Night Flying Woman

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF IGNATIA BROKER

Like many Native American children in her generation, Ignatia Broker was born on a reservation and attended a Christian boarding school. A lifelong Minnesota resident, she left her reservation to work in defense in the Twin Cities, but she lost her job after World War II ended. Broker married a Native American veteran, had two children, and worked as a cleaner for several years, before gaining qualifications to work in a health clinic after her husband died. Broker eventually became a community leader and ran several programs to support her local Native community, primarily helping Native Americans gain access to government resources and integrate into urban life off the reservation. Broker was motivated to write her only novel, *Night Flying Woman*, to document her people's experiences and share insights about her culture before she died. She published the book in 1983 and died a few years later, in 1987, from lung cancer. Broker utilizes traditional indigenous storytelling in the book, and *Night Flying Woman* received critical accolades for offering a Native American perspective on U.S. history.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Night Flying Woman discusses white settler colonialism, and the displacement of Native Americans from their lands onto reservations in Minnesota, roughly between 1850 and 1950. It covers a period when substantive legislation was enacted to limit Native people's rights, including the 1887 General Allotment Act (also known as the Dawes Act), which forced Native Americans onto reservations. Settlers relocate protagonist Oona's family to the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota (established in 1867). The book also discusses widespread deforestation, indirectly referencing the 1889 Nelson Act and 1905 Clapp Act, which allotted most of Minnesota's forests to the lumber industry. Oona's descendant Ignatia Broker (and the book's author) also describes her own experiences working in Minnesota during World War Two (1939-1945), and she briefly mentions her husband's death in the Korean War (1950-1953).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other books offering biographies and histories of the Native American experience that touch on similar topics to *Night Flying Woman* include Deborah A. Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2012). Like Broker, Miranda leverages her family ancestry to describe Native American experiences during the period of white settlement. Darcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936) also describes Native American experiences, focusing on forced Christian schooling for Native children. Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) addresses Native American displacement and the legislation that dispossessed Native Americans of their lands. In addition, Waubgeshig Rice's novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) uses a fictional story to share important insights about Ojibway cultural values, including the importance of community and sharing, and the Ojibway connection with the land, both of which are also emphasized in *Night Flying Woman*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative
- **Where Written:** Minnesota
- **When Published:** 1983
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** History, Biography, Memoir
- **Setting:** Minnesota between 1850 and 1980
- **Climax:** A young girl named Mary asks Oona to tell her stories, and Oona feels uplifted knowing that her culture, and its stories, will live on.
- **Antagonist:** White settlers
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Total Eclipse. The story's protagonist, Oona, is called "Night Flying Woman" because she's born during an eclipse that blacks out the sky. An elderly villager describes Oona as being born while flying through the night, providing the inspiration for her name.

PLOT SUMMARY

As Ignatia Broker walks home, she imagines the time when Native Americans possessed the land. She moved off the reservation to Minnesota's Twin Cities in 1941. When World War Two ended, she lost her job. She ended up working as a cleaner and living in poverty with her family. Despite feeling like an outsider in society, Ignatia feels a strong connection with other Native Americans, and this motivates her to tell her people's story.

Ignatia's great-great-grandmother Oona (or Night Flying Woman) grows up in an Ojibway community in the forests of present-day Minnesota. When her family hear about "strangers" who are claiming land and spreading **sickness**, they

retreat to boggy land that they hope will deter the strangers from finding them. Oona learns many Ojibway traditions from her family, including how to find medicinal herbs, how to set fish traps, and respect for the wisdom of her elders. When Oona's seven, she realizes that she's a "dreamer": her meditative dreams can foretell the future. Oona dreams about a pale stranger walking into her village, and a few days later, the man arrives. The pale man explains that this land belongs to other people, and he convinces the Ojibway to move far away, to some land that the pale people have designated for the Ojibway. The family hosts the man for the winter, and they set off on an arduous journey in the spring.

