking and women become frustrated. Grandparents still take over raising the children.

Mary's father left before Mary was born. Her mother remarried when Mary was nine or ten and the new stepfather taught the kids how to drink. Mary eventually left home because she hated her stepfather and chose to leave and take care of herself. There are six children in Mary's family. After Mary's father left, her mother went to work in Pierre over 100 miles away leaving the children with their grandparents. They are fortunate not to be placed in foster care. Grandmother tries to raise the kids in white ways, but in her heart Grandmother is Indian and follows the old customs. Grandmother does not realize that her desire to raise the children white does not help them have a better life. In order to learn the Indian ways, Mary goes to her grandmother's older sister and her husband who still speak the old words and live by the old Sioux ways. Mary seeks out many of the older family members who live according to the traditional Sioux ways. Mary knows no racism, poverty, or anger as a young girl. Everywhere around her, people look and live as she does. She has nothing against which to compare her life. Mary feels that knowledge of what could be only brings anger. All her innocence vanishes when she goes to boarding school.

The title of this chapter could be "Invisible Families." For white men, the idea of an entire extended family living and working together is heathenish. Uncles sharing sleeping space with nieces and nephews can only mean evil behaviors are taking place. What the white men and the generation of Indians of which Mary's mother is a part do not realize is that the close family relationship is what keeps the entire nation strong. On the reservation Mary is able to remain mostly sheltered from white influences. As she grows up the white world forces her to make a choice between their ways and the struggle associated with remaining Indian.



Chapter Three, Civilize Them with a Stick; Chapter Four, Drinking and Fighting

Chapter Three, Civilize Them with a Stick; Chapter Four, Drinking and Fighting Summary and Analysis

Children are never left alone in Sioux families; they are always with someone. White people come and take the child away from those who love the child. Mary is taken to the mission school at St. Francis, which is run by Catholic nuns. The school was built at the turn of the century and has not improved since. The boarding schools are proclaimed as alternatives to extermination. The truth is that the schools provide whites with cheap labor. After ten years in school, neither the whites nor the Indians want the children.

Mary's grandmother, mother and older sister also attended St. Francis. At one point or another all four women tried to run away. Mary does not like the military-like schedule of the school or the nuns who rule with a whip. One day a white hippie girl from New York comes to the reservation. Her name is Wise and she stirs the girls at the school to an uprising. Mary and two others put out a newspaper telling about the horrible conditions at the school. Mary begins to fight back as she gets older. One day she fights with a priest because he embarrassed a male student. Mary walks into the principal's office saying she has had enough of their treatment and wants her diploma. The sister sends her home and that is Mary's last day of school.

Mary hangs around towns such as St. Francis, Parmelee, and Mission after quitting school. These are drunk towns where what little money Indians have is used for beer and whiskey instead of food for families. Since there is nothing else to do in these towns there are nightly bar brawls. Mary takes part in other drunken reservation rituals such as driving 80 miles an hour between towns in cars that have no tires, no doors, and no windshields. Mary is also a fighter. She slashes a white woman's face for a racist remark in a bar. Mary does not view herself as violent and tries to cool off when she feels her blood begin to boil. Many people only fight when backed into a corner, but there are corners everywhere the Indians live. Even after Mary is married and has a son she still finds herself in the middle of fights. One evening, Mary, her husband Leonard, their baby and several friends are leaving a ceremony. The gas tank on their car is broken and while the men try to fix it, several white men approach. The men begin harassing the Indians. As the fight escalates Mary gives her son to a friend for safety and tries to get help from several cops parked nearby. The cops finally send the white men home and then arrest the Indians. Mary's son just misses being shot in the leg.

These chapters show very clearly what happens when Indians try to interact with the white world. However, the Indians cannot be held wholly responsible for the trouble that occurs. The white missionaries take the Indian children from their homes and expect



them to willingly comply with new rules. At the same time, the Indians are responsible for their consumption of alcohol regardless of who introduced it to them. There is a great deal of finger pointing and very little acceptance of responsibility. The name of the hippie who influences Mary at the mission school is Wise. Her sudden appearance symbolizes the need for Mary to get wise to what is happening around her and make a decision as to where she stands.



Chapter Five, Aimlessness; Chapter Six, We AIM Not to Please

Chapter Five, Aimlessness; Chapter Six, We AIM Not to Please Summary and Analysis

Mary has always been a loner. Mary's mother is concerned with what others think of her (the mother) and works hard to live by white standards. Because she has no relationship with her mother, Mary decides to leave home. Mary travels with ten others for the summer doing drugs and stealing what they need. The group justifies their "liberation" of goods as a way to gain justice for the wrongs done to them in the past. The roving caravans also espouse free love. The Indian men say they honor women because they are the backbone of the tribe but really all they want is someone to do the work and have sex with. Mary is raped at the age of 14 or 15 by a white man. Most Indian girls are raped by whites, particularly cops, but nothing is done about it, and the men say the girls asked for it. Mary does not know if her roving days accomplish anything or teach her anything. She feels that they do make her more Indian and show her what it means to be Indian in a white world.

Mary can feel that something intense is coming. AIM hits her like an earthquake. Mary loves AIM, and she meets her husband at an AIM powwow in 1971, although it is several years before they marry. AIM was started in 1968, by men serving time in prison and Indians in ghettos trying to solve their problems. When the reservation and ghetto kids come together, it is like lightning starting a fire. While AIM tries to do good things, there are many things wrong with AIM. Men and women get together through Indian style marriages that may last only a few days and are not recognized by white law. Mary is in such a marriage long enough to get pregnant. Mary continues to travel throughout her pregnancy, boycotting the excavation of Indian graves, attending political trials and entering establishments forbidden to Indians.

