

The Round House Study Guide

The Round House by Louise Erdrich

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Contents

The Round House Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-4.....	8
Chapters 5-6.....	11
Chapters 7-8.....	13
Chapters 9-11.....	17
Characters.....	21
Symbols and Symbolism.....	25
Settings.....	27
Themes and Motifs.....	28
Styles.....	30
Quotes.....	31



Plot Summary

The Round House is a novel by Louise Erdrich. In this novel, thirteen year old Joe struggles to find a way to help his mother in the aftermath of a brutal attack. As Joe watches from the sidelines, his father, a judge, struggles to work within the legal system to find and prosecute the perpetrator. Unfortunately, Joe's mother cannot remember where the worst of the attack took place; therefore, no one can figure out who has the right to try him. For this reason, the perpetrator is let go. Joe is angered by this news and plots to find a way to stop his mother's attacker. The Round House is a unique look at life on the reservations and the complicated legal system that often lets even the worst criminals slip through the loopholes.

Joe and his father are working in the yard of their small house one Sunday afternoon. As the afternoon slips away, Joe's father, Basil Coutts, begins to worry about his wife, Geraldine. Basil and Joe walk down to his Aunt Clemence's house to borrow her car, assuming that Geraldine has had car trouble. As they make their way to the nearest town, they pass Geraldine in her car. Thinking that she had gone to the grocery store because she had forgotten that it was Sunday, they return home to find her battered and bloody.

Basil quickly moves his wife to the back seat and rushes her to the hospital. In the chaos afterward, Joe hears little tidbits here and there, enough to realize his mother has been raped. Joe is angry and frightened, determined to protect his mother. Days later, when she comes home, Joe and his father tip toe around the house in order to avoid disturbing his mother. At first she seems to be healing, but then Basil surprises her when he comes home one night. This causes Geraldine to lock herself in her bedroom for weeks, refusing to eat. One night, after several days of Basil forcing Geraldine to listen to silly conversation, the mention of a baby sets off memories of the day of the attack. Geraldine tells Basil everything she can remember of the attack, including the other woman and her infant the same man threatened to kill. Geraldine refuses, however, to tell Basil the identity of the man until they can learn the fate of the woman and her child.

A short time later, Joe learns that the man responsible for the attack on his mother has been arrested. For the first time in weeks, life at Joe's house returns to normal. However, things quickly change again when they learn that the perpetrator has been released from jail because the place where Geraldine was attacked sits on a place where three specific pieces of land sit, each with a different legal jurisdiction. Geraldine's face was covered so she does not know where the attacked happened and therefore no one knows who should prosecute.

Joe is frustrated by this news, especially when he can see the fear return to his mother. Joe decides someone has to do something to protect his mother after he and his father run into the perpetrator in the store and his father has a heart attack after attacking him.



Joe shares his fears with his friends. One of them, Cappy, helps him plan a way to stop the perpetrator. They wait for him outside the new golf course. When he appears one morning, Joe shoots at him. While Joe has wounded the man, he is not dead. When the man sees Joe and begins to yell, Cappy comes forward and expertly shoots the man in the head.

An investigation is begun, and Joe is afraid his parents have guessed the truth, but they do not share what they suspect with the police. A short time later, Joe runs away with Cappy to see Cappy's girlfriend. During the night, there is a car accident. Cappy is killed.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1

Joe and his father Basil are working in the yard one Sunday afternoon in late spring. Basil goes inside to nap. Joe finish the work and settles at the kitchen table to read one of his father's legal books. When Basil wakes, he asks Joe where his mother is at. Joe recalls his mother saying she was going to the office to pick up a file. Basil thinks that perhaps his wife, Geraldine, has had car trouble again. For this reason, he and Basil walk down to the home of Geraldine's sister, Clemence, to borrow her car. They drive to the office, but Geraldine is not there. They continue into town and pass her car heading in the other direction. Basil thinks that Geraldine went to the grocery store because she had forgotten that it was closed on Sundays and she was embarrassed. For this reason, he takes his time returning Clemence's car before meeting Geraldine at home.

When they arrive home, Joe and Basil find Geraldine still sitting in her car. Basil opens the door and immediately sees that Geraldine is bruised and bleeding. Basil puts Geraldine in the back seat with Joe and drives her to the hospital. Joe waits alone while doctors examine his mother. Joe is called back where his mother, bruises across her face, assures him that she is okay. However, Joe hears the doctor tell his father that she needs surgery. Police arrive, three officers from three different agencies. No one knows for sure where the attack happened; therefore, no one knows who will prosecute.

Chapter 2

Joe has three friends with whom he is close. Zack Peace is the stepson of the local tribal police officer. Angus lives with his Aunt Star and Elwin, her boyfriend, in an overcrowded, often violent, household. Cappy Lafournais is Joe's best friend. He is the son of the on again, off again chairman of the tribe. All three boys love Star Trek: The Next Generation. For this reason, they often talk in a code drawn from the show's characters and episodes. Joe is grateful to have his friends around in the aftermath of his mother's attack.

Shortly after his mother returns from the hospital, Joe returns to school. He comes home to find the milk sour, so his mother sends him to his uncle's gas station to buy more. Uncle Whitey's girlfriend, Sonja, gives Joe his purchases for free and tells him that she plans to send one of her dogs, Pearl, to stay with the family. Joe dislikes Pearl at first because she is a mean dog that does not like to play. Over dinner that night, Joe's father, a judge, discusses the search for his mother's attacker with him. Joe learns that the perpetrator tried to light his mother on fire, but the matches were wet. The man left the matches behind allowing the police to focus on the new golf course that borders the reservation because of the logo on the matches. Basil also tells Joe that his mother



managed to escape her attacker because Basil had placed a spare key in the wheel well of the car after Geraldine locked herself out too many times to count.

A few days later, Basil coaxes Geraldine out of her room by making dinner. The dinner is very bad, prompting Geraldine to promise to take up the dinner chores again. Afterward, Joe goes to Cappy's to help out with the sweat lodge. Cappy's brother, Randall, accidentally burns everyone's eyes by putting a new medicine in the fire that turns out to be made with peppers. Afterward, Randall warns Joe that he saw a grey haired man who appeared to be trying to warn him of something.

Geraldine cooks all the following week. At the end of the week, Joe goes to his father's office to help him gather his things before he takes a leave of absence. Basil has a large stack of files he wants to take home, which is unusual. When they reach home, Basil accidentally frightens Geraldine. Geraldine goes up to her bedroom and does not return. Basil and Joe busy themselves by going through the files Basil brought home. Joe quickly realizes that his father is searching for the perpetrator in his old case files.

