

Waterlily Study Guide

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Plot Summary

This is a novel about the lives and customs of the Dakota women told from the perspective a young girl named Waterlily. The reader follows Waterlily through her journey from infancy to adulthood, through her joys and heartaches, until she ultimately finds true love.

Blue Bird and her grandmother end up with a group of Indians after their family is attacked and killed, leaving Blue Bird and her grandmother alone. Luckily, the two women are taken in by a passing camp circle, with which they lived with for four years. In this time, Blue Bird marries one of the young men, Star Elk, and becomes pregnant with Waterlily. Star Elk is not a good husband to Blue Bird, and shortly after Waterlily is born, Star Elk publicly throws Blue Bird away. The people of the camp circle know that Star Elk has no reason to do this, and Star Elk is so shamed by his own behavior that he leaves the camp circle, never to be heard from again. Soon after this, Blue Bird's people find her and bring her and her grandmother and new daughter back to their own camp circle.

Soon after Blue Bird and Waterlily are back with their own camp circle, Blue Bird meets Rainbow, and the two are married. Waterlily's new grandmother, Gloku, loves her very much, and treats Waterlily just like one of her own grandchildren.

Rainbow takes his family to visit his friend, Palani. There is a Sun Dance celebration going on at Palani's camp circle when Rainbow and his family get there, and Waterlily and her cousin, Prairie Flower, get to participate in the festivities. While at the festival, Waterlily sees a young boy who is part of a ceremony where he dances and prays. The young boy has promised the Great Spirit that if he spare his father's life, he will sacrifice one hundred pieces of flesh at the festival. Waterlily is so touched by the boy's sacrifice that she tries to bring him some water, which is forbidden. When he refuses the water, Waterlily runs away. Waterlily and her family leave the festival without ever seeing the young boy again.

Soon after returning to their own camp circle, Waterlily's grandmother, Gloku, dies. Waterlily's uncle has two very beautiful and strong American horses he is saving to give as gifts in Gloku's name, but the horses are stolen. Waterlily is asked by a boy she has never met or even seen to be his wife. The boy's family is going to give Waterlily's family two horses in exchange for her marrying the boy. Waterlily agrees to the marriage because she loves her grandmother so much and wants her uncle to be able to have the horses to give as gifts.

When Waterlily marries the young man, Sacred Horse, she moves away from her people to live with his family. She is very homesick for her family and unsure of how to act around her new husband, but before she can become comfortable with him, the camp circle is infected with smallpox and Waterlily's new husband dies. By the time Waterlily returns to her own family, she learns she is pregnant with Sacred Horse's child. One of Sacred Horse's relatives tells Waterlily he will send one of Sacred Horse's



cousins to Waterlily's camp circle to be her husband and to help raise Sacred Horse's child. Waterlily is very surprised when the cousin of Sacred Horse turns out to be the boy from the Sun Dance celebration, Lowanla.



Chapters One through Three

Chapters One through Three Summary

This novel takes the reader into the lives and customs of the Dakota women, as one watches young Waterlily grow from a young child into a woman. The journey Waterlily takes as she becomes a wife and widow and finally finds her true love, is shown, giving the reader insight into the daily life of Dakota women.

In chapter one, Blue Bird and the rest of the camp circle are moving the camp, and Blue Bird walks off by herself to have her baby, a daughter which she names Waterlily. Blue Bird gives her new daughter this name because the place where she is born is near the waterlilies and Blue Bird thinks her child's face is as beautiful as the waterlilies. As soon as Blue Bird has given birth, she wraps the baby up and changes her own clothing and rejoins the group. No one has noticed that Blue Bird is gone, and she takes her places at the back of the group. Once the group stops for the night, Blue Bird finds her cousin and stays with her for the night. News of Waterlily's birth travels through the camp, and the next morning Blue Bird's mother-in-law comes to visit her new granddaughter and daughter-in-law. Blue Bird's mother-in-law knows her son will not be happy about Blue Bird staying with her cousin instead of coming back to their camp, but she thinks it would be better for Blue Bird to remain with her cousin who can help Blue Bird with her new baby.

Chapter two shows how Blue Bird came to live in this camp circle. When Blue Bird was only fourteen, her father, mother, two brothers, and her grandmother are on a hunting trip. Blue Bird and her grandmother are gathering beans when her family is attacked and killed. Blue Bird and her grandmother wander alone for days before a passing camp circle welcomes them in. A few years later, Blue Bird agrees to marry one of the men in the camp, Star Elk. Blue Bird's grandmother is not happy about it because Star Elk is known as lazy and a poor hunter and Blue Bird's grandmother does not think he will make a good husband for Blue Bird. However Blue Bird has already accepted Star Elk by the time her grandmother finds out, so there is nothing to do but make the best of it. Blue Bird is very beautiful and Star Elk is very jealous of the way the other men look at her, so he treats her very badly. Blue Bird is unhappy with Star Elk.

In chapter three, Blue Bird decides to stay with her cousin for a few days after Waterlily is born, and this makes Star Elk so angry that he refuses to even go and see the baby. He pouts around and the rest of the people in the camp make fun of him because they say he is acting like a woman. Star Elk is so angry with Blue Bird and with the way the rest of the camp circle is treating him, that during a victory dance he decides to throw Blue Bird away publicly. He tells every one at the dance that if anyone wants a woman to fetch water or fuel they can have Blue Bird. The people of the camp circle know that Blue Bird has done nothing to deserve this treatment; Star is so shamed by his own behavior that he leaves the camp circle and is never heard from again.



Blue Bird is upset by what Star Elk has done, but Waterlily is sick and Blue Bird is too worried about her child to care about what happened to Star Elk. Blue Bird tries all the medicines that the other women in the camp give her but nothing seems to help Waterlily. Waterlily is growing steadily weaker and Blue Bird fears her baby is going to die. The only thing left for Blue Bird to do is to pray, so Blue Bird gathers the only things she has left from her father and goes out to the woods to make an altar to pray for her daughter. Blue Bird prays that her child will get well, and after she has prayed she hears someone say "Hao", which is the Dakota word for approval and consent. When Blue Bird looks around for who could have said it, she sees no one. Blue Bird is sure this means her prayer will be answered, and after she comes back to the camp, Waterlily begins to get better. Not long after this, she hears that there are visitors in the camp, and then she learns the visitor is her cousin Black Eagle, who has come to take her and her grandmother back to their people.

Chapters One through Three Analysis

When Blue Bird and her grandmother were taken in by this camp circle, they were alone and scared. The new camp circle made them feel at home and gave them everything they needed to live there, including a tipi. As Blue Bird grew older, her grandmother worried that Blue Bird needed to find a husband, but when Blue Bird told her that she had agreed to marry Star Elk, her grandmother became even more concerned. The Dakota's did not have traditional wedding ceremonies; they would agree to marry, then they would plan a wedding trip, then when the couple would return they would set up their tipi with one of their family groups and begin their married life. Blue Bird had, however, left on the honeymoon trip without telling her grandmother, and her grandmother was concerned that Star Elk would not honor his commitment to Blue Bird, thus bringing disgrace to her. Luckily, Star Elk took Waterlily to his family immediately and then sent for her grandmother so she could be with them also. This was the least honorable way to marry, but the people in the camp justified it by saying that Blue Bird did not have a mother to teach her any better.