The young AIM kids are joined by the old Indians who still have wisdom and strength to give, unlike the middle-aged adults who have given up fighting. The older generation teaches the young kids how to perform rituals and follow the old ways. Mary is impressed by the old women and their continued strength. The whites fear AIM, even though it is the Indians who are hurt and killed and not the whites. Caravans of Indians from all over converge on Washington. They pour into the BIA building when they can find no other accommodations and set up a tipi on the front lawn. There are six to eight hundred people crammed into the building but rather than feeling cramped, the Indians quickly set up a village with cooking/cleaning details, child care, care for the elderly and medical services. When government officials refuse to listen to the Indian's peaceful talk and the president ignores the caravans, the Indians become angry realizing that the only way to be heard is to be rowdy. Soon the BIA is surrounded by riot squads as the Indians paint their faces with war paint and fashion weapons from office supplies. For a



week, the Indians remain inside the BIA. Each morning the police order them out by 6 PM. In the evening the police return, but no action is taken by either side. The conflict comes to an end when the officials appoint two men to consider the Indians demands and pay their expenses home. The demands are never addressed and nothing is actually achieved. Still AIM considers the siege of the BIA building a great moral victory for Indians.

AIM serves several purposes in the story. Prior to becoming involved with AIM, Mary is aimless as she wanders the country as a vagabond. She has not decided whether she wants to become an all-out activist for Indian rights or try to live the white life like her mother does. AIM gives Mary some direction when she is the most lost. However, the early stages of AIM are only slightly less "aimless" than her caravan days. When the older generation joins AIM, the focus of the group begins to solidify. The older generation knows what is worth fighting for and how to preserve their traditions. This is the goal AIM has been looking for in order to become a strong activist group.



Chapter Seven, Crying for a Dream; Chapter Eight, Cankpe Opi Wakpala

Chapter Seven, Crying for a Dream; Chapter Eight, Cankpe Opi Wakpala Summary and Analysis

The Indian rights movement is a spiritual movement. Until the time of Franklin D Roosevelt, Indians were forbidden to practice their religion. Christianizing Indians was a way to make them "white." AIM prompts many Indians to leave the missionaries and seek out the old medicine men. Mary seeks out her full-blood relatives because half-breeds are not Indians. Half-breeds take white money and sell Indian land. Mary identifies with her stubborn, full-blood relatives who sit on their land and refuse to give it up.

Leonard Crow Dog believes strongly in peyote. Crow Dog is a peyote priest as well as a traditional medicine man. All over, Indians are crying for a dream and searching for visions through different rituals. Mary worries that the whites will try to take the peyote from them and use it as a drug to get stoned. If used correctly, peyote can be a unifier. Many tribes realize they are similar when they are inside the peyote tipi. The peyote allows different tribes to converse in a common spiritual language. The more faith there is in something, the more man struggles to keep it.

Wounded Knee is started by unpolitical, old Sioux ladies, not militants. In 1934, a man decides that the Indians need reorganized with a white government. Each tribe already has a government founded in religion. The new Act divides tribes into half-breeds and full-bloods. Most of the power is given to the half-breeds while the full-bloods move deeper into the backwoods. The tribal councils have little real power and the whites maintain control. Most tribal presidents put family into power positions and are impossible to remove from office. Dicky Wilson at Pine Ridge is one of the worst tribal presidents. The AIM and OSCRO groups converge on Rapid City and things rapidly escalate between them and Wilson's goons. Mary is not married to Leonard yet but is eight months pregnant. One night the Indians prepare for a fight, and Mary joins in, despite her condition. Eighty years of resentment boils over and is fueled by reports that an Indian is stabbed to death by whites in Custer.

A few hundred Indians converge on the Custer courthouse thirsty for justice. A fight breaks out on the street in front of the courthouse as the police turn tear gas and hoses on the Indians. The Indians set fire to the courthouse and Chamber of Commerce. By midafternoon the fighting is over and many of the Indians have been arrested. Another fight is brewing at Pine Ridge and soon the caravan heads to face Wilson's goons again. Mary goes along because it is the thing to do. No realizes at the time that they will end up at Wounded Knee. The old women say that they should make their stand at Wounded Knee. Wounded Knee has never been forgotten by the Sioux, and the bodies

of the three-hundred murdered Indians are still buried there. Fifty cars caravan through Pine Ridge to make their stand at Wounded Knee. It is the end of February, 1973.

Mary states that the Indian rights movement is a spiritual one, but the reader may notice that it moves according to violence. Within the Sioux nation people are seeking peaceful ways to regain their right to live according to the old ways. The peyote ceremonies unite the various tribes in a common spirit; however, the peacefulness of the ritual is cast aside when word of more violence against Indians is reported. The flood of people that converge on Wounded Knee shows solidarity but also resembles an angry mob. There is a sense of storming the castle to reclaim rightful territory. The reader can well imagine the scene if the feds had tried to prevent the flow of traffic into Wounded Knee. Although the Indians do not have near the same amount of fire power as the feds, they still manage to trade shots with the agents. Perhaps a more peaceful and peyote-like tactic would have been to remain secluded and quiet. The spirituality which fuels the search for a dream is abandoned once secured within Wounded Knee.



Chapter Nine, The Siege; Chapter Ten, The Ghosts Return

Chapter Nine, The Siege; Chapter Ten, The Ghosts Return Summary and Analysis

The Indians endure a seventy-one day siege at Wounded Knee. The police and FBI form a loose ring around the town as media planes fly overhead. For most of the seventy-one days, the Indians try to keep warm and find food. Mary states that not much heroic happens. The women set up a hospital in the only house with heat and water. Many of the women have guns strapped to their hips and take turns firing at the feds. One day the feds call a cease fire so the women and children can leave. Others try to make Mary leave because she is pregnant, but she refuses saying that everything important to her is at Wounded Knee. Mary would rather die at Wounded Knee than surrender to the whites. Only a handful of women leave; most stay and the ceasefire is called off.

On March 12, 1973, Wounded Knee declares itself a sovereign territory of which anyone can become a citizen. Meetings continue between both sides to find a peaceful solution. However, nothing happens because the whites refuse to listen until the Indians surrender, and the Indians refuse to surrender until the whites listen. Airlifts bring much needed food and supplies to the Indians. While bringing in some of the dropped food, Frank Clearwater is killed by a stray bullet. Another man, Buddy Lamont, is shot by a sniper. In both cases the feds refuse to honor a ceasefire called so the men can be removed from the compound. Instead they throw the men's families in jail.