Analysis

This novel begins with the shocking rape of Geraldine Coutts. The novel is told through the eyes of Joe Coutts, Geraldine's thirteen year son. Joe is unaware of what is happening to his mother at first, but he is a smart boy and he quickly figures things out. Joe, like most boys his age, loves his parents even as he is trying to move beyond them, to find some independence. However, this attack on his mother has changed things at home and he wants to find a way to make things go back to the way they are. This, and his natural curiosity about the law, cause Joe to pay more attention than perhaps the normal teenager, eager to help his father find the man who hurt his mother.

In the second chapter of this novel the author introduces Joe's three closest friends. The reader is already aware that this novel is being written as though by a young man looking back on his childhood. There are references in the first chapter suggesting Joe has grown up to be a lawyer like his father and that he understands better what happened that summer now that he looks back on it with adult knowledge. At the same time, Joe tells the reader that his best friend, Cappy, has died since that summer. By telling the reader this, Joe not only keeps the reader aware of his adult view on his childhood but also foreshadows a tragedy that will, if not outweigh, equal the tragic attack on Joe's mother.

In the second chapter the author also introduces the people in Joe's life. These include his Aunt Clemence, his Grandfather Mooshum, and his Uncle Whitey. Joe lives on an Indian reservation in North Dakota. The people in his life are a part of this reservation. Joe's family is colorful and filled with intelligent, hardworking people. His uncle is a science teacher, as well as a traditionalist. Other family members are business owners and civic leaders. Life on the reservation is what shapes Joe's world, and the reader is aware that it will play a large part in the events that will unfold in this novel.



Discussion Question 1

Who is Joe? Why is this summer particularly memorable for him? With what purpose does he look back on this summer?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Geraldine? What happened to her? Why is the whole story not revealed immediately? How has this event impacted Geraldine's family?

Discussion Question 3

What does Basil do for a living? How does that play into his role in helping find Geraldine's attacker?

Vocabulary

Severed, concentrated, intensity, muffle, marathon, inspirational, arranged, surreptitious, loneliness, ascending, soundless, moccasins, urgently, wounded, suspension, splintering, heavily, vainly, casserole, edition, tidbits, decisions, recognizance, invaluable, retreat, preceded, recognizing, organizations, preamble.



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3

As Joe helps his father read through his old case files, several cases stand out. One in particular is that of Grace Lark. Mrs. Lark sued for the right to develop one hundred and sixty acres of land left to her biological daughter, Linda Wishkob, by her adopted parents. Mrs. Lark owns a gas station just outside of the reservation where she and her employees would add a surcharge for Indians who came to buy gas and other merchandize. When Whitey opened a gas station on the reservation, Mrs. Lark's business all but failed. To add insult to injury, Mrs. Lark, who abandoned her daughter in the local hospital after she was born with several defects and was thought to be mentally disabled, felt that she was owed something by the people of the reservation for destroying her business. Basil ruled against her, and Mrs. Lark has since died. However, her son Linden is very bitter about the situation and capable of violence.

Chapter 4.

By reading through the case files with his father, Joe has discovered where his mother was attacked. Angus confirms this after listening to his stepfather's police radio. For this reason, Joe and his friends decide to go to the round house, a place on the reservation once used to conduct secret Indian rituals. Joe arrives first to look around alone. There is little to see at the round house, but Joe can picture it in his mind from the things he has overheard. Joe believes the attacker must have left evidence somewhere. For this reason he walks down to the lake. Joe knows the attacker poured gas on his mother, so he goes into the lake and finds the gas can.

Angus, Zack, and Cappy arrive to find Joe sitting at the round house. Joe tells them his theory that the killer had to have left evidence somewhere, so they crawl through the woods together, collecting everything they find. After a while they are so covered in ticks they decide to stop and go swimming. Angus wanders into the woods to use the bathroom and comes back with two six-packs of beer. As the boys help themselves to the beer, they investigate the pile of clothing left in the woods. Joe is convinced the stash belongs to his mother's attacker.

The boys are hungry, so they make their way to the home of Grandma Thunder, a local woman who likes to shock everyone with her conversations about sex. After a large feast, Joe reluctantly goes home where he overhears a conversation between his father and uncle about the local priest. This leads Joe to think the priest, Father Travis, could be his mother's attacker.

Joe goes to bed some hours later and wakes in the middle of the night to a sound. Joe goes to the window and sees a grey-haired man just as Randall described. This



frightens Joe. The next morning when Joe asks his father about ghosts, his father tells him that they do exist and he used to see them when he worked in a cemetery. Their talk moves to the conversation Basil had with Joe's uncle the night before. Joe tells his father he went to the round house and found the gas can.

Analysis

Joe and his father go through old case files from his father's court. Joe quickly realizes that his father thinks Geraldine's attacker is someone with a grudge against Basil for a court case that went the wrong way. Joe reads several, surprised and disappointed that his father presides mostly over petty theft cases rather than murder trials. A few stand out, generating several suspects. Most notable of these is Linden Lark, the son of a local businesswoman who seems to have a history of violence.

Joe decides to take part of the investigation into his own hands by going to the sight of the attack. Joe is filled with anger at the thought of what happened to his mother. For this reason, he wants revenge. Joe not only wants the man caught, he wants to see him burn the way the attacker had tried to set Joe's mother on fire. This need for revenge is an instinct for a young man who loves his mother very much. However, the reader can see that Basil is doing all he can to help find this man and that revenge will not be necessary, especially at the hands of a child. Joe's desires and attempts to help are noble.

Joe sees the face of a grey-haired man outside his window. Joe has been told by Randall that this same grey-haired man appeared to him and that he represents trouble in Joe's future. Joe cannot figure out who the man is or what he wants, but he fears what he might represent. The reader believes it must have something to do with Geraldine's attack and the perpetrator. However, Joe's father tells him that ghosts are real and that they can come visit when they have unfinished business. This suggests the man is someone who had a connection with Joe and died. It is a mystery that will not be solved until later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Basil want to review his old case files? What does he find? How might this information be helpful?

Discussion Question 2

How does Joe discover the location of his mother's attack? Why does he go there? What does Joe hope to find? What does he find?



Discussion Question 3

Who does Joe's uncle suggest might be involved in Geraldine's attack? For what reason does he suggest this person? What does Joe think of this suggested suspect?

Vocabulary

Congeaed, similar, sacrament, skein, collected, graveyard, recognize, occasionally, irritable, approached, poured, exertion, consciousness, exhausted, permanent, purposely, listened, covered, resented, suggestions, illuminated, notion, inhuman, alarmed, suggestions, clattering, mention.



