

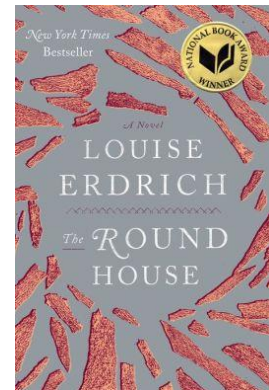


Discussion Questions for The Round House By Louise Erdrich

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club group on Goodreads.com.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at:

https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/216187



1. Spoiler Thread! / The Ending

To us, this book wasn't as much a "Whodunit?" as much as it was a "Will-he-be-held-accountable-for-it?" Depressingly and yet somewhat unsurprisingly, Linden Lark was not held accountable for his crimes in *The Round House*. Were you surprised by this? Why or why not?

Joe's father tries to explain to Joe why this is through a strange, casserole-and-cutlery-related metaphor, where each piece of cutlery explains a court decision or Act of Congress that has repercussions up through the present day (which is 1988 in this book).

Did you think that Joe (& Cappy) would go through with their plan to get revenge on Geraldine's attacker?

What did you think of the book overall?

2. "Moving On" from Sexual Assault

One of the many things that we think Louise Erdrich did quite compellingly in this book was to illustrate both the immediate and long-term consequences and effects of a traumatic assault. Geraldine's recovery and survival was complex and affected each member of her immediate family, her workplace, and her extended network of family and friends.

What did you think of this depiction? In particular, the effect that it had on Joe?

3. Tribal Sovereignty

From early on, Louise Erdrich carefully addresses the complexities inherent in trying criminal cases, particularly sexual assault, that involve Native victims and non-Native perpetrators on Native or state land.

*"They need to get a statement. They should have been here.
We turned to go back to the room.
Which police? I asked.
Exactly, he said."* (12)

"My father had insisted that they each take a statement from my mother because it wasn't clear where the crime had been committed – on state or tribal land – or who had committed it – an Indian or a non-Indian. I



already knew, in a rudimentary way, that these questions would swirl around the facts. I already knew, too, that these questions would not change the facts. But they would inevitably change the way we sought justice.” (12)

Unfortunately, little has changed since 1988 (the setting for *The Round House*). While the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) closed a critical gap in justice by giving Tribal courts the authority to hold domestic violence offenders accountable, it did not extend these protections to victims of sexual assault or stalking.

What do you think these issues of jurisdiction (i.e., who has the authority to investigate and prosecute a case) and sovereignty (i.e., tribes’ right to govern themselves, manage tribal property, hear cases that occur on tribal lands, and much more) say about the historical and current relationships between tribes, states, and the federal government? What do you think about the fairness or justness of these limitations on jurisdiction and sovereignty?

4. Justice & Revenge

Ultimately, *The Round House* is a story about a lack of justice and the therefore seemingly inevitable desire for vengeance. Louise Erdrich has said that *“In writing the book, the question was: If a tribal judge — someone who has spent his life in the law — cannot find justice for the woman he loves, where is justice? And the book is also about the legacy of generations of injustice, and what comes of that.”*

Can revenge be “the only form of justice in some locations and in some terrible situations,” as Erdrich asserts? Or, is it “a sorrow for the person who has to take it on?” Or something else entirely?

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Quotes taken from an NPR interview found here: <http://www.npr.org/2012/10/02/162086064/in-house-erdrich-sets-revenge-on-a-reservation>

5. Characters

The Round House is populated with a fascinating cast of characters -- Geraldine and Bazil; Joe; Joe’s three friends (Cappy, Zack, & Angus), with their love of Star Trek and girls from Montana; Whitey and Sonja, a couple with a “volatile” relationship; Mooshum and Clemence, and their continuous fight over swamp tea vs. whiskey; Grandma Thunder and her neverending supply of food and dirty talk; and so many more. Louise Erdrich wrote each of these characters with care, making them well-rounded and believable.

Did you have a favorite? A least favorite? Why?