The Ghost Dance religion was behind the first Wounded Knee and Leonard revives it at the second one. After one meeting Mary walks along the banks of the river and can hear the cries of women and children killed by canon fire over a hundred years ago. She wonders if this means history will repeat itself. Mary relates several accounts of ghost dances and how a man had a vision of a new world to come where the dead would be alive again. Leonard feels that the dead will not rise, but the old ways should be brought back. He decides to bring the ghost dance back at Wounded Knee where it was killed. Leonard holds the ghost dance at a hollow area where the feds cannot see or shoot at the dancers. They dance for four days from sun-up to sundown. Mary quotes Black Elk who said that the nation's hoop broke and the people's dream died at Wounded Knee. Mary says that in 1973, the Indians picked up the pieces of the nation's hoop, mended it, and the people's dream lives again.

The siege at Wounded Knee really does little to further AIM's cause. No resolution is reached between the Indians and the federal agents, but the siege does two things. First, the feds witness just how strong the nation is that they are fighting against. Women stand beside, and often in front of, men in bunkers. The Indians quickly figure out how to outsmart the white men despite their lack of weapons. The second thing the

siege does is show the Indians that they are still a unified whole. They have spent hundreds of years struggling against the white man's attempts at subjugation. Their families have been torn apart and their ancient traditions systematically erased. By returning to Wounded Knee and performing the ghost dance to summon the strength of those buried near the river, the Indians bind themselves to the past and their heritage.



Chapter Eleven, Birth Giving; Chapter Twelve, Sioux and Elephants Never Forget

Chapter Eleven, Birth Giving; Chapter Twelve, Sioux and Elephants Never Forget Summary and Analysis

The time is coming for Mary to give birth. She hopes that Leonard Crow Dog will be there for the birth, but on April 5 he leaves for Washington with several other men hoping to reach a settlement with the President. Mary does not want to go to a white hospital but instead wants to give birth in the traditional Indian way. A week before Mary goes into labor, she takes part in a peyote meeting. The medicine makes her feel confident and good. On Monday her water breaks and she experiences intense labor pains until Wednesday afternoon when she finally gives birth to a baby boy. The entire camp sings and cheers at the birth of the new warrior. Mary names her son Pedro. Outside her birthing trailer there is gunfire and smoke as the feds try burning out the Indian guides who travel through the sagebrush perimeter.

Four days after Pedro is born Mary is forced to run through a hail of gunfire to a safer place in a basement. Mary finally leaves Wounded Knee when her uncle is shot and killed. She leaves a week before the siege ends. As soon as Mary crosses the road block she is thrown in jail, and Pedro is taken from her. Mary is released after twenty-four hours because she is a nursing mother. Mary has to hitchhike one hundred and fifty miles home. A week after Mary leaves Wounded Knee, a settlement is reached and the remaining one hundred and twenty Indians leave. All remnants of Wounded Knee are bulldozed. The government tries to remove the physical evidence of the siege but the memory remains within the Indians' hearts.

After Wounded Knee, Mary becomes Crow Dog's wife even though he is much older than she, and Mary never thought of him romantically. Before Wounded Knee Leonard asks Mary to be his wife several times but she always refuses. After Wounded Knee, Mary and Leonard are at a ceremony held for the recovery of a man who has been shot. Leonard corners Mary asking her over and over to be his wife. Mary tries to refuse but her ride home has already left so she decides to stay with Crow Dog for good. Mary and Leonard live in a small bungalow house on the Crow Dog tract of land. Leonard's father Henry lives with the rest of the family in a larger structure constructed of bits of scavenged material. There are also tipis scattered about where other family and friends live.

Pedro's birth is a symbol of a significant change for Mary. No longer is she the young carefree girl following her whims. Now she is a mother responsible for a small life. The birth of a child often causes parents to pull inward and return to the values and traditions most familiar to them. Mary is no different. The violence from Wounded Knee



and the abuse she has undergone in her own life makes her a fierce protector. She does not want her son to come to harm or grow up knowing the fear and violence that she knew. Mary desires to raise Pedro according to the old traditions in the hopes that his generation will bring about salvation for the Indian people. Her decision to remain with Crow Dog furthers her goal of being a full-blood at heart since he is a well-respected traditional Indian.



Chapter Thirteen, Two Cut-Off Hands; Chapter Fourteen, Cante Ishta - The Eye of the Heart

Chapter Thirteen, Two Cut-Off Hands; Chapter Fourteen, Cante Ishta - The Eye of the Heart Summary and Analysis

Mary's friend Annie Mae is pure hearted and joyful. Annie is also active in many Indian movements and a rock for Mary to lean on. Annie Mae does not deserve to die. Annie lives a hard life similar to Mary's on a reservation in Canada. Her marriage falls apart when she and her husband disagree about whether to live as Indians or whites. Annie becomes a Native American militant and must give up custody of her children to her sister in order to ensure their safety.

Annie Mae brings her tipi to the Crow Dog camp and stays to take part in the Sun Dance of 1974-75. She gives her possessions away to Mary, keeping only the clothes on her back saying that they are good enough to die in. Annie Mae has become a high leader in AIM and is under a great deal of suspicion. Leonard Peltier, a close friend of Annie's, is suspected of shooting federal agents during an ambush at a nearby settlement. On September 5, 1975, agents swarm Crow Dog's land looking for Annie Mae, who they say is harboring Peltier. Annie is taken for questioning but released with the warning that the feds will kill her if she does not cooperate. Annie Mae goes into hiding. In November, Mary receives a call saying that Annie's body has been found frozen near Pine Ridge. The feds cut off her hands to send in for fingerprinting even though they could have done it there without mutilating Annie's body. The feds maintain that she died of exposure, but a second autopsy reveals she was shot in the head. Mary vows to find Annie Mae's killer and to tell her daughters about their brave mother. Mary feels that Annie Mae died so Mary and her family could survive.