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5

Joe and his father spend the day planting the flower and vegetable gardens Geraldine would have done if she were not locked in her room. At lunch, Joe takes his mother a sandwich and tries to talk to him about the file she had said she was going to get the day of her attack. Geraldine refuses to speak to Joe. Later, Basil brings over the FBI agent investigating the attack so that Joe can give him the gas can. Joe describes how he found the gas can.

Joe runs off to Angus's after growing angry with his father about the investigation. Angus is on his way to church. Joe remembers what his uncle said about the new priest, so he decides to go along. After Angus goes to confession, he leaves Joe on the playground to go look for Cappy. The priest comes out and tells Joe to put out his cigarette. Joe asks the priest where he was the day his mother was attacked. The priest has an alibi, but Joe is not satisfied. When Cappy and Angus return, Joe talks them into going with him to spy on the priest. They stand outside the priest's home and watch him watch a movie. Afterward, the boys are attempting to flee when the priest comes outside and snatches them.

Father Travis confronts the boys, thinking they wanted to see if he was capable of rape. Father Travis was a Marine, and he was injured at the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon. Father Travis acknowledges that it is odd for an ex-Marine to be a priest, but that he had been in seminary before his service. The injury only seemed to make the decision easier.

Chapter 6

After marking Father Travis from the list of suspects, Joe turns his attention to Linden Lark. Joe asks his father if anyone has spoken to Linda Wishkob. Basil decides to do just that, taking Joe along with him. They have lunch with the odd post office worker, but Joe is disappointed when his father does not ask Linda anything directly about the attack or her brother. However, Linda shows up at their house a short time later to speak to Geraldine.

A few days later, Linda Wishkob comes to Joe's house again. Joe's father encourages Joe to engage Linda in casual conversation. At first Joe is reluctant, but he soon finds it enjoyable to speak with Linda. Linda tells Joe the story of how her mother, after more than forty years, contacted her in order to ask her to donate a kidney to her twin brother Linden. Despite the circumstances and her family's objections, Linda agrees to do it. Linden strikes her as an unkind, cruel man, but still she does it only to suffer a terrible infection afterward.



Analysis

Joe and his friends go to check out the local priest as a suspect in Geraldine's attack. The priest is a young man who was once a Marine and has been seen shooting gophers in the church yard. There is a rumor that he was injured in the military and that is why he became a priest. Joe and his friends are able to confirm this last rumor, but they are also able to establish that he could not have committed the brutal crime against Geraldine.

As one suspect is eliminated, Joe moves his attention to another. Linden Lark is well known on the reservation because of his family's gas station and because of his violent past. His sister Linda was raised on the reservation by a kind family after being abandoned at birth by her parents. Linda turns out to be a good source of information regarding Linden, especially his violent past and his heartless attitude toward everyone.

Discussion Question 1

What makes Joe think Father Travis might have hurt his mother? What is odd about Father Travis? Why does this stand out to the people of the reservation?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Joe think it is important to speak to Linda Wishkob? What is his first impression of Linda? Why does he feel this way? What changes?

Discussion Question 3

What story does Linda tell Joe? What importance does this story have on the search for Geraldine's attacker?

Vocabulary

Attention, wistful, infection, precisely, correcting, rescue, ceremony, awkwardly, overcome, orthodontic, sentimental, exert, consented, compensation, uncomfortable, regular, murder, transplant, religious, alternative, sense, circumstances, perceptible, appointment, concluded, assuage, dentures, common, detect, leatherette.



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7

Joe goes to visit with his grandfather. He asks him about the grey-haired man he saw outside his window. His Grandfather Mooshum suggests to Joe that the man he saw could be warning him of danger and he should find his luck. For this reason, Joe goes back to the round house to find heron, his ajijaak. As he stands near the lake on a small dock searching for his luck, he finds a doll floating in the water. When Joe removes the doll's head to drain it of water, he is shocked to find money inside. Joe goes to the gas station and shows it to Sonja. Sonja immediately takes Joe to her house where she irons the money, discovering more than forty thousand dollars. They visit multiple banks to open savings accounts, burying the pass books afterward for safe keeping. Sonja makes Joe promise he will never tell anyone about the money and he will use it for something good, like going to college.

Joe returns home to find the FBI agent there again. Basil and the agent ask Joe to tell them again about his visit to the round house. Joe tells them about the beer he and his friends found. The agent tells them they knew about the beer and the clothes, that they belong to a local man and have no bearing on the case.

Chapter 8

After learning about the phone call Geraldine received the day she was attacked and the file she told Joe she went to retrieve, the FBI agent returns to ask her about it. It is a difficult situation, especially since Geraldine has not gotten out of bed in more than a week. Joe watches as the agent tries to speak to his mother. She refuses to answer. Finally they give up and leave her alone.

Worried about Geraldine's refusal to eat or get out of bed, Basil decides to move a table into the bedroom so that they can have dinner together even if Geraldine does not want to participate. Every night for several days Joe is forced to eat in his mother's bedroom where she is wrapped in the bedclothes, refusing to acknowledge Basil's continuous one-sided conversation. One day Basil begins to talk about the South Dakota governor's attempts to adopt an Indian baby girl. This sets off something in Geraldine, and she suddenly begins to talk about her rape.

On the day of the attack, Geraldine received a call from Mayla Wolfskin asking her to meet her at the round house. Mayla wanted the file she had recently filled out that establishes her daughter's Indian heritage as well as names her biological father. Geraldine arrived, but she was attacked the moment she stepped out of her car. The man put a bag over her head and walked her away from the round house where he raped her. The man then took Geraldine into the round house where she found Mayla



tied up on the floor next to her infant daughter. The man ranted about Mayla's betrayal of him before dousing them both with gasoline. Aware of what the man was planning to do, Geraldine urinated on his pants to get the matches too wet to light. When the man left the round house to find more matches, Geraldine escaped. The file that Mayla had wanted was still in the car. Geraldine will not identify her attacker, however, until they can establish the fate of Mayla and her child.

Basil takes Geraldine to the hospital in Minot. Joe arranges to stay with Sonja and Whitey while his parents are gone. For several days it goes well. Joe loves being so close to Sonja since he has something of a crush on her. However, when Sonja suddenly begins wearing expensive earrings and clothing, Whitey becomes enraged. That night there is a fight between Whitey and Sonja that becomes violent. The next day Joe quits his job and goes to stay with Clemence.