The reason Blue Bird is so unhappy with Star Elk is because he is so jealous of her beauty. He thinks that the other men in the camp are paying too much attention to her and that she is encouraging them. Star Elk spends too much of his time being angry about the attention he thinks Blue Bird is receiving from other men and not enough time hunting and providing for his wife, and he takes out his insecurities on Blue Bird. Blue Bird is a good wife to Star Elk, and if he would have given her the attention he thought the other men were giving her, he would not have lost his wife and daughter and had to leave his own camp circle.

Blue Bird's honor came into question two times while she was with Star Elk, once when she came back from her honeymoon trip and then again when he threw her away at the victory dance, but Blue Bird had always proven to be a woman of honor, and when it came down to it, the people around her knew what kind of a person Blue Bird was no matter what was being said about her. The author shows throughout the novel how the Dakota women are taught from early childhood the importance of living a honorable life.



Chapters Four through Six

Chapters Four through Six Summary

In chapter four, back at her own camp circle, Blue Bird is finding it a little harder to readjust than she thought it would be. She was much younger when she left, and now she is returning with a child of her own. Blue Bird has also returned without a husband, through no fault of her own. Her grandmother, on the other hand, is very happy to be home, and is spending her days going from tipi to tipi, visiting with her old friends. Blue Bird is staying in her own tipi and allowing friends and family to call on her as they please.

One day a small boy comes by to play with Waterlily. The boy's name is Little Chief, and before long, Little Chief is coming by almost every day to see Waterlily. Blue Bird makes Little Chief a pair of beautiful moccasins and tells the boy the moccasins are from Waterlily. When Little Chief's grandmother sees the moccasins, she brings food to Blue Bird's tipi to thank her. Little Chief's grandmother, Gloku, tells Blue Bird that she and her husband are so touched by the kindness that Blue Bird has shown their grandson that they want to give Waterlily a horse. The two women sit and talk, and Gloku tells Blue Bird about her family. Gloku's daughter, First Woman, is married to Black Eagle. Little Chief's father, Rainbow, is away from the camp circle at the moment and Little Chief's mother died when he was born. Gloku and her husband take care of Little Chief. After the two women finish their conversation and Gloku goes back to her own tipi, she tells her husband about Blue Bird and they decide that Blue Bird would make a good wife for Rainbow. Gloku decides to talk to Rainbow about Blue Bird as soon as he returns.

Sometime during the summer, Blue Bird's grandmother is killed when a tree falls on her while she is gathering wood for fuel. While the family is preparing for her burial, Gloku's son Rainbow returns to the camp circle and helps Black Eagle with the burial tradition. Blue Bird cannot help but notice the difference between Rainbow and Star Elk, such as how Rainbow does what needs to be done without having to be asked or told. After the burial, Rainbow asks Blue Bird to marry him and she accepts.

Rainbow returns to his parent's tipi and asks them if he can use their hunting tipi for his honeymoon trip with Blue Bird. Gloku and her husband are surprised because they had not had the chance to talk to him about Blue Bird.

In chapter five, the camp circle is moving to the location they will be in for the winter, and they are stopping near Box Butte before they reach their final location. Blue Bird and Rainbow are preparing for their trip with the help of Rainbow's sister's and mother. Rainbow has a special place in mind for this trip, a place his family has gone for years. It is going to be a surprise for Blue Bird. The place Rainbow has picked is near a stream and is secluded, where they can have peace and quiet.



Back at the camp circle, Gloku is caring for Little Chief and Waterlily while their parents are on their hunting trip. One day, Little Chief tells Gloku that he has seen a giant on the hill at Box Butte. Gloku tells the boy that what he has seen is the pile of prayers. Gloku decides that she should take both children up to the pile of prayers and teach them to pray. The next day she packs them a lunch and they head out for Box Butte. It is a long way to the top of the hill, and they stop to have their lunch before continuing up to the top. When they finally reach the top, Gloku paints each child's rock and helps them place the rock on the pile and say their prayers. Then Gloku places her own rock and prays, while both children sit quietly and watch their grandmother. When they are finished, they return to the camp circle.

In chapter six, the camp circle has finally settled where they are going to stay for the winter. The size of the camp circle has doubled because another camp circle has joined them. Blue Bird and Rainbow have returned from their trip, and Blue Bird is busy setting up their tipi. Everyone in the camp is very happy about their marriage, especially Gloku. She is very pleased with her new daughter-in-law, and takes every opportunity to introduce Blue Bird to the new people at the camp.

Gloku has a dream that she believes is a sign that in four nights she will be in danger and that she will be invisible. The dream is making Gloku very uneasy. On the fourth night, she is trying to stay close to the camp, but one of the women asks her to go with her to get water and Gloku reluctantly agrees to go. While the two women are getting the water, they are attacked. Gloku picks up a handful of sand and throws it in the air behind her as she is running away. She runs to the first group of tipis and tells them what has happened, and they send out help. Gloku's friend later dies from her injuries. Gloku believes the dream saved her life and that the sand made her invisible to the attackers, especially when she hears years later that a neighboring tribe tells the story of a Dakota woman who disappeared right before their eyes.

A storyteller named Woyaka comes to each of the families in the camp circle during this winter. They are all happy to have Woyaka there because he is known as the best storyteller of all times. When Woyaka comes to Black Eagle's family, he tells them the story about the time the buffalo came into the camp when the Dakotas were starving and allowed the Dakotas to kill just enough of them to make it through the winter. Then the buffalo walked out of the camp as calmly as they had walked in to it.

Chapters Four through Six Analysis

The traditions the Dakotas have are seen throughout this novel, and the giving of gifts is one of the most common traditions. When Dakotas give gifts, it is seen as a sign of respect and honor. When Blue Bird made the moccasins for Little Chief, she did this because she cared for the boy and because he was kind to her daughter. When Gloku and her husband found out that Blue Bird had done this for Little Chief, they were so moved by her kindness they responded by giving Waterlily a horse. Both adults gave these gifts in the name of the children, so it was as if the children gave the gifts to each other, even though the children were too young to be able to even understand the



meaning behind the giving of the gifts. This act brought honor to the children as well as to their families. One can see this act of giving throughout the novel, because their generosity is one of the main things the Dakotas are known for.

When Blue Bird meets Rainbow for the first time, he asks her to marry him. Normally it would take more than a first meeting for a woman to agree to marriage. Blue Bird had already been married, and she had been watching Rainbow help her family with her grandmother's burial. Blue Bird could tell Rainbow was an honorable man. Blue Bird could see the difference between Rainbow and Star Elk, so when Rainbow asks her to marry him, she knows things would be different with Rainbow.

While Blue Bird and Rainbow are on their hunting trip, Gloku takes care of their children. In the Dakota tribe, it was custom for the grandmother as well as the aunts to help to raise the children. It is for this reason that the tipis are set up close together, so the whole family is there to help. Gloku taught the children how to behave and how to respect each other. Dakota children are expected to respect their brothers, sisters and cousins, and to be proud of each other's accomplishments. This is shown later with Waterlily and Little Chief when Little Chief is becoming a young man.