The medicine men often say that one should look through the eye in their heart instead of the eyes in their head. When Mary becomes Leonard's wife the eye of her heart is blind. She participates in rituals without understanding and is not well versed in traditional ways. Leonard begins to teach Mary how to be a medicine man's wife. It is a difficult situation because Mary does not follow the old Sioux beliefs that a woman is not as important as a man. Leonard patiently teaches Mary. He teaches her to listen and hear the sounds of nature that make up the Indian language. Mary learns how to perform ceremonies and the ritual sweat lodge used for purification. The first time Mary participates in a sweat, the heat is almost more than she can endure, but soon she enjoys the cleansing heat and looks forward to the sweat.



In early summer 1974, the Crow Dogs have a ghost dance. It is supposed to be a small gathering but word travels fast and soon Indians are coming from very far away to participate. Mary has a feeling that something bad is going to happen. The dance goes well but Mary's premonition remains. Leonard says that the Crow Dogs feel bad luck follows them because of the first Crow Dog's killing of Spotted Tail many years ago. Mary feels he may be correct since many bad things happen after the ghost dance.

The murder of Annie Mae Aquash is evidence of the irrationality that guides the white men's thinking toward Indians. Simply because Annie is a high-ranking leader in AIM, the government assumes she poses a threat to them. The feds are so blinded by their fear that they cannot focus on reality. Annie Mae could be a strong ally for the white man. Her calm manner would make her an excellent mediator in negotiations between AIM and government agents. The white man is incapable of looking through the eyes in his heart and can only see through the eyes in his head. However, when these eyes are covered by misunderstanding and fear, the result is violence and unnecessary death.



Chapter Fifteen, The Eagle Caged

Chapter Fifteen, The Eagle Caged Summary and Analysis

After the ghost dance, Leonard experiences a period of peacefulness, but he knows the prison walls are closing in on him. Although Leonard is a medicine man uninterested in politics and does not carry a gun, his words have power, and that power is dangerous to the feds. The main charge brought against Leonard is obstruction of justice stemming from an incident at Wounded Knee. Leonard is sentenced to thirteen years for being the leader at Wounded Knee and therefore responsible for everything that happened during the siege. Leonard is set free on probation. However, the government does not like Leonard being free, so they find ways to bring more charges against him with the hopes of getting him thrown in jail.

On the morning of September 5, 1975, Mary and Leonard are awoken by their door being broken down and FBI agents pressing M-16s to their heads. Crow Dog's land looks like something from a Vietnam movie as one hundred and eighty-five government agents swarm Mary's small shack. An agent throws Mary's son Pedro across the room hitting his head on the wall. Agents pull half-asleep Indians from their beds forcing them to sit outside. Leonard is hauled off to jail where the FBI grills him with confusing questions. Leonard is put in jail for over a year even though no official explanation is given. Years later, Mary and Leonard learn that the FBI made a mistake and were trying to cover their tracks.

Mary is lost without Leonard, stumbling through her days trying to take care of all his responsibilities. Leonard is whisked to jails all over the country in a random pattern while Mary tries to keep up with him. Friends rally around Leonard trying to free him, but they all quickly learn that there is no justice in the American system where Indians are concerned. Money is the key to the justice system. If you have enough, you are acquitted, if you have none you stay in jail. It takes nearly two years for Mary and supporters to raise money to free Leonard from jail.

While in jail Leonard is treated horribly. He is never told what is happening to him or what his friends on the outside are trying to do for him. At each new jail, he is placed in the "hole" for several weeks while the guards process him for general population. The guards harass Leonard for his braided hair, his Lakota speech, his singing, and his religion. In spite of all the physical and mental abuse Leonard suffers in jail, he remains calm, breaking down only twice. The first time Leonard breaks down is when a prison doctor convinces him that they will lobotomize him to make him cooperate. Leonard is scared that they are taking his mind and his knowledge of medicine away. The second time Leonard breaks down is when he learns that a suspicious fire has burned the Crow Dog home to the ground. All the sacred relics and pieces of history are destroyed in the fire.



Even though Leonard suffers at the hands of the guards, he makes many friends among the inmates at each jail. In the spring of 1976, Leonard is released for three months while an appeal works through the courts. Leonard is restless and cannot sleep. He tells Mary that mentally he is still in prison. Three months after his release, Leonard is sent back to jail when the appeal is denied. Letters and petitions flood the courthouse pleading for the judge to reduce Leonard's sentence and assess time already served. When the judge's personal priest begins to hound him, the judge agrees and orders Leonard's release. It takes nearly three more months of red tape before Leonard is released on parole. Mary is relieved to have Leonard home so they can finally rest.

More than the chapter on the siege at Wounded Knee, this chapter shows the extreme cruelty brought against the Indians. The actions against Leonard also show the stupidity of the white man that drives the attempt to exterminate the Indian nations. Leonard's jail sentence is a game. He is used as an example to other Indians about what could happen if they dare resist the white man. However, the white man does not realize that the game works in reverse. Instead of serving as a warning, Leonard's prison sentence only fuels the Indian cause and draws new supporters with more power. Leonard's unwillingness to break in the face of the guards' cruelty shows the strength of the nation and the power of their belief system.



Chapter Sixteen, Ho Uway Tinkte - My Voice You Shall Hear; Epilogue

Chapter Sixteen, Ho Uway Tinkte - My Voice You Shall Hear; Epilogue Summary and Analysis

The time spent apart while Leonard was in prison has changed everyone. Mary became used to living in a city with modern amenities but life back on the reservation means outhouses and drawing water from a well. Living with white women has shown Mary that she does not have to be the little squaw walking behind her husband and taking beatings in silence. Leonard becomes more tolerant of women and fights less with Mary. He tells her of the First Woman who came before man bringing with her the knowledge of herbs and healing roots. He tells her also of the White Buffalo Woman who brought the Indians their sacred pipe. Leonard is careful to teach Mary the role of both men and women in Indian religion. He does not react well to the new ideas of feminism and lesbianism that became popular while he was jailed.