Joe sleeps in the same room with Mooshum. Mooshum talks in his sleep, telling the story of Akii, a woman who when the reservations were first formed was targeted by her unhappy husband as a wiindigoo, a person who goes crazy and begins eating her fellow tribesmen. They try multiple times to kill Akii, but fail. Akii finds herself alone in the woods with her son, Nanapush, starving. Akii catches a fish that she says has told her there is still a single buffalo in the woods. Akii sends her son after that buffalo in hopes it will save them. Mooshum then goes back to sleep. When Joe asks Mooshum about Nanapush the next day, Mooshum does not recall the story he told in his sleep. However, the following night he finishes the story by describing how Nanapush found the buffalo and killed it, but then a terrible storm came and Nanapush had to find refuge inside the animal carcass. When Akii found Nanapush sometime later, he was frozen inside the animal. The spirit of the buffalo remained with Nanapush, telling him he would be regarded as odd among his people, but he will help guide them. It was Nanpush who inspired the creation of the round house, a place the tribe could hold traditional ceremonies in a time when such things were outlawed on the reservation.

Joe and his friends go to the lake to swim, going to a section of lake behind the church where a Youth Encounter Christ program is going on. Two of the youths from the YEC, a young pimple faced boy and a beautiful young girl, come to ask the boys to get out of the water. Joe and his friends refuse. The young boy has a seizure brought on by his emotional distress in arguing with the boys. Cappy and Joe help him, while Angus and Zack go for help. Afterward, Joe and his friends agree to join the YEC to appease the priest. They are really doing it because of the beautiful girl who is named Zelia.

Joe's parents have returned home. Geraldine is beginning to recover, spending more time outside of her bedroom than before. A few days later, Joe and his friends go to the lake and watch as the police dredge it. They pull up Mayla's car. Joe is shocked to see a dress in the car that matches the one on the doll, making it clear where the doll came from.



Analysis

Geraldine begins to come out of her depression. She tells Basil and Joe what happened the day she was attacked. It is clear that Geraldine has been blocking the events of that day because of the trauma of the attack, but the news that the governor of South Dakota was trying to adopt an Indian baby awakens something in Geraldine. With her story, Joe and Basil learn that the mother of the governor's baby-to-be was an Indian girl called Mayla, who is from the Indian reservation. Mayla worked for the governor of South Dakota, and he is most likely her child's father. However, there was another man in Mayla's life who took exception to the child and its paternity. It was this situation that led to the attack on Geraldine who is a tribal enrollment specialist, in charge of registering and researching the heritage of the Indians served by the reservation. For this reason, Mayla had gone to Geraldine to register her infant child, denoting the name of the biological father. It was this file the attacker was after, possibly to blackmail the father.

All this information seems to lead to the identity of the attacker, but no one is saying who it is. Joe can only watch from the sidelines as the investigation continues. This includes a dredging of the lake that turns up Mayla's car. Joe watches as they pull the car from the water and is shocked to recognize a dress in the window that matches one on a doll Joe pulled from the water sometime before. Joe found forty thousand dollars in the doll, money Sonja hid away for Joe to use to go to college. This money could possibly be the money Mayla was paid by the governor of South Dakota to allow him to adopt her child, his biological child.

As the investigation into his mother's attack continues, Joe continues to live something of a normal life. Joe gets a job and hangs out with his friends. When Joe stays with Sonja and Whitey, he is thrilled to be so close to the woman he has a crush on. Unfortunately, a physical fight between Sonja and Whitey shows Joe firsthand the dangers of alcohol as well as the insecurities that many adults struggle with. It is a real adult situation that places Joe in a dangerous world he had only to that point heard rumors of, but not really seen.

Joe and his friends meet a group of kids down by the lake who have come to the reservation to participate in a religious program. One of these kids, Zelia, proves to be a very beautiful girl that all of Joe's friends quickly fall in love with. Cappy, however, proves to be the luckiest as Zelia turns her attention to him. Zelia will prove to play an important part in Cappy's future.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Joe go looking for his luck? What is he hoping it will provide him? What does it provide him? Why does Joe go to Sonja with this opportunity? Can she be trusted?



Discussion Question 2

What story does Mooshum tell Joe in his sleep? What is the significance of the story? How does it relate to what is happening in Joe's life this particular summer?

Discussion Question 3

What causes Joe's mother to reveal the true story of her attack? What causes Geraldine to suddenly remember these details? How might it lead to the capture of the attacker?

Vocabulary

Declared, assumed, gentrified, disoriented, surprised, stubborn, language, exclamation, constant, distinguished, unnoticed, established, immediate, rumbled, maroon, invisible, methodical, sleek, intriguing, remains, crime, allotment, fractionated, description, accurate, aimlessly, arraignment, defense, traditional, unreadable, encounter.



Chapters 9-11

Summary

Chapter 9

On Mooshum's birthday Clemence throws a large birthday party. When the cake is brought out, Mooshum accidentally catches his hair on fire. Clemence sends him inside to rest. The next day, Basil tells Joe about the arrest of Geraldine's attacker, Linden Lark. Geraldine feels safe now and returns to work. A short time later Geraldine and Basil go to Bismarck to give more testimony, so Joe stays with Clemence. In the night, Mooshum again talks about Nanapush, about how he came to build the round house.

Sonja comes to Clemence's after everyone has left, except Joe and Mooshum. Mooshum and Sonja want Joe to leave, but he refuses. Eventually Sonja gives in and does what she has come to do. She gives Mooshum a strip tease for his birthday. Joe is both shamed and excited by her dance. Afterward, Mooshum passes out. Sonja tells Joe that he is just like every other man who has ever wanted to see her dance or use her in another sexual way. It is a difficult moment for Joe that he will never forget.

Cappy tells Joe that he and Zelia had sex several times, but she recently returned home to Montana. Cappy is torn up by being separated from his new love. A short time later, Joe's parents return home with the news that the suspect has been freed from jail. Joe is angry and confronts his father only to receive a lesson on how important it is to fight for the legal system even when it does not work. For this reason, Joe and Cappy spend some time working off their frustrations at a construction site, riding their bikes over mounds of dirt.

One day Cappy and Joe come across Angus on the way to confession. Cappy decides to confess as well. However, when he tells Father Travis about having sex with Zelia in the church, Father Travis chases him out of the church and around a nearby neighborhood before letting him go.

Joe learns that Sonja left Whitey, so he immediately asks Cappy to go with him to find the bankbooks. All but one of the books is gone. A note with two hundred dollars tells Joe that Sonja is sorry, but she needed the money to make a new start. Joe gives half the money to Cappy.