Oona's family arrive at a place where many other Ojibway clans are living, though many are very sick. They make their new home here. As time passes, the strangers who oversee the reservation gradually make Oona's family change their lifestyle: instead of living off the land in the forest, they live in a log cabin and work for money in the lumberyard, which they exchange for food, clothes, and belongings. Oona's Mother embraces this new lifestyle, though it makes her sad. The family earns too little to feed themselves, so they survive by relying on traditions like foraging. Within a few years, the government bans most Ojibway traditions (like gathering medicinal herbs). The community strives to retain their culture, integrating ritual dancing and storytelling into their new lives. The pale men in charge make the children go to school, where they learn English and study Christianity. The teachers tell the children that Ojibway culture is bad and Christianity is good. However, Oona's Grandfather explains that both cultures are good, but the strangers can't see that because they're not interested in learning about Ojibway life. Many Native Americans die from sickness.

When Oona is a teenager, the sickness kills Oona's mother. Her father, grandfather, and Grandmother die shortly after. Oona soon marries a man named Michael, and they start a farm, growing crops that the strangers like. She takes in many people from her community, and together, they make the farm thrive. Oona loses her ability to foretell the future in her dreams, so she accompanies Michael and his Little Brother into the wilderness to meditate and reconnect with nature. On their way home, a group of pale men take them captive. Oona dreams about a great fog, and at dawn, a thick fog descends on the group, allowing them to escape undetected.

As Oona ages, she tends diligently to her farm, family, and community. Because loggers cut down so many trees, the forest all but disappears. Oona feels like she can hear the forest crying. When Oona approaches death, she feels deeply sad that Ojibway children know less and less about their culture and history. It troubles Oona to think of nobody learning the Ojibway stories she learned from her grandparents, and she worries about her culture disappearing from history entirely. One day, when Oona is very old, a little girl named Mary knocks on the door. Mary wants to hear the Ojibway stories. Oona feels uplifted: she now knows that her culture will live on after she dies.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman – Oona is the story's protagonist. Oona is born in a traditional Ojibway village in the wilderness (located in present-day Minnesota) during an eclipse. When she's seven, Oona realizes that she's a "dreamer," meaning that her dreams can predict the future. Realizing that Oona is gifted, her community—especially the elderly women—tell Oona many traditional stories from Ojibway culture, so that Oona can learn them and pass them on. As Oona grows up, she witnesses the atrocities European settlers cause Native Americans by displacing them from their homes, spreading illness and death by passing on a smallpox epidemic, destroying their forest habitat through the lumber industry, and all but erasing Ojibway culture through legal bans and forced schooling. Oona's life story thus stands for many Native Americans' stories, as her experiences mirror what many Native American people endured under colonization. Despite the oppression that Oona's story exposes, Oona survives by relying on her indigenous traditions and knowledge, reinforcing the idea that Ojibway values—centered on community, sharing, and respecting nature—have tremendous value, even under oppressive circumstances.

Ignatia Broker – Ignatia Broker is the book's author. She appears as a character in the story's prologue, describing her life before she moves on to tell her great-great-grandmother Oona's life story. In describing her own life, Ignatia reveals that Native Americans continue to face oppression in the United States. Ignatia points out how hard it is for Native Americans like herself to find work, earn a living wage, rent a home, and access resources and support when they leave their reservations and attempt to integrate into American society. Ignatia's insights thereby suggest that Native Americans like herself feel like unwelcome outsiders, even though they are in their native land. Ignatia also has a strong sense of community: she empowers other Native Americans, and she shares Oona's life story to inform her readers about Ojibway culture. The Ojibway consider storytelling deeply important. Their traditional stories function as ways to share indigenous knowledge, skills, and values. Ignatia embodies the role of a traditional storyteller in sharing her people's story. In doing so, she shows that Native American culture survives, just as her great-great-grandmother Oona would have wanted.

Grandfather – Grandfather is Oona's grandfather. According to Ojibway tradition, she always greets him with her eyes cast down to signal her deep respect. Grandfather, a kindhearted

man, always greets Oona warmly in return. He encourages her to cultivate her meditation skills and teaches her how to interpret her dreams, enabling her to foretell the future. When Oona's community learns that strangers are coming to displace them, Grandfather leads his family deep into the forest, to unforgiving, boggy land, hoping this will deter the settlers from finding them. His family creates a small village there, and Grandfather becomes the village leader, successfully evading European colonists for over two years. Grandfather is a wise, intuitive, and peaceful man. After settlers discover the family and move them to a reservation, Grandfather encourages his family to embrace the good in the strangers who are taking over their land, as he believes that the colonists (who practice Christianity) and the Native Americans share many values—like charity and brotherly love. It saddens Grandfather that incoming settlers have no desire to learn about Native American culture or live in peaceful harmony with Native Americans.