Mary takes part in a Sun Dance. This ritual is the most inspiring of all the Indian ceremonies. Many historians believe this ritual did not occur between 1883 and the 1930s because it was outlawed. However, the Sioux still performed it every year in secret. Since 1971, Leonard holds the Sun Dance on the Crow Dog's land. Mary vows to dance for four years but finds it difficult to keep her promise the first year. The Sun Dance requires piercing of various body parts which can be difficult to tolerate. Mary is pierced through her arms. She feels nothing and hears only the sound of the eagle bone whistles blown around her. She sees those who have died knowing that they died on her behalf. Mary knows that she is now pure Indian instead of a half-breed. She sings a song about sending her voice out and living on.

In the epilogue, Mary quickly sums up her life to the current time. She is now thirty-seven and Leonard is fifty. His parents have passed away and Mary's mother now teaches on the Rosebud reservation. Pedro is nineteen and a yuwipi (medicine) man running meetings and sweat lodges. The leaders of AIM have calmed down since Wounded Knee and are living new lives. Many of the young AIM people are dead. Most of their deaths were of natural causes as if the struggle wore them out. Leonard and Mary still perform ceremonies and rituals to help Indians in need wherever they can.

Although Mary's life continues to center around the Indian rights movement and she and Leonard are constantly involved in helping others, there is a sense of calmness to her story in the final chapter. Her devotion to Leonard during his incarceration results in increased understanding from her husband. Rather than pulling away from each other, the couple works together to find new balance to their relationship. Mary has found a man whose heart is big enough for her and who respects the strength she brings to the tribe's unity. For her part, Mary has found a home and the place where she feels content. She no longer wishes to wander in caravans and is ready to take root on the

Crow Dog compound where she can raise her children in the old ways. Mary is finally able to settle into her own light skin knowing that she is a full-blood at heart.



Characters

Mary Crow Dog

Mary Crow Dog is a Sioux from the Rosebud reservation. She stands barely over five feet tall, has dark hair and eyes but light skin. Mary is a half-blood. Her mother is Sioux but her father was white. Mary attributes her temper to the white blood in her. Mary is caught between the world of whites and the full-blood Indian ways, and she does not fit in with either group. Mary grows up on the reservation not knowing racism until she is older. Her mother left the children in order to work in Pierre over a hundred miles away. Mary and her five brothers and sisters are raised by their grandparents. Mary's grandmother tries to raise the children as whites but often overlaps traditional Sioux ways. Mary prefers the old Indian ways and seeks out those members of her family who still live according to tradition.

Mary's struggle to discover where she fits in often results in trouble. Mary walks out of the white Mission school because she cannot tolerate the unfair treatment of the students. Mary then joins a roving group of Indian youths who steal from white stores and engage in free love. Mary does drugs and drinks heavily but does not follow the promiscuous ways of the other girls. At a young age Mary marries another Indian in the traditional way and ends up pregnant. The child's father abandons her but Mary continues to engage in Indian activist rallies. Mary is at the siege of Wounded Knee when she gives birth to her son, Pedro. Shortly after Wounded Knee Mary marries Leonard Crow Dog, several years her senior but a prominent leader of Indian rights groups.

Mary's life with Leonard leads her closer to her Indian roots. She learns about the many rituals observed by the Sioux and how to assist Leonard in the execution of the ceremonies. All her training establishes a sense of self within Mary. She eventually comes to feel that despite her light skin, she is a full-blood Sioux.

Leonard Crow Dog

Leonard Crow Dog is a great Indian leader, medicine man, and yuwipi leader. He is also Mary's husband. When Mary first meets Leonard, she is fascinated by his long braids and confident swagger that most reservation men no longer exude. Leonard is nearly thirteen years older than Mary. Because of the difference in their ages Mary regards Leonard as a father-figure and refers to him as "uncle." When Leonard asks her to marry him, Mary repeatedly refuses because she does not view him in that way. However, Mary has a great deal of respect for Leonard and she eventually comes to love him.

Leonard is a natural leader for the Indians. He is calm and well-spoken but does not engage in violence. The federal agents fear Leonard's power over the people and try to



pin many crimes on him. They eventually succeed in throwing Leonard in jail for nearly two years. Leonard is abused by the guards and shuffled among prisons all over the country. Leonard manages to remain strong in the face of the abuse and only loses his composure twice. Leonard is afraid that the doctors will try to take his mind and all the knowledge he possesses. He later finds out that the guards were playing a trick on him.

Leonard and Mary's life is consumed with ministering to the Indian nation. They travel the country holding Sun Dances, Ghost Dances, yuwipi rituals and sweat lodges to help those in need. Leonard is a skilled medicine man and spends a great deal of time seeking visions. Leonard trains Mary to be a medicine man's wife and to live as a traditional Sioux. Their life together is difficult. Their families oppose their marriage for a long time and they are constantly on the run from the law. Still the couple remains bound to each other and continues to fight for Indian rights.

Annie Mae Aquash

Annie Mae is one of Mary's closest friends. She is a small woman barely over five feet tall but powerful in character. Annie is willing to help out anyone in need and often goes out of her way to help a fellow Indian. Although Annie Mae is a leader in AIM and takes part in many rallies, she is not a violent individual. Mary and Annie Mae become close friends because they have similar backgrounds. Annie Mae and her husband divorced because they could not agree on whether to live according to white or Indian values. Annie Mae then becomes involved in AIM and gives up custody of her children to her sister so they will not be in danger. Annie Mae lives her life with the premonition that she will die early. In preparation for her death, Annie Mae gives away all her belongings except for the clothes on her back. Annie Mae's corpse is found at the base of a hill on the Pine Ridge reservation. Her hands are cut off and shipped to Washington for fingerprint identification. Mary notes that this insulting mutilation is not necessary because fingerprinting could have been done in South Dakota. Mary vows to find Annie Mae's killer and to tell her daughters about their strong mother.

Barb

Barb is Mary's older sister by four years. She is also Mary's best friend. The sisters spend a great deal of time together and their close relationship is very apparent. Barb is more of a wild child than Mary and often in more trouble with drugs, alcohol, and men. Barb tries to keep Mary out of trouble by warning her sister that she has already been through it all and Mary does not need to repeat Barb's mistakes. Both Mary and Barb attend the Mission School at the same time. Barb quits and leaves after being fed up with the treatment from the nuns. Barb's first pregnancy ends in a miscarriage when her employer forces her to carry a heavy load that puts too much stress on her body. The second time Barb is pregnant she goes in for delivery but the baby dies due to poor care at the white hospital. Doctors then sterilize Barb without her permission. When Mary becomes pregnant with Pedro, she is determined to have the baby in the traditional way and not at a white hospital. Mary wants Barb to share in the joy of having



a baby along with her. The bond between the sisters is wonderful and gives them both a confidant and friend to lean on during the difficult times they each face.