Chapter 10

Joe and his father go to the grocery store to shop for Geraldine. While there, they run into Linden Lark. Basil attacks Linden. Linden manages to push Basil off, allowing him to escape. Seconds later Basil has a heart attack. Joe and his mother stay at a hotel in Fargo while Basil recovers at a hospital there. Joe and Geraldine learn that some of their friends and family beat up Linden. Geraldine, however, knows that Linden will



always be a problem and that she will have to take care of it. Joe, however, feels that he should take care of it himself.

Joe goes to Father Travis pretending to want to become part of the church when what he really wants is to learn how to shoot. Father Travis sees through Joe's story and refuses. Joe tells Cappy what Father Travis said. Cappy decides to teach Joe how to shoot. They go out in the woods and use a shotgun that belongs to Cappy's father. Cappy worries his father will notice the missing ammunition, so Joe tricks his mother into taking him shopping for shoes. Then, he sneaks off to the sporting goods store to buy more ammunition.

A few days later, Joe begins befriending Linda so that he might get information from her about Linden. Eventually, Linda tells Joe that her brother likes to golf early in the morning before anyone else is around. Then Joe and Cappy figure out how Joe could steal the gun from Cappy's father. Over a powwow weekend, Cappy's entire family camps near the festivities. On the first day, Joe sneaks off and breaks into the house, making it look like a failed burglary. Joe then hides the rifle in the woods.

For several days over the next week, Joe goes to the golf course and waits for Linden. When Linden finally shows up, Joe is not sure he can pull the trigger. However, he does. Linden is hit in the chest, but he is still alive. Joe fires again, but it is not a fatal hit. Linden sits up and spots Joe. As Linden begins to yell, Cappy arrives. Cappy takes the gun and kills Linden with a clean shot to the head.

Chapter 11

The boys leave the woods, going to Cappy's to get a car before driving the shotgun to Linda's house and hiding it under the porch. Then, they go to Whitey's. News has already spread, and Whitey is aware of what has happened. Whitey gives the boys a bottle of alcohol and sends them out back to drink. The boys down the bottle and fall asleep under the trees. When they wake, Whitey collects Joe's shirt before sending them home.

Joe's parents confront him when he returns home. They clearly suspect Joe has played some part in the death of Linden, but they are not sure about what he did. The police, too, are curious about Joe's whereabouts that morning, but Whitey has developed a strong alibi for them. Joe comes down with a summer flu the following day. Joe lingers in bed for a few days. When he is finally well enough to get up, Joe finds his mother out in the garden like she might have done before the attack. Joe feels that this is why he did what he did despite the nightmares he and Cappy are having. The only thing that makes Joe have second thoughts about his actions is the revelation from a local man that Linden most likely hid Mayla's body at the construction site and he most likely would have been arrested for murder.

Cappy, who is still pining after Zelia, receives a letter from Zelia's parents telling him to leave her alone. Cappy is devastated, especially by the promise that Zelia's parents will be moving her away where he cannot find her. Cappy decides he must go to her



immediately. Joe agrees to go with him. Soon all four boys are on the road to Montana in Cappy's old clunker of a car. The first part of the ride is exciting with the boys stocking up on junk food everywhere they stop. However, Joe grows tired and decides to sleep in the back while Cappy, who is determined to arrive at Zelia's by morning, continues to drive. When Joe wakes again it is after the car has crashed. Angus and Zack are injured. Joe cannot initially find Cappy. When he does, it is clear that Cappy did not survive the wreck. The police come, and Joe soon finds himself in the custody of his parents, driving back to the reservation.

Analysis

Joe's parents live in fear of Linden Lark. Geraldine will not even go out because she is afraid of running into him. When Basil runs into Linden at the store, he attacks him. Then, Basil has a heart attack. It is a difficult situation, and Joe wants to do something to change it. He wants to return his family to the way it was before the attack. The only way Joe knows to do this is to make sure Linden cannot be a danger to anyone again.

Cappy has only been a side character in this novel thus far, a friend, but not a focus. When Joe needs help ending his mother's nightmare, however, Cappy is there for him. Not only does Cappy teach him how to shoot, but he helps Joe steal his own father's gun. When Joe has to prove himself by shooting Linden, Cappy is there to support him. In fact, it is Cappy who fires the fatal shot. Cappy proves to be a good friend to Joe. This only makes Cappy's death at the end of the novel more tragic. There are few friends like Cappy in the world. It also turns out the ghost Joe kept seeing, the one Randall warned him about, was a cop who came to investigate the wreck.

In the end, Joe feels he did the right thing by ridding the world of Linden Lark. Joe's mother and father can finally return to normal. Then, Joe realizes that murdering Linden Lark was unnecessary. Linden would have probably been arrested for the murder of Mayla when her body was discovered at the construction site. After this realization, Joe second guesses himself. Joe believes in the law despite how it failed his mother. Joe grew up to become a lawyer like his father before him. That summer will always stick out in Joe's mind, and his own actions will remain with him forever.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Basil attack Linden Lark in the grocery store? What are the consequences of this act? Who suffers them?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Joe attempt to become a part of the Catholic Church? What is his purpose? Does it work out the way he thought it would? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Joe steal a gun from Cappy's father? What does he do with the gun? Morally, are Joe's actions right or wrong?

Vocabulary

Flared, horizon, jailbait, governor, widening, disoriented, entrance, staggering, hurtled, unplowed, buckle, idled, concentration, tremble, concentration, horizon, journey, sorrow, forever, accident, invisible, sketchily, applied, entrance, mattered, enrollment, static, balanced, mysterious, mercy, error, floated, entirely, disappear.



Characters

Joe Coutts

Joe was thirteen the summer his mother was raped. Joe looks back on this summer from his late thirties and tells the story as though it happened just yesterday. This attack on his mother changed Joe's family irrevocably, and it seemed to Joe that he was the only one who could make it right.

Joe is a typical teen with three good friends with whom he drinks and smokes cigarettes. Joe has a crush on his uncle's girlfriend and a folder in his room where he has pictures he hides from his mother. Joe idolizes the show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. He is normal in every way except for the fact that he decides to assassinate his mother's rapist.

Joe sees how Linden Lark walking around free is affecting his family. Joe's father has had a heart attack, and his mother is afraid to leave her house. Joe feels that it's up to him to free his family from Linden Lark. In the end, however, Joe is not alone. Joe's best friend Cappy helps him, firing the shot that kills Linden. The murder frees Joe's family and anyone else Linden Lark might have hurt in the future.

Basil Coutts

Basil Coutts is Joe's father. Basil is a judge on the reservation. Joe imagines that his father presides over murders, but he is saddened to find most of his father's cases are simple petty theft and the like.

Basil is an older man who got married late in life. Joe was a surprise to Basil and Geraldine, therefore he is much younger than his cousins. For this reason, the stress of dealing with the aftermath of Geraldine's attack leaves Basil vulnerable, and he has a minor heart attack after confronting Linden Lark in the local grocery store.

