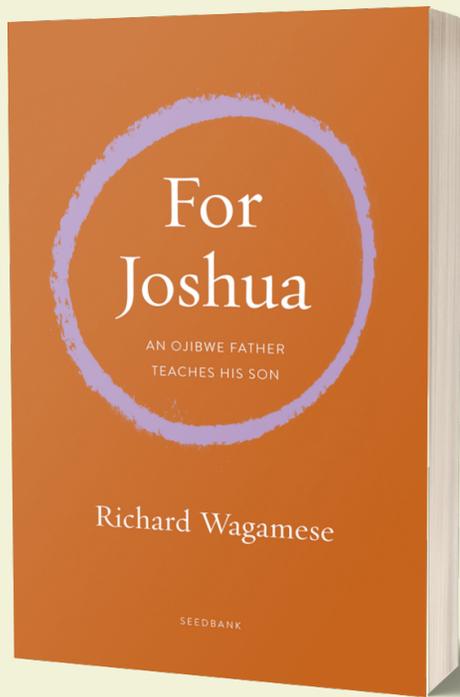


# FOR JOSHUA AN OJIBWE FATHER TEACHES HIS SON BY RICHARD WAGAMESE



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In school, Wagamese felt he had to play the part of “Indian” to win over his classmates and crush which led him to lie and lean into harsh stereotypes. Growing up did you ever feel that kind of pressure to belong? How important was it for you to feel accepted by your peers? Do you still experience that kind of pressure as an adult?
2. Humans tend to be creatures of habit, seeking comfort in our routines. After leaving home, Wagamese fell into a dangerous cycle of stealing, drinking, and spending months at a time in jail, just to be realized and start it all over again. How easy would it be for anyone to fall into a cycle like this? Why is it so hard to break our routines? What do your own routines mean to you?
3. While living on the streets, Wagamese craved a home with loved ones to return to after a long day. In *For Joshua*, he writes that he would often stare longingly through the windows of the houses he passed on the street. What does home mean to you? What makes a place a home?
4. For four days, Wagamese sat in a dirt circle at the top of a hill to reflect on his life. He had no distractions to keep his attention and the experience opened his eyes to the world around him. Close your eyes and sit with your thoughts for three full minutes. Think about your life so far and all that you have experienced. What comes to mind? Do you find that your mind wanders? If so, where does it go and why?
5. At 24, Wagamese found work in the Native community as a reporter on a small Native newspaper. He learned from those around him how to confront his biases and grow as a person—participating in many traditions and ceremonies. However, on page 124, he writes: “But understanding is not healing.” What does it take to begin the process of healing? How is it possible for someone to understand and learn so much but still not be ready to take the first steps themselves?
6. At the youth hostel Wagamese and the others guests sat around a fire and shared their stories of travel and life. Wagamese describes the feeling he had in that moment as “Kinship.” Who are the people you feel a kinship with? What do you have in common? What are your differences?
7. During his time on the mountain, Wagamese thinks through a long story John had told him about how animals were originally man’s teachers. Is this story still relevant in modern society? What can we still learn from the animal kingdom?
8. Part of the four-day ritual that Wagamese embarks on in *For Joshua* is creating a Tabacco pouch each time he thinks of something he is grateful for. What are some of the things in your life that you are grateful for?
9. *For Joshua* is a series of letters written by Wagamese for his estranged son meant to follow the Ojibwe tradition of fathers walking their children through the world. Who taught you the life lessons that mean the most to you? Was it a parent? A friend? A family member? Someone else?
10. As part of the Seedbank series, *For Joshua* can be regarded as a guide for reflection on our relationship to the world around us. In what ways does this book challenge and broaden your perception of the world and humanity?

# FOR JOSHUA AN OJIBWE FATHER TEACHES HIS SON BY RICHARD WAGAMESE

## SYNOPSIS

Following the Ojibwe tradition of fathers walking their children through the world and teaching them life's great lessons, *For Joshua* is an intimate series of letters written by one of Canada's foremost writers, Richard Wagamese, to his six-year-old son from whom he was estranged.

*For Joshua* fulfills this traditional duty with grace and humility, describing his own path through life—separation from his family as a boy, substance abuse, incarceration, and the discovery of books and writing—and braiding this extraordinary story with the teachings of his people, in which animals were the teachers of human beings, until greed and a desire to control the more-than-human world led to anger, fear, and eventually profound alienation.

At once a deeply moving memoir and a fascinating elucidation of a rich indigenous cosmology, *For Joshua* is an unforgettable journey.

## ABOUT THE SEEDBANK SERIES

This new series of world literature expands Milkweed's publishing program to bring ancient, historical, and contemporary works from cultures from around the world to American readers. Just as repositories around the world gather seeds to ensure biodiversity in the future, Seedbank gathers works of literature from around the world that foster conversation and reflection on the human relationship to place and the natural world—exposing readers to new, endangered, and forgotten ways of seeing the world.