Mary's Mother

Mary does not give her mother's name. Mary's mother wants to live a "white" life and does not like that Mary and Barb seek out the traditional ways. When Mary's father abandons the family, Mary's mother remarries a man who is a drunk and teaches the kids to drink. Mary's mother leaves the family to work in Pierre over a hundred miles away. The children are raised by Mary's grandparents. Mary's mother is also the victim of forced sterilization after the still birth of her seventh child. Mary and her mother do not have a relationship until after Pedro is born. Mary's mother eventually returns to Rosebud Reservation where she works as a teacher.

AIM: American Indian Movement

AIM is a group of Indians desiring to change the way the American government treats Native Americans. The group was started by men in prison and Indians trying to survive in the ghettos of big cities. Although AIM is started by city Indians, the desire is for a return to many of the old ways. The AIM group seeks out the Sioux nation to teach them many of the lost traditions and rituals. AIM is often seen by whites as a radical group intending harm to white men. Mary admits that many of the AIM Indians found themselves in a great deal of trouble but most of it was the result of being provoked by white federal agents and law enforcement.

Dick Wilson

Dick Wilson is the tribal president at Pine Ridge. He is one of the worst tribal presidents. Before being appointed to the position Dick and his family were in trouble for illegal practices and were even run out of Pine Ridge for a time. Once Dick becomes president he abolishes freedom of speech and assembly on the reservation. He maintains his control with a group of men used as his private army. These men are called goons by the other Indians. Any one who offends Dick or his goons is usually found dead of suspicious circumstances. Wilson's abuse continues to escalate until it results in the siege at Wounded Knee.

Elsie Flood

Elsie is a niece of Mary's Grandmother. Elsie still lives by the old traditions and Mary seeks her out in rebellion against her grandmother's Catholic teachings. Elsie is a turtle woman. The turtle is a symbol of strength, resolution and long-life. Elsie is also a medicine woman who carries a pack on her back everywhere she goes. Her pack is full of remedies, many of them based on the turtle. Elsie is one of the most traditionally strong women of her generation. Elsie is found beaten to death and naked under her



bed. The knowledge that died with Elsie is not found anymore and will take many years to resurrect.

Pedro

Pedro is Mary's first born son. Mary becomes pregnant after a traditional marriage while she is a member of AIM. Pedro's father abandons Mary shortly after she becomes pregnant. Pedro as an individual character does not figure largely into the story. The importance of Pedro is that he was born during the siege at Wounded Knee. Pedro is a kind of symbol for the siege and a rebirth of the spirits of the dead trapped at Wounded Knee from the massacre a hundred years before. In her epilogue, Mary notes that Pedro has grown into a yuwipi leader and medicine man like Leonard.

Grandpa Fool Bull

Grandpa Fool Bull is also referred to as Uncle Dick Fool Bull. The name of "grandfather" may be an affectionate term used to denote the man's standing within the community. Grandpa Fool Bull takes Mary to her first peyote meeting. There Mary ingests a large quantity of peyote and sees many good visions. Grandpa Fool Bull is over a hundred years old. He was at the first Wounded Knee. Like Elsie Flood, Grandpa Fool Bull is someone Mary seeks out and spends a great deal of time with in order to learn more about the old Indian ways. While at the peyote meeting Grandpa Fool Bull sings his death song in preparation for dying. He speaks of being reunited with lost loved ones and returning to his native ways.

OSCRO

OSCRO stands for the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization. The group is formed by old chiefs, medicine men and traditional Indians seeking fair treatment by the tribal presidents. The head of the OSCRO is Pedro Bissenette. Pedro is a very influential leader and takes part in many AIM rallies and is at the siege at Wounded Knee. Pedro and Mary are very close friends. She names her son after Pedro and is glad that she does because Pedro Bissenette is found dead after Wilson's goons attack him.



Objects/Places

Peyote

Peyote is a type of cactus. It is used in peyote ceremonies as a medicine or recreational drug.

Sacred Pipe

The sacred pipe is used in nearly all Indian rituals. The pipe is smoked and passed around to participants so they can all take part in the restorative power of the herbs.

Mission School

The mission school is run by Catholic nuns who rule with a whip. Mary, her sister, her mother, and her grandmother all attended a mission school. None of them attend by choice. The nuns mistreat the girls, embarrass them, and try to "whitemanize" them. Mary rebels and ends up leaving the school before graduating.

Wounded Knee

Wounded Knee is the site of two important events in Native American history. The first occurs over a hundred years before the second. At the first Wounded Knee, soldiers massacre innocent women and children without reason. The second event involves members of AIM laying siege to Wounded Knee for over a month. The stand-off with the feds leaves many Indians dead and brings no resolution to the problem. Mary's son Pedro is born in the middle of the second Wounded Knee.

Sweat Lodge

The sweat lodge is used for purification. The sweat lodge has four doors that may be opened during the ritual in order to bring cooling relief to participants. Rocks are heated and placed in the center of the lodge. Water is then poured over the rocks to produce steam.

Sun Dance

The sun dance is performed so that participants can feel suffering to commiserate with friends who are suffering. Several participants pledge to dance and are then pierced on various parts of their body. Often the dancers are suspended from a tree by the piercings to intensify the pain.



Yuwipi Ceremony

The yuwipi ceremony bridges the gap between the human and spirit worlds. An intercessor is bound hand and foot, wrapped in a cloth, and placed face down inside a sacred square. The lights are blown out and the participants can feel spirits circling around them. At the end of the ceremony the lights are lit again to reveal that the intercessor is unbound and sitting upright. He then gives the message delivered by the spirits and all the participants take part in a dog feast.