Basil introduces Joe to the law from the time he is a young boy just beginning to learn to read. Therefore, when Geraldine is attacked and Basil takes a part in the investigation, he shares some of what he learns with Joe. It is difficult for Basil to hide things from Joe because Joe is too smart not to see and hear what is going on around him. For this reason, Basil partially blames himself when it becomes obvious that Joe killed Linden Lark. However, Basil keeps his suspicions to himself based on the old Indian believe of wiindigo, a tribesman who goes crazy and turns on his people or a white man who consumes the Indians. In this case, Linden Lark was the wiindigo.



Geraldine Coutts

Geraldine is Joe's mother. Geraldine is a kind, gentle woman who likes to have a little fun sometimes. As a tribal enrollment specialist, Geraldine knows all the secrets of the people on the reservation, as well as those who come to her from other parts of the state. Geraldine researches the heritage of the people who come to her in order to help them prove their Indian heritage. It is this job that causes Geraldine to find herself vulnerable to attack.

Geraldine had recently helped a young girl register her infant daughter with the tribal offices. This girl, Mayla Wolfskin, called Geraldine one Sunday and asked her to meet her at the round house with her file. When Geraldine arrived, she was brutally raped before being taken into the round house where Mayla lay tied up with her infant daughter beside her. The man who attacked Geraldine, Linden Lark, wants the file most likely so he can blackmail the governor of South Dakota who is listed as the child's father. Linden Lark is also inspired to hurt Mayla because he was in love with her and is angry that she chose the governor over him.

Geraldine struggles after the attack, spending a great deal of time locked in her bedroom and refusing to eat. When Linden Lark is arrested, Geraldine seems to be returning to herself, going back to work and spending time with her family. However, when Linden Lark is released from jail, Geraldine goes back to being something of a recluse. This inspires Joe to rid his family of Linden Lark.

Cappy

Cappy is Joe's best friend. Cappy is the son of the on-again, off-again chairman of the tribe and janitor. Cappy's mother has died, leaving him and his brother Randall with their father. Cappy's father and Randall often participate in the traditional rituals of the tribe, including maintaining the sweathouse as well as running the annual powwow.

Cappy is a good friend to Joe, always offering support when Joe needs it. This includes giving him a thunderbird stone after his mother's attack and helping him learn to shoot when he decides his mother's attacker must die. Cappy even follows Joe to the woods every morning and helps him when he shoots Linden Lark but cannot finish the job. Cappy saves Joe from being caught and shares with him the nightmares of what they have done.

In the end, Cappy dies trying to get to a girl he loves. Cappy and Joe show great maturity in their decision to end Linden Lark's life, but great immaturity when they decide to drive to Montana to see Zelia. Cappy must have fallen asleep at the wheel. He was probably thrown from the car when it rolled. With Cappy's death, Joe loses a great friend who would have done anything for him.



Linden Lark

Linden Lark is the son of the Larks who own a gas station outside the reservation. Due to the fact that this was the only gas station in the area, the Indians from the reservation were forced to patronize it. The Larks would charge some of the Indians a surcharge because of the way they looked or because of their reputations. This led to a lawsuit. Soon after the reservation encouraged Whitey to open a gas station of his own. The Larks lost a lot of business.

Linden Lark is a cruel man who often engages in violent behavior. Linden has been arrested multiple times, but the charges rarely stick. When Linden rapes and beats Geraldine Coutts, he is careful not to do it in the round house and to cover her face so that she cannot identify the exact place it happened. It is this fact that later causes trouble with the case against Linden despite Geraldine's testimony.

When Linden Lark is released from jail, he remains near the reservation for reasons no one can understand. Joe's father has a heart attack after confronting Linden in the grocery store. Joe realizes that someone has to take out Linden to protect his family. Joe needs to be the one to do it and save his mother this time. Joe shoots Linden twice, but it is Cappy who finally delivers the death shot. Afterward, Joe learns that Linden hid the body of Mayla, his former girlfriend, at the construction site and he would have likely been charged with murder when it was found.

Linda Wishkob

Linda Wishkob was born Linda Lark. The day Linda was born, the doctor saw her deformed head and pronounced she would be mentally disabled. For this reason, Linda's parents made the decision to abandon their daughter and allow her to die. Instead, Linda was adopted by the Indian housekeeper at the hospital. Several times the state attempted to find a white family for Linda. In the end, they allowed her to remain with the Wishkobs even though they never formally adopted her.

When the Wishkobs died, their property was left for Linda's use. A short time later, Linda got a call from her birth mother asking that she donate a kidney to her twin brother, Linden. Linda did despite Linden's and Mrs. Lark's cruelty toward her. Afterward, Linda suffered a terrible infection that nearly caused her death. Not long after Linda recovered, Mrs. Lark sued for the right to develop the one hundred and sixty acres left to Linda by the Wishkobs. Mrs. Lark lost the case and died soon after.

Linda becomes a source of information on Linden as the Coutts search for justice. Linda does all she can do to help. Linda sees the attack that Linden committed as partially her responsibility because she gave him her kidney and saved his life. Joe sees it the same way for a time. In the end, however, Linda helps Joe out when she finds the murder weapon under her deck. She has her adopted brother break it apart so she can scatter it along the highway to the reservation.



Mooshum

Mooshum is Joe's elderly grandfather. Mooshum is old enough that his father fought in the Battle of Batoche in 1885 and was forced to move his family to the reservation in North Dakota afterward. Mooshum is part of a unique tribe of Indians that causes many students to come and speak to him about his childhood. Mooshum is also full of stories of the early days of the reservation, of a time when the Indians were forced onto the reservation and nearly starved to death by the United States government. Mooshum proves to be both comic relief and a source of great information for Joe in this novel.

Clemence

Clemence is Geraldine's sister. Clemence is a temperamental woman who has taken on the burden of caring for her elderly father. Clemence is a devout Catholic who attends church regularly, often dressing up to catch the attention of the new, young priest. Clemence is both a caregiver and an independent woman, taking care of Joe in the aftermath of his mother's attack while also continuing to live her life as she wants.

Sonja

Sonja is a former stripper who lives with Whitey. Sonja has been used and abused by men all her life. Sonja stays with Whitey because she runs a business with him. She has a place to keep her dogs and horses. However, after Joe finds some money and Sonja helps him hide it, she begins to use it to buy herself some of the nicer things that Whitey will not. This angers Joe; so, when Sonja arrives at Clemence's to give Mooshum a show for his birthday, Joe threatens to tell Whitey about the money to force Sonja to let him watch. Afterward, Sonja puts Joe in his place by telling him that he has just become one of the many men who have abused her all her life. A short time later, Joe learns that Sonja has taken most of the money and left Whitey.