Gloku loves Waterlily as much as she does her own blood grandchildren. The Dakotas did not treat people differently if they were not blood relatives. When Rainbow and Blue Bird married, Waterlily was then Rainbow's child and Gloku's grandchild. As will be illustrated in later chapters, Dakotas from time to time take in other people into their families and these people are family for life, with the same family etiquette of blood family. The Dakota are a very devoted, loyal people, who see past bloodlines.



Chapters Seven through Nine

Chapters Seven through Nine Summary

In chapter seven, the winter is coming to an end and Blue Bird is expecting a child. Rainbow's sisters are busy preparing cradles and clothing for the baby. In fact, all of Blue Bird's new family are helping her any way they can, from helping put up her tipi to preparing meals for her. Blue Bird is thankful for the help but careful not to take advantage of their kindness. She knows they all love her, but like all Dakota women their ultimate loyalty is with Rainbow, and Blue Bird does not want her sister-in-laws to think she is lazy and is not worthy of their brother.

Little Chief is getting older now and spends most of his time with the older boys and not so much time playing with Waterlily. Little Chief has begun his training with Black Eagle's brother, Bear Heart. Bear Heart is teaching the young boys in the camp circle to hunt and to be good warriors. After one of their first training sessions, Black Eagle gives Little Chief his first horse. Little Chief is so happy he hardly ever gets off his horse even to eat.

Blue Bird has her baby, and Rainbow names him Ohiya. Waterlily is very protective of her new brother and hardly ever leaves his side. The one day Waterlily does leave Ohiya for a moment, a snake crawls into the tipi and coils around the sleeping baby. The family calls in a man from the camp who can talk to snakes. The man is said to be a brother to all snakes. The man comes in and tells everyone that the snake is blind and did not know where he was or that he was around the baby. The snake then uncoils itself from the baby and leaves the tipi. The man tells the family that Ohiya is going to be blessed in many ways.

In chapter eight, Waterlily is now six years old, and she has been left to take care of her now blind grandfather while her grandmother goes out for the day. Waterlily is supposed to bring her grandfather water and food and whatever else he should need while Glok is gone. Waterlily soon notices a pemmican cake that her grandmother has left outside, and she begins to eat some of the cake. Waterlily knows she should not eat very much, but she cannot help herself. Before long, Glok returns to find Waterlily lying on the floor of the tipi, very still. Waterlily's family is very worried that she is going to die, but soon the medicine helps her to get better. The next morning Rainbow tells Waterlily how worried he was about her. In fact, Rainbow was so scared she was going to die that he is now going to make her a beloved child, or a hunka, because he is so relieved she lived. Waterlily is too young to understand what all of this means, but she knows that this honor is not given to every Dakota child.

During the two years it takes to prepare for the hunka ceremony, Waterlily's aunts are busy making the gown she will wear and her moccasins. Blue Bird also has another child, a girl they call Smiling One. The ceremony is a grand celebration and Waterlily still



does not fully understand the entire honor that comes with being a beloved child. Rainbow gives away horses in Waterlily's name and other relatives give gifts as well.

Waterlily is getting older and spending more time with her mother instead of Gloku. Waterlily is enjoying getting to know her mother. Blue Bird takes her children out and tells them stories and plays games with them. Waterlily is also starting to understand the traditions of the Dakotas and appreciate them. As she is getting older, she is learning to be proud of her family for their accomplishments, as they are growing up too.

In chapter nine, Little Chief is also growing up and Waterlily is very proud of the young man her brother is becoming. One day, Rainbow and his cousin take their immediate families on a hunting trip. One evening while they are sitting around the fire talking, Rainbow hears a bird calling. The bird continues to interrupt the conversation and Rainbow throws a bone into the bushes, and the bird stops calling. When Rainbow goes to check to see if he could have killed the bird with the bone, he finds a dead Indian in the bushes. The Indian was a scout for the other Indians who were going to attack them. Rainbow allows Little Chief to make the first blow to the already dead Indian, which is a great honor for Little Chief. Waterlily is very proud for her brother.

Rainbow and the other men know that the dead Indian was not the only Indian they have to be concerned about, so they form a war party to go and kill the rest of the Indians before they could attack the camp circle. Little Chief wants to go with the war party, but is told he is not ready but that he can go the next time. Little Chief follows the war party until they are too far from the camp circle to send him home, then he lets them know he has been following them. Little Chief is correct, they are too far from camp to send him home, so the war party tells him that he can stay and that his job is going to be to keep the horses watered for them so they do not have to waste time when they can be fighting. The war party defeats the Indians. As it turns out, Little Chief was a great help to them. Waterlily is proud of Little Chief when she hears how brave he was during the battle.

When Waterlily is twelve years old, Little Chief kills his first buffalo. This is a very important event in a young man's life and Waterlily is just as proud for him as if she had been her accomplishment. Waterlily loves to hear Little Chief tell the story of his first buffalo kill.

Chapters Seven through Nine Analysis

When Blue Bird's new son is endangered by the snake, the people in the camp circle call the man who talks to snakes. This man believes he is a brother to all snakes, a common belief in the Dakota tribe. They believe they are part of all things, animals, trees, and the earth. They believe that each child is born with a certain gift and ability, and this man's gift is to talk to snakes. He told the family not to move their tipi after the snake left because that would insult the snake and make the snake think they thought he would be dumb enough to make the mistake of coming into their tipi again. This is similar to the passage about Woyaka talking about the buffalo. Woyaka believes all



Indians are brothers to the buffalo, and that is why when the Dakota's were starving, the buffalo's allowed themselves to be killed so the Indians would have meat for the winter.

One can also see another of the many traditions the Dakotas celebrate, the hunka ceremony. When Waterlily faces death and lives, her stepfather makes her a beloved child. This is a symbol of high honor that Waterlily will carry with her all of her life. This status will be known no matter what camp circle she is a part of, and when there is a festival or a celebration, she will paint her face with red paint and everyone will know that her father did this for her because she was so loved. This is especially meaningful because Rainbow is Waterlily's stepfather.

Waterlily's pride for Little Chief goes back to the teaching of Gloku. This is how Dakota woman are raised to love their brothers and sisters. They take such pride in the accomplishments of their siblings that one would think it were their own accomplishment. Even though these three firsts are huge steps in Little Chief's journey to becoming a respected Dakota man, Waterlily takes as much pride in them as he does. This shows Waterlily's own journey into adulthood as Little Chief's. Waterlily is beginning to understand the significance of the customs and rites of passage in the daily life of the Dakotas, as well as her place in it.



Chapters Ten through Twelve

Chapters Ten through Twelve Summary

In chapter ten, Waterlily is now around fifteen years old and Rainbow has done many things to ensure Waterlily's continued high rank as a beloved child, such as giving her a Buffalo Ceremony marking her change from childhood to adolescence. Soon after this ceremony, Rainbow receives word that he is being considered for the Kit Fox society. This is a high honor within the camp circle. The news of Rainbow's honor reaches a far off camp circle where Rainbow's close friend Palani lives. Palani sends word that he wants Rainbow and his family to come for a visit. Rainbow quickly makes plans to leave for Palani's camp circle soon after he has learned that he is accepted into Kit Fox.

Waterlily's family arrives at Palani's camp and they are told about a Sun Dance celebration that is going on at the camp. Palani asks Rainbow and his family to stay and watch the celebration. During the first part of the celebration, Waterlily and her family watch the singers and Waterlily cannot help watching one boy in particular. He is very young to be such a good singer and Waterlily cannot help but wonder who he is.