Grandmother – Grandmother is Oona's grandmother. She's married to Grandfather, and Oona deeply respects them both. Oona learns many traditional skills and stories from Grandmother, including traditional beadwork. After the family moves to a reservation, Grandmother relies on her traditional skills to make handicrafts (like necklaces and headpieces), which she sells to tourists, thereby helping to support her family when they struggle to get by.

Father/Me-ow-ga-bo – Me-ow-ga-bo is Oona's father. Before colonists move his family to a reservation, he thrives by trapping fish, farming rice in the wilderness, and living in harmony with the forest. After he's displaced, he has to work on a lumberyard. It gives him great sadness to see the forest around him destroyed, and he grieves for the animals that—like him—lose their habitat.

Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe – Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe is Oona's mother. She is a practical, competent woman who takes an open-minded attitude toward European culture. She strives to learn English and integrate into the emerging culture, believing that it will be the best way to ensure her family's survival. Still, she's deeply saddened by losing her traditional lifestyle and culture. She eventually dies from smallpox, leaving her daughter Oona as the family's new matriarch.

A-wa-sa-si – A-wa-sa-si is an elderly healer in Oona's traditional village. A-wa-sa-si names Oona "Night Flying Woman" because Oona is born during an eclipse. When the villagers are displaced, A-wa-sa-si travels with Oona and her family to a reservation, and they live communally together. A-wa-sa-si teaches Oona many traditional stories about Ojibway culture, and she also teaches Oona how to practice traditional medicine, based on gathering and using wild herbs.

Michael – Michael is half-white and half-Ojibway. He and Oona get married when she is a teenager, and together—along with several other community members—they build a thriving farm and have children. Oona uses her dreaming powers to save Michael's life when some white men capture and kidnap Michael, Oona, and Michael's brother Little Brother.

Little Brother – Little Brother is Michael's brother (making him Oona's brother-in-law). Little Brother lives on the farm with Oona and Michael. When some white men capture Little Brother and tie him to a horse, intending to drag him to death, Oona prevents the horse from moving by speaking to it in her native tongue, thereby saving Little Brother's life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Warm Sky/David – Warm Sky is Oona and Michael's eldest son.

Brother/John – Brother is Oona and Michael's younger son.

Carl/Two Standing – Carl is Oona's great-grandson. He takes over the family farm when Oona grows old.

Mary – Mary is a little Ojibway girl who finds an aging Oona to learn stories about Ojibway culture. Mary revives Oona's spirits, as Oona now knows that Mary will be able to learn the stories and pass them on, enabling Ojibway culture to survive.

Ignatia's Husband – Ignatia's husband is a Native American veteran whom Ignatia meets when he returns from fighting in World War II. He lives in poverty with Ignatia for a few years before dying in the Korean War.

A-bo-wi-ghi-shig/Warm Sky – A-bo-wi-ghi-shig is the leader in Oona's village, before settlers displace the villagers from their homelands.

E-quay – E-quay is Oona's cousin. They experience a similar life, growing up together, both in the wilderness and on the reservation. Later in life, E-quay and Oona's families live together, collectively working on their farm. E-quay and Oona's kinship exemplifies the strong sense of community and sharing in Ojibway culture.

Walter – Walter is a farmer who marries E-quay. He dies during a fatal accident at the lumberyard where he works.

A-ki-wa-a-si – A-ki-wa-a-si is an old man in Oona's wilderness community.

The Clansman – The clansman is a Native American from a neighboring area who comes to warn Oona's community about strange people (meaning white settlers) who are seizing land and ripping up the forest.

The Stranger – The stranger is a white man who discovers Oona's family in the wilderness. He leads them to the reservation where they end up settling. Despite the fact that he arrives in the village to displace Oona's family, they still host him through the winter, showing their hospitality and warmth.