Whitey

Whitey is Joe's uncle. Whitey owns the only gas station on the reservation, a station he opened to fight the surcharge the Larks charged Indians at their gas station. Whitey is an alcoholic who has a temper. When Whitey becomes convinced that Sonja is cheating on him, he becomes very drunk and hits her. Joe finds himself in the middle of the fight as he tries to defuse the situation. Whitey later makes it up to Joe by providing an alibi for him and Cappy after the murder of Linden Lark.



Symbols and Symbolism

Shotgun

Joe steals a gun from Cappy's father and uses it to kill Linden Lark. Later, Linda Wishkob has her adopted brother dismantle the gun and she scatters the pieces on the highway outside the reservation.

Mayla's File

Geraldine is attacked over a file from her job as a tribal enrollment specialist. She had filled out the file for Mayla. The file contains the real name of the father of Mayla's daughter, a controversial name that could destroy the career of South Dakota's governor.

Case Files

Basil reviews many of his old case files in an attempt to find suspects in his wife's assault.

Pillow Case

Linden Lark uses a pillow case to keep Geraldine from seeing where Linden has taken her during the rape. This is a key point in the defense, making it difficult

Matches

Linden Lark attempts to light Geraldine and Mayla on fire after his attack on them, but Geraldine manages to get the matches wet so that they will not light. Linden Lark leaves the match book behind giving the police their first clue to his identity.

Gas Can

Joe finds a gas can in the lake that the police believe might have belonged to Geraldine's attacker.

Diamond Earrings

Sonja buys a pair of diamond earrings for herself after she and Joe squirrel away the money he found in a doll. These earrings make Whitey think she is cheating on him which leads to a violent fight that Joe finds himself forced to break up.



Doll

Joe finds a doll in the lake that is filled with forty thousand dollars cash. Sonja helps him deposit the money in multiple banks, but she takes it when she decides to leave Whitey.

Clothes and Beer

While searching for clues to the identity of his mother's attacker, Joe and his friends find clothes and two six-packs of beer in the woods. It later turns out that these are unrelated to the attack.

Sweatlodge

Cappy's brother runs the sweat lodge on the reservation where they perform traditional rituals.



Settings

Reservation

The novel is set in the summer of 1988. Joe and his family live on an Indian reservation in North Dakota. The reservation consists mostly of single family homes with a few apartments built by the government. There is a Catholic Church, a gas station, and a lake. Bordering the reservation is a new golf course that welcomes Indians as well as the white people of the nearby towns. It is on this golf course that Linden Lark is shot and killed.

Round House

There is a structure on the reservation referred to as the round house. This house was built many years before when the government outlawed traditional Indian rituals on the reservation. This house was to give local Indians a place to perform their rituals in secret. The house has not been used much in recent years. However, it sits on a section of the reservation that borders both government land and local city land. This causes some trouble when Geraldine is attacked in this vicinity but cannot say for sure where.

Lake

Joe and his friends spend a great deal of time at the lake during the summer of 1988. It is at the lake that Joe finds the doll and the gas can. It is also at another section of the lake that Cappy meets Zelia.

Whitey's Gas Station

Whitey, Joe's uncle, owns a gas station on the reservation. This gas station was opened in part to counteract the surcharge the Lark's gas station charged to certain Indians. Joe spends some time during the summer working at the gas station. Later, after Joe and Cappy kill Linden Lark, they go to the gas station where Whitey provides them with alcohol and an alibi.

Golf Course

There is a new golf course that has been built next to the reservation. This golf course allows both whites and Indians to become members. It is from this golf course that the book of matches is from and it is also where Joe shoots Linden Lark.



Themes and Motifs

Family

The main theme of this novel is family. Joe's family is a tightknit one, a family who like to spend time together. Joe's parents love each other deeply and are always affectionate with one another. In turn, they love their son and are deeply involved in his life. There is extended family in the area who always come over, or invite Joe's family over, so that everyone is involved in the affairs of everyone else.

When Joe's mother is attacked by Linden Lark at the round house, everything changes. At first Geraldine tries to remain a functioning part of the family, but soon her fears of being attacked again overwhelm her. She ends up locking herself in her room for days on end, refusing to do anything but sleep. Growing afraid that his wife will never recover, Basil forces Geraldine to participate in nightly family meals by setting up a table at the end of the bed. It is during one of these dinners that Geraldine finally has a breakthrough and things begin to change.

When Linden Lark is arrested, it seems that everything will return to normal. However, when the police cannot determine who has the jurisdictional right to prosecute Linden Lark, he is released. Geraldine returns to being frightened. Joe only wants things to return to normal. Joe wants his mother to be unafraid in her own home. For this reason, Joe takes the law into his own hands. In the end, Geraldine does become more like her old self, allowing the family to find a new kind of normal. For this reason, family is a theme of the novel.

Violence

Drunkenness and violence are stereotypes of modern Indians. The author of this book chooses not to ignore this reality. Some of the characters are heavy drinkers, though they still manage to work a full day every day. Some of the characters are violent as well, as illustrated by Whitey hitting Sonja in front of Joe. However, in this novel, the worst violence is not perpetrated by an Indian.

Geraldine returns home one Sunday afternoon in late May beaten and bloody. Her husband immediately takes her to the hospital where he discovers that she has been raped. For weeks Geraldine either cannot remember or refuses to tell all that happened to her. Instead, she falls into a dark depression while those around her, especially her husband, struggle to find the man who hurt her. Every man with a grudge against the family is considered, white and Indian alike. In the end, however, it turns out that a white man is the source of the violence that tore Joe's family apart.

Violence is not an uncommon thing in modern society. Linden Lark's actions, however, are beyond cruel in the fact that his attack on both Geraldine and Mayla were so unnecessary. Linden Lark could have gotten what he wanted without committing rape.



Linden Lark more than likely could have gotten what he wanted without killing Mayla. However, he did so. Linden Lark was an unstable man. In the end, Joe learned a lesson that a boy his age should not have had to learn. Joe's response to that lesson is morally questionable. In the end, the reader must make their own choice as to whether violence should beget more violence. Violence among Indians, violence in white society, violence by whites against Indians, it does not matter. What matters is that violence is a reality in this novel, making it a theme..

Tribal Law

This novel begins with Joe reading through his father's old copy of Felix S. Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian Law. This sets a tone to the novel, suggesting that legal issues on the reservation will be important as the plot develops. Soon the reader learns of Geraldine's attack and that it may have taken place on the reservation. If so, the perpetrator could be tried by tribal law, of which Geraldine's husband is a respected judge.