In chapter eleven, the next part of the Sun Dance is the fasting and weeping. The hosting camp circle is preparing for the sacred place where the celebration will be held. Waterlily and her cousin are allowed to participate in cutting down the sacred tree for the dancers to dance around. Waterlily and her cousin are allowed this honor because both girls are beloved children. Once the tree has been put in place, the men who have been fasting and praying enter and begin dancing around the tree. The men are supposed to dance day and night for several days so that their prayers will be answered. Some of the men are also going to make sacrifices during the dance, the men are only allowed short periods to rest, then they return to weep and dance.

Waterlily and her family are told of a young boy who is going to be part of the Sun Dance because he prayed to the Spirit to save his dying father's life. The boy promised one hundred pieces of flesh if his father's life were spared, which it was. The Sun Dance is where this boy is to fulfill his sacrifice. Waterlily is very moved by this boy's love for his father. Everyone at the camp is talking about what a huge sacrifice this is for such a young boy.

Waterlily, Blue Bird, and Prairie Flower go to the Sun Dance to watch the men enter and begin the dance. Waterlily is in awe of the entire celebration, until she sees some of the women sneaking water to the men who are dancing. Blue Bird explains that the women are the men's wives or girlfriends and they cannot bear to see the men in such pain and so they offer them water to help their suffering. Waterlily thinks this ruins the meaning behind the celebration for her. However, when Waterlily realizes that the boy from the singing is the same boy who is going to give the one hundred pieces of flesh, she understands why the women are giving the men water. The boy's name is Lowanla, and after Waterlily watches him make his sacrifice and continue to dance, she wants nothing



more than to ease his suffering in any way she can. When Waterlily's family is asleep, she sneaks back down to the Sun Dance and offers Lowanla water. Lowanla is so shocked that someone would offer him water that he knocks the water out of Waterlily's hand. This scares Waterlily and she runs away before Lowanla has the chance to see who has offered him the water. Waterlily vows to never tell anyone what she has done, and a few days later Rainbow takes the family back to their camp circle without Waterlily ever running into Lowanla.

In chapter twelve, now that the family has returned to the camp circle, Blue Bird talks to Waterlily about the proper ways to be courted by a boy. They have learned about a girl from their camp circle who eloped with a boy and the boy did not bring her back to his family, and now the girl will have to live with the shame of this event for the rest of her life. Blue Bird does not want this to happen to Waterlily, and Blue Bird knows how easily it can happen because she was lucky it did not happen to her when she eloped with Star Elk.

Waterlily's cousin, Leaping Fawn, has a Virgin's Fire, because one of the boys in the camp circle claims that Leaping Fawn has agreed to marry him. The boy is confused and has Leaping Fawn mixed up with another girl in the camp, but now Leaping Fawn's honor is in question. Leaping Fawn requests a Virgin's Fire to clear her name. During the Virgin's Fire, all the virgins in the camp circle come to the ceremony, and if anyone has reason to question them they do so at this time. If any girl is questioned, their honor is lost. When the boy sees Leaping Fawn, he realizes his mistake and remains silent. This action restores Leaping Fawn's honor.

Shortly after the Virgin's Fire, Gloku dies. Her family decides to have a ghostkeeping instead of a traditional burial. During a ghostkeeping, the family and friends of the dead gather gifts to be given at the end of the ghostkeeping. The gifts are then given in the name of the dead. For Gloku, this was the final way her family could honor her and all she had done for them.

Chapters Ten through Twelve Analysis

Rainbow's friend Palani is called his Kola. This is a special term the Dakotas use for someone who is more than a friend and yet not a blood family member. When two men decide to become kola, they do not take it lightly. This means the men are now saying they are like brothers. They would even be willing to die for each other. They take each other's family as their own. When Rainbow and family arrive at Palani's camp, Palani calls Gloku mother and she calls him son. Palani's brothers and sisters are now Rainbow's brothers and sisters as well. These men take this vow of fellowship, or kola, for life. If either man ever breaks this vow, it is very disgraceful for both men. They vow to always do anything for one another; that is why when Palani asks Rainbow and his family to come visit, Rainbow does so, even though she has just been accepted in the Kit Fox society. The elders of the camp circle respect the wishes of the kola and do not fault Rainbow for leaving.



When Waterlily arrives at the Sun Dance celebration, she is excited to be a part of this new experience. She is becoming a young woman, and is beginning to understand the significance of the Dakota customs. However, when she watches Lowanla go through his sacrifice, her feelings for him cause her to do something out of character. While her family is asleep, Waterlily sneaks back to the Sun Dance and attempts to ease Lowanla's suffering by offering him some water. Lowanla is so shocked that someone would offer him water that he knocks the water out of her hand. Waterlily is embarrassed by what she has just done and runs back to her tipi without Lowanla ever seeing who was so kind to offer him the water. Once Waterlily has returned to her own camp circle and Blue Bird is talking to her about the proper way to be courted by a boy, Waterlily is ashamed by the way she acted with Lowanla.

When Gluko dies, her family decides that a ghostkeeping would be a better way to honor her than a traditional burial. It is out of their deep love and respect for Gloku that her family makes this decision. Gloku is known throughout the camp circle for her generosity. She is also so beloved by her family that they want to keep her with them as long as possible. The ghostkeeping can last for several months and even years, and shows great honor for the dead. At the end of the ghostkeeping, the family gives away all the gifts that have been gathered in the name of the person who has died. This is a final tribute to the dead family member



Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen

Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen Summary

In chapter thirteen, Waterlily's uncle, Black Eagle, has been saving two American horses to be the main gifts for Gloku's ghost keeping ceremony. One night the two horses are stolen, and Black Eagle and his family are trying to find a way to replace the horses. Two women come to Black Eagle and tell him that their son wants to marry Waterlily, and if she agrees to the marriage, among the gifts they are going to give the family are two American horses. Black Eagle knows the horses would be the perfect replacement for the two that were stolen, but he allows Waterlily to make her own decision. Waterlily is not eager to be married at this time, especially to some a boy she does not even know, but she realizes what it would mean to her family if she does accept the marriage proposal, so she agrees to the marriage out of love and respect to her grandmother's memory.

As soon as Gloku's ghostkeeping ceremony is over, Waterlily leaves the camp circle with her new husband's two mothers. Soon after leaving camp, her new husband Sacred Horse appears. Waterlily realizes that she has seen this boy before; he is the same boy who she had seen while she was getting water. He had smiled at Waterlily, but she had shown no interest, just like her mother had taught her to do. Sacred Horse is very kind and patient with Waterlily, and she thinks she will like being married to him.

In chapter fourteen, Waterlily is getting used to her new surroundings and her new family. Although there is not much difference between Sacred Horses' camp circle and her own, Waterlily is very homesick. Sacred Horse's father has three wives, and all the wives seem to get along fine. Waterlily has never been around a family with co-wives, and this takes some getting used to.

While Waterlily is still getting used to her new life, she receives word from home that her grandfather is very sick and dying. Waterlily is even more home sickened by this news and wishes she could go home to be with her grandfather.