The Agent – The agent is the white man who runs the reservation where Oona's family lives. He teaches the Ojibway about currency, and he gradually makes the Ojibway replace

their traditional lifestyle with a European-inspired Christian lifestyle, like his own.

The Agent's Wife – Oona's mother learns about the settlers' culture when she works as a cleaner for the agent's wife. The agent's wife is a kind, honest woman whom the Ojibway respect.

Sam – Sam is an Ojibway man who works with the agent. He tells Oona's family about the new law requiring Native children to attend Christian school.

David – David is one of Oona's cousins. He's the first in his family to attend Christian school and integrate into the strangers' culture. At the end of the story, he leaves the family to enter the strangers' society, hoping to teach them more about Ojibway culture.

Gitchi Manito – Gitchi Manito is the spiritual deity in Ojibway culture. The Ojibway believe that Gitchi Manito watches over them and their forest ecosystem, helping the Ojibway to live in harmony with their natural environment.

TERMS

Ojibway – The Ojibway are a North American indigenous people who originated in what is now the northern Midwestern U.S. and southern Canada. The Ojibway are a subgroup of the Anishinaabe indigenous people.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

COLONIZATION, OPPRESSION, AND LOSS

In *Night Flying Woman*, author Ignatia Broker narrates North America's colonization, as told from the perspective of her Native American great-great-grandmother, Oona. Oona is born in a flourishing Ojibway community in the mid-1800s, in a vast forest that eventually becomes part of the Midwestern United States. By the time Oona is 80 years old, however, she lives on an urbanized reservation in Minnesota, and the last remnants of traditional Ojibway life exist only in her memories. Oona's life story highlights the losses that Native Americans endure when white settlers begin displacing them and causing widespread deaths through a smallpox epidemic (which the characters call the "**sickness**"). As Oona grows up, settlers begin to ban Native traditions and force Native children into Christian schools, causing them to lose touch with their own culture. Moreover, Oona's descendants face discrimination and poverty when attempting to settle into urban life outside their reservation. Oona's story thus stresses the profound losses that Native Americans have endured since the 19th century—their homelands, culture, and livelihoods, and even their lives.

Oona's early childhood experiences highlight Native American people's displacement from their lands and their experiences with illness and death, exposing the unjust physical losses that they endure under colonization. The story opens with the Ojibway community discussing white colonists who are displacing many Native American tribes. The Ojibway consistently refer to white settlers as "strangers," emphasizing that settlers are not indigenous to the land and are therefore stealing it from its Native inhabitants. In the course of taking indigenous land, white settlers force Native Americans onto crowded reservations, where many contract a mysterious, deadly "sickness." The "sickness" refers to the smallpox epidemic that ends up killing 90 percent of the Native American population. By introducing smallpox (to which the Native Americans have no natural immunity), settlers cause widespread illness and death among indigenous people who've already been forced from their homes. Even though Oona's family minimizes contact with other Native Americans, choosing to live on the remote edge of the reservation, Oona's mother still dies from the sickness, suggesting that even when Native people resist destruction of their homes and lives, colonialism still exacts unjust losses.

Even on Native reservations, white settlers force Native Americans to change their language, religion, and lifestyles, leaving no space for Native culture to thrive. This highlights the unethical way that colonists attempt to erase Native American culture. The United States government bans many Native cultural traditions, such as using herbal medicine and hunting in the wild without expensive licenses. This effectively forces Native Americans to live in a non-traditional way, even on land that the settlers have designated for them. Native Americans thus have little remaining space or freedom to embrace their own culture. As a result, traditional indigenous culture disappears from their daily lives little by little. Compulsory schooling further displaces Native traditions from people's lives. When settlers force Oona's cousin David to attend Christian school, David learns English, takes a Christian name, and "learn[s] the new ways" (meaning he learns how to live like the settlers do). David's experience shows that forced schooling effectively indoctrinates children by replacing their own language and traditions with the settlers' culture. As a result of cultural loss and forced schooling, Native people are increasingly hindered from passing down their traditions. As an adult, Oona notes that many Native children don't know their own language and traditions, demonstrating the intergenerational effects of oppressive policies. Government

bans and schooling thus cause widespread cultural erasure among Native American communities.

