



PERMA RED

A Novel

By Debra Magpie
Earling

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Discussion Questions

1. *Perma Red* opens with the tangled history of Louise White Elk and Baptiste Yellow Knife. “She felt an urge to move closer to him, a strange urge she didn’t understand, the same urge she had to look close into the small mouths of dead animals.” [13] Reflect on Louise’s ever-changing feelings toward Baptiste and his obsession with her throughout the novel.
2. Louise is forced to attend boarding schools in her youth, and Charlie Kicking Woman remarks during one visit, “Cruelty would never be a crime around here” [39]. Were you familiar with the history of Native boarding schools before reading *Perma Red*? What have you learned from Louise’s experience?
3. Charlie struggles to please the Native and non-Native world and find a balance between both cultures as a police officer. Is his quest possible? How does his relationship with Louise undermine and support his identity? How do other characters contribute to or challenge his identity?
4. *Perma Red* could be misinterpreted as a book about romance, with Louise always at the center of male attention. However, the truth of Louise’s story is obsession and abuse: “Trout slept in the hazy shadow of early evening, safe. She wanted to believe she was safe, too, that there was a place for her to hide from all of them, from Baptiste Yellow Knife. . . from Charlie Kicking Woman’s chase.” [88] How does Louise react to each man’s advances and how does she steer her own story?
5. Given the nature of governmental control and boarding school overreach during this time, how does Louise find her own agency when she is controlled by a larger governing agent? What did you learn from her choices of agency in regards to her family, partners, and education?
6. “The cold had not numbed her. She felt the sting of blood along her spine.” [262] Earling’s vivid writing style exposes the reader to the violence Louise faces throughout the novel. What is the impact of showing intimate partner abuse on the page?
7. There are incidents and scenes that speak to the supernatural world in *Perma Red*. What unexplained images forced you to think beyond the page? How do the fantastical images inform the larger narrative?
8. “The day was so dry with cold my heater rattled. The mountains were edged with morning light. The stars were thinning.” [249] What role does the western landscape play in *Perma Red*?
9. Reflect on Earling’s use of multiple perspectives throughout the novel. Which scenes stick out to you as more impactful because of this choice?
10. In the U.S. and Canada, there is a crisis of Missing And Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). According to a National Institute of Justice Report, more than 80% of Indigenous women have experienced violence and more than 55% have been abused by their intimate partners. Research local and national organizations doing work to bring awareness to MMIW and provide resources to help survivors, and share what you have learned.