Chapter fifteen, Waterlily meets the parents of Red Leaf. Red Leaf is a boy who is the kola of her brother Ohiya. This is wonderful news to Waterlily, because of her brother's fellowship with Red Leaf, she now has a family of her own in the camp circle. Waterlily is very pleased to have people with whom she can now be completely herself with at the camp. Meeting her social parents also helps Waterlily's relationship with Sacred Horse. The two have been having trouble communicating because Waterlily is so shy around him. Waterlily and Sacred Horse begin spending time with Red Leaf's parents, and Sacred Horse is finally getting to see the real Waterlily.

Sacred Horse talks to his friend about the distance between him and Waterlily. His friend tells Sacred Horse that the problem is Waterlily does not have her own family with



her. The friend also tells Sacred Horse that he should move back to live with Waterlily's people.

One day while Sacred Horse and Waterlily are at Red Leaf's parent's tipi, a man named Yankton comes to tell stories. He tells them about a family whose young son is killed. Instead of the family seeking revenge against the killer, they give the boy's killer gifts and take him into their family, in fact, letting the killer take the place of their dead son. Yankton finishes telling stories, and Waterlily and Sacred Horse walk home holding hands.

Soon after this night, the people of the camp circle begin getting sick and dying. Good Hunter, Sacred Horse's father, tells everyone that they need to go off in smaller groups, in hopes to stop the spread of whatever is killing the people. Sacred Horse is told to take his sister Echo and her family as well as his and Echo's mother, Taluta and Waterlily, and wait for Good Hunter to send word that the sickness has passed.

Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen Analysis

The love and respect Waterlily has for Gloku is so strong that she is willing to marry a man she has never seen before just so her family can get the horses they need for the ceremony. The love Waterlily has for Gloku is so deep that she not only marries this stranger, but does so knowing that it also means she has to leave her family and her home to live with his people. This act of selflessness shows the devotion Waterlily has for the grandmother that took her in as one of her own when Waterlily was a small child. Gloku taught Waterlily how to be an honorable Dakota woman, and this was the best way Waterlily could repay her grandmother.

Fellowshiphood, or kola, comes into play once again when Waterlily is homesick for her family. Thanks to her younger brother, Ohiya, Waterlily finds her social parents at Sacred Horses camp. If Waterlily's father Rainbow had not taken the family to visit Palani, his Kola Ohiya would not have met Red Leaf and Waterlily would not have found the family unit it took for her to finally become comfortable enough for Sacred Horse to finally get to see the real Waterlily, not to mention her stay would have been much worse. Waterlily was so homesick and finding her social parents helped to ease that pain.



Chapter Sixteen and Seventeen

Chapter Sixteen and Seventeen Summary

In chapter sixteen, Sacred Horse and the rest of his immediate family get sick from smallpox, which is what is killing all the people in the camp circle. Sacred Horse and two of Echo's children die from the disease. The remaining family members are waiting for word to come back from the camp circle when they are attacked. Echo's son Little Bear is out getting water and Waterlily goes to get him. Echo and her mother are attacked and Echo's baby and mother are killed. Echo is scalped and barely alive when Waterlily returns with Little Bear. Echo's husband is out hunting, and when he does not return, they fear he has been killed. Waterlily and Little Bear take care of Echo as best they can until help arrives. Sacred Horse's cousin finds them and brings them back to the camp circle. The cousin tells Waterlily that Good Hunter has destroyed most of the camp in an effort to kill out the small pox. The camp circle is left with only rough shelter to last them the rest of the winter.

In chapter seventeen, Waterlily stays with her social parents when she returns to Good Hunter's camp since her husband is dead. Waterlily also learns she is pregnant with Sacred Horse's child, and Sacred Horse's cousin tells her that he will send his younger brother to marry her and raise the child. He tells Waterlily his brother's name is Lowanla, and asks her to wait on Lowanla. Waterlily is surprised to hear that the man her cousin wants her to marry is the boy from the Sun Dance, although she is so overwhelmed by the loss of Sacred Horse that she is not interested in the thought of marrying anyone.

Soon Waterlily's social parents tell her they have made arrangements for her to travel with a war party that is going towards Waterlily's family camp circle. Waterlily is very happy to finally be going home. Her social parents make the trip with her.

Waterlily arrives at her camp circle and is greeted by all of her family except for Little Chief. Little Chief has gotten married and is visiting his new in-laws at a nearby camp circle. Black Eagle tells Waterlily that Little Chief will come to see her as soon as he gets word that she has returned.

Waterlily is spending her time catching up with her cousins and visiting with her still very ill grandfather. Waterlily is telling her grandfather stories about the people she met while at Sacred Horse's camp. Waterlily is also preparing for the birth of her baby. Waterlily's son is born at the same time her grandfather dies. Waterlily names her new son, Mitawa, which means My Son.

Two months after Mitawa is born, a man rides into camp. Waterlily thinks the man looks like Sacred Horse when she first sees him, then she realizes that he must be Lowanla. Lowanla tells Waterlily he has come to take care to his son, if she is agreeable to this. Waterlily explains to Lowanla that she does not want to marry him if has only come



because of obligation, but if he truly wants to marry her she will agree. With this, the two are engaged.

Waterlily and Lowanla are now married and Waterlily is happier than she has ever been. She still feels guilt over the way her marriage began with Sacred Horse; she was so shy with him. She thinks she was not a very good wife to him and that if she had known how little time they would have had together, she would have made more of an effort to not be so shy with him. Waterlily makes a vow to herself that she will not make this mistake with Lowanla.

One day Lowanla asks Waterlily if she was the girl who offered him the water at the Sun Dance. He tells her it would make his life perfect he could only know for sure that she were the girl who had shown him such kindness that day. Waterlily loves Lowanla very much and wants him to be happy, but she decides he will have to make due with never knowing the truth. Waterlily refuses to confirm that she is in fact the same girl from the Sun Dance.

Chapter Sixteen and Seventeen Analysis

When Waterlily had first seen Lowanla, she had hoped to someday become his wife. Now her only hope is for Sacred Horse to survive. When Sacred Horse dies, Waterlily realizes all the time she wasted being shy with him. She is now carrying the guilt of not being the wife and companion she could have been to Sacred Horse. When she learns that Lowanla is Sacred Horse's cousin who is expected to take his place as her husband, she has no emotion because she has just lost Sacred Horse.

By the time Lowanla comes to Waterlily's camp to marry her, she has already given birth to her son and is very happy to be back with her own people. Waterlily wants to be Lowanla's wife, but she wants to be sure Lowanla is marrying her of his own free will and not out of family obligations. She is hopeful that Lowanla is there for her as much as for Sacred Horse's son.

Later, when Lowanla tells Waterlily he has kept the cup she had used to offer him the water at the Sun Dance, she knows that he is there because of her and not obligation. Lowanla still is not sure that Waterlily is in fact the girl who offered the water, but he is hopeful that she is. Even though they are now married and Waterlily loves Lowanla very much, she cannot let him for sure that it was her at the Sun Dance. She knows that she should not have been so bold as to bring a strange boy water during that celebration. Waterlily knows that is not the way a honorable Dakota woman is expected to behave, and even though she can tell Lowanla is hoping that it was her, she's afraid he will see her in a different light if he knows the truth. This all goes back to the Dakota women and their honor. Waterlily is happy with her life with Lowanla and does not want to do anything that could change this, even if it means Lowanla never knows who brought him the water.