Even when Native Americans like Oona and her descendant Ignatia try to integrate into the settlers' society, they are treated like unwelcome outsiders and experience ongoing discrimination and poverty. When Oona, her husband Michael, and her brother-in-law Little Brother leave the reservation to spend time in the wilderness, they pass white people's homesteads while remaining "very careful and quiet" because they don't "want to be seen by the pale strangers." Their caution suggests that when they venture off the reservation and onto settlers' land, they feel unwelcome and even unsafe—an instinct that's proven valid when some settlers kidnap the trio, and they barely escape with their lives. Oona's descendent Ignatia describes the pervasive discrimination that Native Americans face when they try to build lives off the reservation in the 1950s, showing that even generations later, Native Americans struggle to integrate into the United States. When Ignatia looks for jobs, many white people tell her that they "don't hire Indians" and believe that Native Americans have a poor work ethic. Ignatia's experience shows that racism and unfair stereotypes hobble Native Americans' attempts to claim a place within the dominant culture.

This struggle shows the effects of losses accumulated across generations—having had their land and traditions taken from them, Native Americans now fight to survive within a society that leaves little room for them. Broker thus prompts the reader to empathize with Native Americans, acknowledging a history that has been suppressed for too long.

STORYTELLING, KNOWLEDGE, AND CULTURE

Night Flying Woman suggests that traditional stories are important in Native American culture because they pass on indigenous knowledge. The story's protagonist, a young Ojibway child named Oona, learns many traditional stories from her grandfather, grandmother, and elderly people in her community, including an old woman named A-wa-sa-si. Oona's elders believe that these stories will teach Oona valuable life lessons, including practical skills like using medicinal herbs, cultural values like the importance of community, and spiritual beliefs like maintaining a deep connection with the land. Throughout her life, Oona weathers many hardships—including displacement, poverty, and cultural upheaval—as white settlers seize North American land and force Native Americans onto reservations. Nonetheless, the skills and wisdom that Oona learns from traditional stories help her to survive. As an old woman, Oona's dying wish is to pass on her stories, so that her culture's wisdom won't be lost. Storytelling's important role in Oona's life stresses how valuable it is to Ojibway culture: it's a mechanism for preserving indigenous wisdom, including life lessons, practical skills, and cultural beliefs.

The elderly people in Oona's community place great emphasis on telling Oona stories from their culture and encouraging her to memorize them so that she can pass them on, suggesting that such stories contain valuable information that the Ojibway want to preserve. After A-wa-sa-si tells Oona stories about the forest, Oona reflects that "I know that I have been honored by being told these words. I shall repeat them many times," showing that she not only recognizes the stories' importance, but also recognizes a duty to memorize them so that she can pass them on someday. Although the stories tell tales about things like "why the rabbit traded his tail to the chipmunk," they actually communicate "the beliefs, the customs, and the practices of [Ojibway] people," meaning that the stories are metaphorical (or allegorical) narratives containing indigenous knowledge. For example, Oona's descendent (and narrator) Ignatia remarks that "Ojibway tales teach a philosophy for living. They tell of the purity of man and nature and keeping them in balance." Ignatia suggests that Ojibway stories communicate important Ojibway values (like keeping the ecosystem in balance to ensure that resources remain abundant in the long term). As an old woman, Oona worries that if no children come to hear her pass on the stories, then Ojibway "history will be lost," reinforcing the idea that the stories contain important cultural knowledge. Similarly, Ignatia explains that Ojibway stories "tell what must be passed on so that our ways will be known to the Ojibway children of the future"—showing that, generations later, the stories still function as important learning tools that communicate Ojibway knowledge, history, and values.