Vision Quest

A vision quest is undertaken when an Indian wishes to find deeper understanding. The person is buried in a pit where they spend several days in deep contemplation waiting to receive a vision from the spirits.

Pine Ridge

Pine Ridge is an Indian Reservation that is often a hotbed of violence. Pine Ridge and Rosebud neighbor each other and make up nearly two million acres of reservation land occupied by the Sioux.

Rosebud

Rosebud is the name of the reservation where Mary lives. It is near Pine Ridge and much of the violence that takes place at Pine Ridge spills over into Rosebud.

BIA

The BIA stands for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Shortly after Mary joins AIM, the group lays siege to the BIA building in Washington for a week. The siege accomplishes little but does raise morale of the Indian militants.

Res

Res is short for reservation. Mary usually refers to the different reservations and her home simply as the "res."

Crow Dog's Land

Crow Dog's land is the allotment where the Crow Dog family lives within the boundaries of the Rosebud reservation. Many families and friends live in shacks or tipis scattered

about the compound. The Crow Dog's land is used for many ceremonies and is a sort of sanctuary for wayward Indians.



Themes

The Struggle of Being an Indian Woman

Numerous times Mary mentions a Cheyenne saying that points to the strength of tribe as emanating from its women. Women hold an dual role in Native American culture. They are at once revered and misused. The old ways directed a woman to walk behind her man and defer to him in all things. With the influx of the white man, women are learning that they do not have to stay one step behind their men. The white man also brings new evils to the Indian that negatively affect the role of women in Indian culture. The struggle for Indian women comes from embracing their own personal strength and remaining centered within their traditions.

It is the White Buffalo Woman who brings the sacred pipe to the Sioux. The pipe is the central component of Sioux religion and features prominently in many ceremonies. A woman is also responsible for bringing knowledge of medicine and healing herbs to the Indians. A woman who is menstruating is not allowed to take part in sacred rituals because her power is so great that it may consume the power of others. Outwardly the men of the tribe value a woman's role among the tribe and protect her from outsiders. However, the history of women's power is not enough to fight off the new ways of thinking and living introduced by the white man.

Under the influence of whiskey brought to reservations by white explorers, Indian men abuse their wives. Drunken rages are spent beating women and sometimes children. Indian women are raped by white men who insist the women ask for it. These crimes are commonplace and never investigated. The rights of Indian women to bear children are taken away by white doctors who force sterilization on Indian mothers. Women are not respected at home or in society any more. They are still kept out of ceremonies according to the old traditions, but it is perfectly acceptable for a woman to use a gun to fight off the feds so the men can run for safety. Women are left to hold a family together while the man drinks away what little money the family has, but she is berated for leaving her children to find a job of her own.

Mary and Leonard must find a balance to their relationship after his return from jail. Mary has spent time enjoying the freedom of being a woman in white society, but Leonard does not agree with the increase of women's rights. Their compromise seems to emanate from the historical backgrounds of Indian women. As Leonard shares with Mary the stories of the White Buffalo Woman and the Woman bringing knowledge, they both come to realize the importance of a woman in Indian society. While white religion maintains that woman sprang from man, Indians believe that women were the first to populate the earth. This inbred knowledge causes many Indian women to be confused about their place in the community. The men say that the woman is important but do not follow their words with actions. A woman like Mary, who can internalize the old ways and integrate new freedoms is the one who can manage to live peacefully with her man.



Finding Where You Belong

Mary feels that she is a loner. She does not fit in with the whites or the full-bloods because of her half-blood status. Mary is repulsed by her mother's attempts to live like a white person. She does not agree with the whites' lack of respect for families and their belief that it is better to be an individual than a strong member of the community. Instead Mary is drawn to the old Indian ways. She likes the rituals and reverence espoused by her ancestors. However, fitting in with the full-blood traditionalists is not as easy as it would seem.

Mary defines a full-blood as anyone who lives and thinks like a full-blood. Although she states this definition, Mary does not appear to believe the truth of the description. Mary seeks out her traditionalist family members in order to learn the old rituals and ways of living. She takes part in many ceremonies, ingests peyote, and eagerly becomes a member of AIM. However, it is not until Mary marries Leonard Crow Dog that she begins to find a sense of belonging. Leonard teaches her the history of the rituals, how to perform them properly and how to find meaning in them. Mary also feels a solidarity with her friends in AIM. The organization becomes a home for Mary where she was respected for her contributions.

As Mary begins to feel a sense of home and connect with her traditional roots, she feels more and more that she is a full-blood no matter what the color of her skin. Mary fights for Indian rights because she is an Indian. She believes in the rituals, practices the religion, and desires to live an Indian life. Finally Mary comes to embody her own definition of a full-blood.

Culture Shock

When the white man ventures on to Indian land, his first order of business is to eradicate the Indian lifestyle. Mary notes that the popular image of Indians teaching white explorers to plant corn and a mixed congregation sharing Thanksgiving dinner together is false. Most white explorers did not take the time to get to know the Indians or the wisdom of their ways. Instead the immediate concern was to corral the Indians and force them to live according to white ways. As Mary says, "Christianizing us was one way of making us white, that is, of making us forget that we were Indians." (Chapter 7, pg. 92)

The white man fears the Indian ways. Because the Indians worship the earth, sun, moon and Mother Nature through strange rituals that include piercing one's flesh, eating dog, and binding people in cloth, the white man assumes that these practices are evil. The fear of the unknown causes the white man to refuse to listen instead seeking to subdue an imagined enemy. The white man's concern can be rationalized by the knowledge that some Indian tribes were known to act violently even against other tribes. However, violent Indian behavior can be explained by the fact that the Indian's way of living, their homeland, and their lives were often threatened without provocation. Mary says that anyone backed into a corner will fight and that Indians are always in a corner.



The influx of white men brings a whole new culture to Indians. Most of the ideas brought by the white men prove detrimental to the Indians, and, in truth, are not very healthy for any men. Whiskey turns men who were once brave warriors into drunken wife beaters. The loss of land and animals causes many to starve and for sacred rituals to go unpracticed. Ancient knowledge passed down through generations is lost as the old die and the young do not understand the old ways. The family unit is torn apart in an attempt to create an individualistic society when previously, a large extended family saw to the care of the very young, the very old, and all those in between. People are on edge because they do not know where they belong. New luxuries only breed envy and more fear of others.