Characters

Waterlily

Waterlily is the main character of this novel. She is the daughter of Blue Bird and Star Elk. Shortly after her birth, her father leaves her mother and her mother returns to her own camp circle. Once Waterlily is back with her mother's family, she becomes friends with a young boy named Little Chief whose father Rainbow soon marries Blue Bird.

Waterlily spends most of her childhood with her new grandmother Gloku and her cousins. Gloku teaches Waterlily the ways of the Dakota women. When Waterlily is a teenager, her father Rainbow takes the family to a Sun Dance Festival, where Waterlily sees a boy named Lowanla. Waterlily is so taken with this boy that she offers him some water during the festival, even though this act is forbidden. She is so embarrassed by her actions that she runs away before Lowanla can see who has offered him the water. Waterlily and her family leave the festival before she is able to see Lowanla again. Sometime after this trip, Waterlily's grandmother Gloku dies. Waterlily repays her grandmother's kindness and love by marrying a young Indian so her family can get the horses they need for Gloku's ghostkeeping ceremony.

Waterlily and her new husband, Sacred Horse, move to his camp circle to begin their life together, and Waterlily struggles to be the wife and companion she feels she needs to be for Sacred Horse. Waterlily is fond of Sacred Horse, but she is so homesick for her family that she has trouble being herself around her new husband. Fortunately, Waterlily finds her social parents at Sacred Horse's camp circle, and being around them helps Waterlily be at ease with her new surroundings. However, just as Waterlily and Sacred Horse are becoming closer, he gets smallpox and dies. Soon after Sacred Horse's death, Waterlily learns she is pregnant and returns to her own camp circle.

Once back with her own people, Sacred Horse's cousin sends his younger brother to marry Waterlily and raise her child. When the man arrives at Waterlily's camp circle, she is surprised to see the man is the same man from the Sun Dance celebration, Lowanla. Waterlily is even more surprised to learn that Lowanla had held out hope of finding Waterlily again.

Blue Bird

Blue Bird is Waterlily's mother. When Blue Bird was only fourteen years old, she was on a hunting trip with her parents, two brothers, and grandmother. Blue Bird and her grandmother were out picking up beans when her family was attacked and killed. Blue Bird and her grandmother wandered alone for days until a passing camp circle took them in. The two women stayed with this camp circle for four years. In this time, Blue Bird married one of the men from the camp circle, named Star Elk. Blue Bird was very beautiful and Star Elk always thought the other men in the camp were paying too much



attention to Blue Bird, and so he did not treat Blue Bird very well, not to mention he was very lazy and not a good hunter or provider for Blue Bird. Blue Bird was very unhappy with Star Elk and missed her family very much. When Blue Bird gave birth to Waterlily, Star Elk's jealousy grew worse until finally he publicly threw Blue Bird away. The elders of the camp circle knew that Blue Bird had done nothing to deserve this action, and Star Elk was so shamed by his own behavior that he left the camp circle never to be heard from again, freeing Blue Bird from her unhappy marriage.

Soon after this, Blue Bird's cousin Black Eagle found her and brought her, her grandmother and her new baby back to his camp circle. Sometime after her return, Blue Bird's grandmother was killed when a tree fell on her while she was gathering wood. One of the men who came to help with the burial of Blue Bird's grandmother was Rainbow, Black Eagle's brother-in-law. Soon after the burial, Rainbow asked Blue Bird to marry him. They had two children, Ohiya and Smiling One.

Lowanla

Lowanla is Waterlily's second husband. He was sent by his older brother to take the place of his cousin, Sacred Horse, who had died from smallpox, leaving Waterlily alone to care for their infant child. Waterlily saw Lowanla years earlier when she went to the Sun Dance with her parents. Lowanla had made a promise to the Great Spirit that if his father's life was spared, he would give one hundred pieces of flesh. His father's life was spared, so Lowanla was at the Sun Dance to give his sacrifice. He was very young when he made this promise, and some of his women family members stepped in and gave of their own flesh so the sacrifice could be fulfilled.

Little Chief

Little Chief is Rainbow's son by his first wife, who died when Little Chief was born. When Blue Bird first came back to the camp circle, Little Chief would come to play with Waterlily.

Gloku

Gloku is Waterlily's grandmother and is Rainbow's mother. Gloku took care of Waterlily and the rest of her grandchildren when they were small. When she died, her family wanted to honor her by holding a ghost keeping for her instead of a traditional burial. She tried to make sure Rainbow married Blue Bird early on, but Rainbow had already asked her before Gloku had the chance to talk to him about it.

Leaping Fawn

Leaping Fawn is Waterlily's cousin who held the Virgin's Fire ceremony. She never married, and she is Dream Woman's daughter.



Prairie Flower

Prairie Flower is Waterlily's cousin that went with her to the Sun Dance Festival. She is also Dream Woman's daughter.

Rainbow

Rainbow is Blue Bird's second husband and Waterlily's step-father. When Waterlily almost died from eating too much pemmican, Rainbow made her his beloved child after she got well to show how much he cared for her.

Sacred Horse

Sacred Horse is Waterlily's first husband who died of smallpox not long after they were married.

Dream Woman

Dream Woman is the mother of both Leaping Fawn and Prairie Flower. She is also the one who is very talented at making clothing and moccasins.

First Woman

First Woman is Black Eagle's wife and Rainbow and Dream Woman's sister.

Black Eagle

Black Eagle is Blue Bird's cousin and is married to Rainbow's sister. He is the head of the tiyosaye that Waterlily lives in most of her life.

Good Hunter

Good Hunter is the head of the camp circle where Waterlily lives when she is married to Sacred Horse. He is also Sacred Horse's father. Good Hunter had three wives. His camp is where everyone got small pox and died.

Blue Bird's grandmother

Blue Bird's grandmother was with her while she was in Star Elk's camp. The author never tells her real name, but after she dies, Waterlily refers to her as "grandmother



killed by the tree," because she was found dead in the woods after being struck in the head by a tree while gathering wood for the fire.

Palani

Palani is Rainbow's kola. When Rainbow takes his family to meet Palani, they all get to watch the Sun Dance.

Red Leaf

Red Leaf is Waterlily's younger brother Ohiya's kola. Ohiya meets Red Leaf when Ohiya's family travels to visits Palani.

Star Elk

Star Elk was Blue Bird's first husband and Waterlily's father. He publicly threw Blue Bird away after Waterlily was born. He was a lazy husband and hunter.



Objects/Places

Star Elk's Camp Circle

This is where Blue Bird and her grandmother stayed after their family was attacked and killed when Blue Bird was fourteen. Blue Bird and her grandmother stayed in this camp circle for four years before their own camp circle found them.

Black Eagles Tiyosaye

A tiyosaye is a group of tipis within the larger camp circle. Black Eagle was the head of Blue Bird's family, so when she and her grandmother returned to their camp circle, the two women lived in Black Eagle's tiyosaye. This is where Waterlily grew up because Black Eagle was married to Waterlily's father's sister, so Black Eagle was always the head of Waterlily's family and tiyosaye.

Box Butte

Box Butte is a Holy Hill where the Dakotas have gone to pray and leave their prayers for many years. Gloku takes her grandchildren up there to pray.