As the novel progresses, Basil begins his own search for the assailant even as the tribal police, the FBI, and the local city police conduct their own investigation. Basil wants the assailant tried by tribal law, but jurisdiction cannot be determined until Geraldine can tell them exactly where she was raped. The problem is, the assailant knew this and he kept Geraldine's head covered the whole time. In the end, no one is able to prosecute Linden Lark for rape because no one knows who has the right to do so.

Joe wants his family to return to normal. For this reason, he wants Linden Lark arrested, tried, and placed in prison. When this fails to happen, Joe questions his father on the reasons why he continues to believe in tribal law when it seems so useless. Basil sets a rotten casserole on the counter and balances a stack of silverware, knives, and serving ware on top of it. Basil then proceeds to tell Joe of all the strong legal cases that sit on top of the more rotten cases from the earliest years of the reservations. In the end, Basil manages to convey to Joe that they have to keep fighting or the work that has been done, the good work, will be for naught. In this way, Joe begins to discover a new appreciation for tribal law.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The author chooses Joe Coutts, a thirteen year old boy, the narrator of the novel. There are times, however, when the author allows other characters to tell their own stories in the first person point of view. These include the story Linda Wishkob tells about her first meeting with her birth mother and her decision to give Linden Lark a kidney, as well as Mooshum's stories about Nanapush.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot because it allows the reader to develop an intimate relationship with the main character. This point of view also keeps the narration tight so that there is no confusion from the author moving from character to character. The point of view also works with the structure of the novel as the author has created a story that is supposedly written by an older man looking back on a summer of his childhood that had an enormous impact on his life.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The novel features a thirteen year old boy as its main character. For this reason, some of the language is quite simple, and it includes slang that was common during the time period. The author even includes some language that was developed by the main character and his friends. It refers to a television show that was popular in the year the novel is set.

The language of this novel works well because it is authentic to the main character. The language includes some foreign words, but these words fit with the characters, and they are easily understood from their use in the plot. This is also authentic to the characters. The language of this novel is appropriate to the characters and the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into eleven chapters. Each chapter is fairly long, some longer than forty pages. The chapters are divided into scenes, some chapters covering time periods as long as weeks at a time. The novel is told in a linear fashion, but it has a sense of a flashback because the narrator tells the reader he is writing this as an adult, a lawyer, who is looking back on a significant time in his childhood.

This novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Joe Coutts as he attempts to deal with his mother's attack while having a normal childhood. One of the subplots follows the relationship between Joe and his friends. Another subplot follows the investigation into the attack against Geraldine Coutts. All the plots come to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

Small trees had attacked my parents' house at the foundation.

-- Joe (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote not only sets the scene for the first part of the novel, but it sets the tone as well. The foundation in this case is both literally the house's foundation and figuratively the basic foundation of the family.

Much later, after I had gone into law and gone back and examined every document I could find, every statement, relived every moment of that day and the days that followed, I understood that this was when my father had learned from Dr. Egge the details and extent of my mother's injuries.

-- Joe (Chapter 1 paragraph 89)

Importance: This quote establishes for the reader that the narration is by an older Joe who is looking back on this particular summer with more knowledge than he had as a child. This not only explains the style in which the novel is written, but it also explains some things a child might not have been able to explain.

We had to hunt them down, but I don't think we ever missed one episode of Star Trek. Not the old one, but The Next Generation. We loved Star Wars, had our favorite quotes, but we lived in TNG.

-- Joe (Chapter 2 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote shows not only a piece of nostalgia from 1988, but the basic nature of these three adolescents in a summer that would soon change everything.

My father was punishing hot dog thieves and examining washers—not even washing machines—just washers worth 15 cents apiece.

-- Joe (Chapter 3 paragraph 8)

Importance: This quote shows Joe's disillusionment when he finally discovered what his father spent most of his time doing in his career as a tribal law judge.

During the old days when Indians could not practice their religion—well, actually not such old days: pre-1978—the round house had been used for ceremonies.

-- Joe (Chapter 4 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote explains the purpose of the round house on the reservation, a history that is important to the people who live there. Unfortunately, this is also the location of the aftermath of Geraldine's attack.

It had been over a week since she had walked up those stairs, and the bedroom had taken on a fusty odor. The air was heavy with her breath, as if she'd sucked out the oxygen.



-- Joe (Chapter 5 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote describes what Joe finds in his mother's room shortly after he investigates at the round house. Geraldine has withdrawn from life in the aftermath of the attack. Despite Joe's attempts to draw her out, she remains withdrawn.

The nurse was stopped by the doctor, who pointed out my crumpled head, arm, and leg. Stepping in front of the nurse and me, the doctor addressed the mother, telling her that the second baby had a congenital deformity, and asking if he should use extraordinary means to salvage it. The answer was no.

-- Linda (Chapter 6 paragraph 47)

Importance: This quote from Linda Wishkob shows the ruthlessness with which Mrs. Lark abandoned her daughter without even seeing her for herself. The phrasing should also be noted, showing the lack of emotional attachment Linda has to her birth family.

I wrenched the head off the doll to dump out the rest of the water, and there was my luck. Right there. The doll was packed with money.

-- Joe (Chapter 7 paragraph 48)

Importance: This quote is important because the money that Joe finds in this doll is not only directly involved in the attack on his mother, but it will also be part of the cause of his falling out with his beloved Sonja.

My mother's job is to know everybody's secrets.

-- Joe (Chapter 8 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote is important because Geraldine's job is the main reason she was attacked by Linden Lark.

When I tell this story to white people they are surprised, and when I tell it to Indians they always have a story like it. And they usually found out about their relatives by dating the wrong ones, or at any rate, they usually began to figure out family somewhere in their teens.

-- Joe (Chapter 9 paragraph 37)

Importance: This quote touches on the common act of having illegitimate children among the Indians on the reservation, including Joe's own grandfather. This quote is important because it touches on a theme that is also related to Geraldine's attack, the biological father of a child.

That was when my father had his first heart attack—it turned out to be a small one. Not even a medium one. Just a small one. But it was a heart attack.

-- Joe (Chapter 10 paragraph 24)

Importance: This quote shows the continuing impact Linden Lark is having on the



Coutts family. Basil has a heart attack shortly after running into Linden Lark in the grocery store.

I've done what I had to do. There is no going back. And whatever happens, I can take.
-- Joe (Chapter 11 paragraph 121)

Importance: This is what Joe says to him the night after he killed Linden Lark.