Lack of understanding and patience couple with fear to produce a volatile environment where peaceful people are made violent. The white men destroy old ways that could have proved beneficial to themselves and upset an entire nation causing more stress for the white people. The problem is age old and has no end. Mary's story shows the effects of an imposed culture on the old ways and the damage it does to both parties involved.

Style

Perspective

Mary Crow Dog knows her story and that of the Native American pretty well. She lived during a turbulent time in the Native American civil rights struggle and has close ancestral ties to the beginnings of that struggle. Mary provides a straight forward look at the realities of the abuse, displacement, and uncertainties encountered by the Indians. Mary does not hold back in her narrative, giving the reader details that are not found in history books. Her life is not easy and she does not attempt to shield the reader; however, Mary does not ask for sympathy. She does not tell her story to bring pity on the Indians, but to promote understanding.

The reader is certainly impacted by Mary's story. She comes from such a rich background that many readers do not have or do not know. Mary's desire to embrace her ancestral past encourages the reader to discover her/his own past. There is simplicity to the old Indian ways that is comforting. Instead of being swept into the stress and hustle of the white world the Indians desire a connection to the earth. They are rooted in the land and their religion. The sense of family and community Mary portrays is astounding and completely foreign to the white reader. The reader comes to understand the struggle faced by Indians who have been forced from their own lifestyle and yet are not welcome into a new society.

Tone

At only one point in the story does Mary note that she is being objective. In Chapter Three, Mary notes that several of the German priests at the terrible mission school are responsible for putting together the best Lakota-English dictionaries available. Apart from this one instance, Mary is purely subjective throughout the book. The story is Mary's and the events that occur are too emotional for her to step back and view them with an objective lens.

There is a feeling of harshness to Mary's story. She does not attempt to hide the severeness of her life or the hardships faced by herself and other Indians. Mary's comparisons to Vietnam enhance the battle ground atmosphere of Indians versus whites. Her repetition of events and abusive acts reinforces the reality of what happened. Mary does not give the reader a chance to relax or forget the Indian's suffering. However, for all the bluntness Mary offers, she also speaks with extreme reverence where the traditions of her people are concerned. The reader is able to understand each ritual from its beginnings to its practice and meaning. Mary may have struggled with her place in the full-blood world, but her story is told from the heart of a pure Indian.

Structure

The story is told in sixteen chapters. Each chapter is numbered and titled. The titles convey the idea contained within the chapter. Further alerting the reader to the contents of the chapter is a short quote at the beginning of each chapter. These quotations are taken from Native American sayings, songs, and words spoken by Mary's friends.

The first several chapters are a mesh of background information sporadically told. Mary briefly tells about many of the people who will be mentioned later in the book in greater detail. These first chapters jump around as Mary begins by telling about Pedro's birth at Wounded Knee, returns to her own childhood, and then fast forwards to Leonard's time in jail. Since many events are mentioned more than once and in no particular order, the reader can become confused about when certain events occurred in relation to one another. Overall Mary presents a cohesive narrative that provides a first-hand account of the struggle between those trying to live and those trying to prevent them from a way of life.



Quotes

"I had my first baby during a firefight, with the bullets crashing through one wall and coming out through the other." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"The life of an Indian is not held in great value in the State of South Dakota." Chapter 2, pg. 25

"I started drinking because it was the natural way of life." Chapter 4, pg. 45

"I should make clear that being a full-blood or breed is not a matter of bloodline, or how Indian you look, or how black your hair is. The general rule is that whoever thinks, sings, acts, and speaks Indian is a skin, a full-blood, and whoever acts and thinks like a white man is a half-blood or breed, no matter how Indian he looks." Chapter 4, pg. 49

I was scared of white people and uneasy in their company, so I did not socialize with them. I could not relate to half-bloods and was afraid that full-bloods would not accept me." Chapter 5, pg. 56

"For a number of years BIA doctors performed thousands of forced sterilizations on Indian and Chicano women without their knowledge or consent." Chapter 6, pg. 79

"It is really true, the old Cheyenne saying: 'A nation is not dead until the hearts of its women are on the ground.'" Chapter 6, pg. 80

"A faith you have suffered for becomes more precious." Chapter 7, pg. 105

"She was older than I and already a mother, divorced from a husband whose heart was not big enough for her." Chapter 9, pg. 138

"One thing Leonard did not do was to take up a gun and shoot. His being a medicine man forbade it." Chapter 10, pg. 148

"To them my husband was more dangerous than Peltier because moral power is always more dangerous to an oppressor than political force." Chapter 15, pg. 222

"Wherever Native Americans struggle for their rights, Leonard is there. Life goes on." Epilogue, pg. 263

"Christanizing us was one way of making us white, that is, of making us forget that we were Indians." Chapter 7, pg. 92



Topics for Discussion

Mary talks quite a bit about the influence of alcohol on the Indian culture. At times she asserts that white men are to blame for the alcohol problem among Indians because whites introduced whiskey to Native Americans. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Who should be held responsible for the rise of alcoholism among Native Americans?

How do you feel about the role of peyote in Indian culture? Is it a mind-altering drug or an innocent herb used for medicinal purposes?

Mary quotes the Cheyenne proverb that says an Indian nation does not die until the hearts of its women are buried in the earth. How does this quote represent Mary's life? Does she embody the meaning behind this saying?

After reading Mary's story and seeing a new side to the struggle between whites and Indians, have you changed any opinions you may have had about the Native American struggle? How does the Indians' struggle compare to that of the Jews in Nazi Germany or Africans colonized by the British?

Several times Mary compares the fights between the Indians and the feds to Vietnam. What does she mean by making this comparison? Do you agree or disagree with this analogy?

How do you feel about Mary's relationship with Leonard? Is it based on love, mutual respect and common interest, and a lack of options, or is Leonard a father figure for Mary?

Discuss the siege at Wounded Knee. How does it compare to the massacre a hundred years before? How does it differ?