Sun Dance Festival

The Sun Dance Festival is where Waterlily meets Lowanla. This is a festival where the men fast and pray and some of them even sacrifice their bodies to the Great Spirit.

Good Hunter's Camp Circle

This is where Waterlily moved to when she married Sacred Horse. This is also the camp that was infected with smallpox by the blankets.

Virgin's Fire

The Virgin's Fire is a ceremony that occurs when a young woman's honor has been called into question, then all the virgins in the camp participate and if any of the boys have reason to think any of the girls there are not virgins they may call the girls out at this ceremony. In this novel Waterlily's cousin Leaping Fawn held a Virgins Fire because a boy in the camp had said she had been with him.



Ghostkeeping

Ghostkeeping is an alternative to traditional burial for Dakota's. During a ghostkeeping, the family and friends of the dead bring gifts in the name of the dead, and a few months after the person has died or in some cases years, the family has a celebration and the gifts are then given to people in the camp circle in the name of the dead. It is suppose to bring honor to the dead for one last act of giving. Waterlily's family held a ghostkeeping for her grandmother, Glok, when she died.

Hunka Ceremony

The hunka ceremony is when a child is made beloved. Waterlily was made a beloved child after she got sick from eating too much pemmican.

Sandy Bend

Sandy Bend is where Woyaka was born. Woyaka is the great storyteller.

Missouri River

The Missouri River is where Palani's camp circle was located. Rainbow and his family went to Palani's camp circle to visit him during the Sun Dance Festival.



Themes

Honor

Honor is a theme carried throughout this novel. Everything a Dakota does revolves around the honor the action holds or would bring to his or her family. The Dakota children were taught from a very early age to honor not only their parents and elders, but also their brothers and sisters as well as the entire Dakota tribe. When a child was born, the families would have a feast in that child's name, and this feast would bring honor to the baby as well as his or her family. It was a sign of honor for someone in your family to give a gift in your name, and gift exchanges were common in Dakota society. There is a story in this novel of a family whose young boy was killed by a fellow tribesman, and instead of the family of the slain boy seeking revenge against the boy who killed their young boy, the family of the slain boy gave gifts of the best that they had to the boy who killed their family member and they took in the boy who killed their family member and made him one of their own family. They told the tribesman he would take the place of the one he killed. The tribesman was so moved by this act that he became the most devoted member of their family for the remainder of his life. This act brought great honor to this Dakota family.

Blue Bird, Waterlily's mother, showed great honor when she was just a young woman living with a different camp circle. Blue Bird and her grandmother had gotten separated from their camp circle when Blue Bird was only fourteen years old, and they had been taken in by a passing camp circle that had welcomed them in. Blue Bird was only a young woman when she had agreed to marry one of the men from this camp circle, Star Elk, who would become Waterlily's father. Blue Bird had acted hastily in accepting Star Elk, and she ended up in an unhappy marriage with a lazy husband who was always very jealous of Blue Bird. When Waterlily was born, Star Elk's jealousy only intensified and he decided to publicly throw Blue Bird away. Blue Bird had always been known for her honor and character within this new camp circle, and when Star Elk made his announcement to the tribe, they instead banished Star Elk from the camp circle, leaving Blue Bird free of Star Elk.

The Dakotas live by the belief that their honor above all else should be protected.

Tradition

The Dakotas had many traditions that they observed, one of which was giving. The Dakotas gave gifts of food, clothing, pottery, and livestock for most all occasions. Whether the occasion was a birth, death or wedding, a feast or festival was held and gifts were exchanged. The Dakotas are a very giving people and were very well known for their giving.



Waterlily's grandmother, Glokū, was so well known within her camp circle for her gift giving that when she died, her family didn't have a traditional burial for her but instead had a "ghostkeeping". During the ghostkeeping, the family keeps only some of the hair of the dead in their tipi of several months or sometimes years while they gather gifts for the dead. During this ghostkeeping, not only the family members but anyone in the camp circle bring gifts to the tipi in the name of the dead. When the camp circle moves, the ghostkeeping tipi is the first moved and the first set back up at the new location, at the end of the ghostkeeping, there is a big festival like a funeral, where all the gifts are then given to members of the family and camp circle in the name of the dead, once again honoring the dead. Glokū's family and friends gave many wonderful gifts in her name because she had always been so good to give to everyone when she was alive and they all wanted to honor her in this final act. It was a great tribute to Glokū.

Another tradition shown in this novel is fellowshiphood, or kola. Fellowshiphood is when two men, not related, make a vow to always be as close as if they were brothers, to in fact die for one another if the need should arise. This pact is for life, and if the men ever break this pact, it is very disgraceful to both men. Once this pact is made, they are not only like brothers, but now they must treat one another's family like their own family. Waterlily's father, Rainbow, made such a pact with Palani. When Waterlily's family went to Palani's camp circle to visit him and his family, Waterlily's younger brother, Ohiya, made a fellowshiphood pact with a young boy from this camp circle named Red Leaf. Several years later, when Waterlily was married to Scared Horse and was living with his family, Waterlily found Red Leaf's parents in the same camp circle. Waterlily had been very homesick for her own people and longed for people she could be herself around. Finding Red Leaf and his parents was an answer to Waterlily's prayers. Because of her brother Ohiya's fellowshiphood with Red Leaf, Waterlily finally had a family with whom she could be herself.

The Sun Dance was another tradition of the Dakotas. The Sun Dance was a celebration where some of the young men in the camp circle would come and dance and pray for days on end without food and very little water. Some of the men only prayed and danced, but a few would also torture themselves as a sacrifice for their answered prayers. One boy had prayed that his dead father would live, and had promised the Great Spirit that he would sacrifice one hundred pieces of flesh for this answered prayer. When the boy had returned from praying, his father was well, and the Sun Dance festival was where he was to give his sacrifice of one hundred pieces of flesh.

Waterlily and part of her family were at this Sun Dance festival and she saw the young boy who was giving such a huge sacrifice. Waterlily liked the young boy and felt sorry for him because he hadn't had any water to drink during the festival, so she tried to sneak him some water even though she was forbidden to do so. The young boy was startled by Waterlily and didn't take the water. Waterlily was embarrassed that she had tried to give him water and vowed to never tell anyone she had done so. Years later after Waterlily's husband Scared Horse died, it was the same boy from the Sun Dance who turned out to be Scared Horse's cousin that came to marry Waterlily and help raise Sacred Horse's son.



Love

Love is another theme in this novel. The love between Waterlily and her grandmother is one example. When Waterlily and her mother returned from Star Elk's camp circle, Gloku's grandson Little Chief became friends with the infant Waterlily, and soon his grandmother fell in love with the baby too. After Gloku's son married Blue Bird, Gloku cared for Waterlily as if she were one of her own, teaching the child the ways of the Dakotas. Gloku loved Waterlily as much as any of her other grandchildren. When Gloku died and her family was holding the ghostkeeping ceremony for her rather than a traditional burial, a group of Indians stole the horses that Black Eagle was saving to give as gifts in the name of Gloku. While the family was trying to decide how they were going to be able to replace these horses, they got word that a young man from another camp circle wished to marry Waterlily and was willing to give the family two very strong and beautiful horses in exchange for her hand. Waterlily had never even seen this boy, yet she agreed to the marriage so her family could have the horses. Waterlily loved her grandmother so much, and this was the only way she could honor the grandmother who had shown her so much kindness and love.

There is also the love between Waterlily and Lowanla. The two first saw each other at the Sun Dance Festival while Waterlily and her family were visiting Rainbow's friend Palani. There was a connection between the two almost from the beginning, and even though the two never actually spoke to one another at the festival, Waterlily was so drawn to Lowanla that even though she knew it was forbidden, she tried to give him some water. Waterlily had told her mother only hours earlier how it almost ruined the whole thing for her to see the women sneaking water to their boyfriends and husbands, yet her love for Lowanla had her out in the middle of the night, sneaking out of her parents' tipi to try and give water to a boy she hadn't even met. Then years later, Waterlily was shocked when this same boy was sent to take the place of her dead husband and help her raise her new son. Once the two are finally married, Lowanla confesses to Waterlily that he has been hoping all these years that it was her who had dared to bring him water during the Sun Dance Festival.

The love between Waterlily and Little Chief is another example of this theme. Little Chief showed Waterlily brotherly love even before the two were actually related. He would come to her tipi every day to play with the child. Waterlily loves Little Chief just as much as he does her; in fact, when he is going through his change from being a child to a man and has the milestones of his first coup, when his father lets him strike the first blow to the dead Indian, as well as his first buffalo kill, and when he sneaks away to join the war party, Waterlily is so filled with pride and love for her brother one would think these were her milestones. The others in the camp circle can see the love and devotion between these two siblings. When Waterlily returns to the camp after Sacred Horse has died, Black Eagle tells Waterlily that he has no doubt that Little Chief will come to see her as soon as he hears she has returned. Even Black Eagle has seen the level of love these two share, even though they are not blood relatives.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in third person omniscient, because the author not only tells the reader what the characters are saying to one another, but also what the characters are thinking and feeling. There is some dialogue between the characters mixed throughout the novel.

The story is told mainly from the perspective of the main character, Waterlily, but one also gets a glimpse into how some of the other family members are feeling at times also. For instance, when Sacred Horse and Waterlily are first married, the reader would not understand the concern that Sacred Horse had for his new wife's happiness and how she feels about being with him if not for this point of view. Thanks to the omniscient point of view, the reader understands that Sacred Horse truly cares for Waterlily and wants her to be happy. Even when Sacred Horse talks to his friend about the situation, this point of view helps the reader see that Sacred Horse is wondering if he has made a mistake by taking Waterlily away from all of her family.

Setting

The setting for this novel, although the exact location is never mentioned, is in the South Dakota plains. The author mentions numerous times that the camp circle moved from location to location for different reasons, whether it be the time of year or out of necessity, although where the camp circle went is never really clear. Sometimes the camp circle moved because of lack of easily gathered foods like berries or beans, or the lack of meat or firewood, or even because of unsanitary conditions within the camp circle itself. For example, when Waterlily was living with Sacred Horse's people, smallpox infected the camp circle and killed a lot of the people in the camp circle. The camp circle was told to break off into smaller groups and leave the larger camp circle in hopes that the people who were still healthy would remain so. While Waterlily and her family were away, they were attacked by another group of Indians after Sacred Horse had already died from smallpox, and only Waterlily and her sister-in-law Echo and Echo's son survived the attack. When they were rescued, they learned the larger group finally destroyed the camp and moved the camp circle to another location.

Just before winter moved, in the camp circle would move to another location to ride out the cold winter. Then in the spring they would move again, never giving an exact location or direction in which they traveled.

When Waterlily and her family went to visit Palani, her father's friend in fellowship, they traveled with a camp circle near the Missouri River. While Waterlily's family was visiting this camp circle they got to see the Sun Dance festival. This is the festival where Waterlily first saw Lowanla, her future husband.



On some occasions, small family groups would leave the larger camp circles for short periods of time to go on hunting trips. These groups would search for game for not only their own family but for the larger camp circles as well. When Blue Bird was fourteen, her family went out on one of these hunting trips and everyone was killed by another tribe of Indians except for Blue Bird and her grandmother. This is how Blue Bird and her grandmother ended up with Star Elk's camp circle.

Although the actual locations may have changed throughout this novel, the basic setting remains the same; whether the Dakotas were with a large camp circle or the smaller hunting camps, the setting was always the South Dakota Plains.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is very simple and easy to follow. The fact that this novel is written by a Sioux Indian lends to the authenticity of the story, and allows the reader the insight of what everyday life was like for the Dakota woman. The overall effect of the author's use of mixing Dakota terms with common everyday language gives the reader the freedom to get lost in the story itself and not focus on the meaning of the Dakota terms, as they quickly explained.

This novel is written in the same way in which is commonly spoken today even though it was written by a Sioux Indian. This is very beneficial for the reader, as there is no need to backtrack for clarity. The overall effect of this novel is a very enjoyable, easy to follow read.

Structure

This novel is comprised of seventeen chapters; each chapter is about ten pages long. Each chapter is only numbered with no title or subtitle. The chapters are short passages that quickly move the reader from one event to the next.

The plot is simple and contains no subplots. The novel is about a young Dakota Indian girl and her life in the South Dakota plains before white people had settled there. This novel tells the daily life and customs of the Dakota woman, a story that is not commonly told. The reader follows the main character, Waterlily, from birth to young adulthood, as she faces such challenges as the death of her first husband in a camp circle of unfamiliar people, until she finds the love of a young boy she saw years earlier. This is a story of love and honor and selflessness.

This novel has a very easy to read pace that keeps the reader's attention without too much backstory or descriptive passages to slow the pace. Overall, this is a very good read and very informative about the lives and customs of the Dakota Indian women.

Quotes

"As beautiful as the waterlilies. You too are a waterlily, my waterlily." Chap. 1 p. 6

"This is that woman! Whoever needs a woman to fetch his fuel and water can have her!"
Chap. 3 p. 16

"While the buffalo live we shall not die!" Chap. 6 p. 57

"Yesterday you gave me a fright, but if you will hurry and get well, then by and by you shall wear a gown and red paint on your face." Chap. 8 p. 73

"The best I have is for my kola." Chap. 10 p. 105

"How she loved her grandmother!" Chap. 13 p. 153

"You know, she must be some relation to the deer; she cried because I killed it." Chap. 13 p. 162

"It was long past midnight when she and Sacred Horse walked homeward, hand in hand in the dark." Chap. 15 p. 194

"This is a real male you have married, don't you know!" Chap. 16 p. 202

"You are just a girl; your life is only beginning. You will marry again, and that is right."
Chap. 17 p. 211

"Oh, if only I could know that you were the girl who dared do that for me!" Chap. 17 p. 226

"He shall never know! He must get along with a little less than perfect happiness. It will be best that way." Chap. 17 p. 227



Topics for Discussion

After Blue Bird and Waterlily return to their own camp circle, how does Blue Bird meet her future stepson, Little Chief?

How does Gloku's dream about being invisible save her life?

What festivities come out of Waterlily getting sick from eating too much pemmican?

What three firsts in Little Chief's life make Waterlily proud of her brother?

How does the trip to visit Rainbow's friend, Palani, affect Waterlily's life later? Give two examples.

Why does Waterlily agree to marry Sacred Horse?

What causes the people at Sacred Horse's camp circle to become sick and die?

How does Waterlily end up married to Lowanla?