When the Ojibway people move to reservations and adopt a new lifestyle based on white settler culture, they find that the values and skills they've learned from traditional stories end up sustaining them, suggesting that such stories—and the indigenous knowledge they contain—are essential to the Ojibway's survival, even in unfamiliar circumstances. At the beginning of the book, Ignatia says that many Native Americans ask, "What good are these tales in today's world?" This suggests that many people fail to look past the stories' surface, assuming they're not useful or relevant for their evolving lives. In telling Oona's life story, however, Ignatia reveals that her ancestors only survived by relying on the values and skills they learned from indigenous stories, which suggests that the stories are, in fact, valuable and relevant—even in new situations. Government food and medicine rations are scarce on the reservation, so Oona's family survives by leaning on skills they've learned from traditional stories, like "making the maple sugar, cutting the birch bark, and digging the medicinal herbs." Oona reflects that "Even in today's world, these things are necessary for us to survive." Even in unfamiliar territory with scarce resources, they know how to sustain themselves, based on the knowledge passed on through the stories. This suggests

that survival tools are embedded within traditional stories, making such stories not just relevant but crucial. Several generations later, Ignatia explains that the values she learned from traditional stories continue to sustain her people, enabling them to survive hard times in urban society. Informed by traditional stories that celebrate sharing, Ignatia shares her home and salary with other Ojibway people, enabling struggling Ojibway people to forge informal support networks that help them survive off the reservation. Ignatia concludes that it's "important that you learn the past and act accordingly, for that will assure us that we will always people the earth." She thinks that the indigenous knowledge contained in traditional stories will continue to remain relevant and ensure her people's survival, no matter what circumstances they face in the future. This suggests that indigenous stories have ongoing value, prompting the reader to recognize their importance and perhaps even embrace their wisdom.

DEFORESTATION AND URBANIZATION

Night Flying Woman documents the United States' transition from forest-filled wilderness to urban society. When protagonist Oona is born, her traditional Ojibway community lives deep in the forest (where Minnesota is today). The characters often speak reverently of the vast forest's beauty and the ecosystem it sustains. However, when white settlers move the Ojibway onto reservations in the mid-1800s, they make many Ojibway people work in lumberyards, highlighting the rapid deforestation that takes place during this time. When Oona reaches adulthood, the lumber industry moves farther westward, suggesting that deforestation is so extensive that there are insufficient trees left in Oona's area to sustain it. By the 1940s, Ignatia Broker (Oona's descendant and the author of the book) describes her neighborhood in the Twin Cities shrinking to accommodate highways, suggesting that in less than 100 years, Americans have further transformed the landscape into urban sprawl. Throughout the book, Broker highlights the deep sadness that the Native characters feel as the forests disappear, especially because indigenous forest communities like the Ojibway managed to thrive for countless generations without destroying their natural habitat. Broker thus suggests that ongoing deforestation, logging, and urban expansion are unnecessary, unethical, and unsustainable.

The Native American characters express deep sadness about deforestation, emphasizing how unethical they think it is to destroy a living ecosystem. As a young girl, Oona says, "The forest is happy and I know that we will be happy, too," showing that she thinks of the forest as a living being that must not be harmed, rather than a resource to be exploited. As Oona witnesses ongoing deforestation, she doesn't just worry about the trees, but about the animals who will become homeless. Oona's father, too, worries about the destruction that logging causes to the forest animals after he begins working at a lumberyard. Both their concerns show their awareness that they share the forest with many other living creatures and their belief that it's unethical for human beings to cause reckless destruction and damage to other animals' habitats. Similarly, Ojibway spiritual beliefs hold that "if you wantonly harm[] any animals [...] you might not pass through" to the afterlife, implying that causing harm to the forest's living ecosystem is morally wrong, even affecting one's spiritual existence.

Oona's community thinks that their people have survived for many generations without destroying their natural habitat: to them, deforestation seems not only unethical, but also unnecessary. The Ojibway strive to live in the forest without destroying it, so that its resources will remain abundant for future generations. In noting that the forest "offer[s] its yearly gift of **bark**," the community reveals that they only use the bark from their own birch forest so that they will not damage the trees beyond repair. In contrast to this sustainable practice, the lumberyards cut down trees far faster than they can replant them, thereby destroying the resources that settlers need to sustain their lifestyles. A-wa-sa-si, the oldest woman in Oona's community, says, "[t]he trees, for as long as they shall stand will give shelter and life to the [Ojibway]." She reveals that the Ojibway think that their people's future survival depends on the forest remaining intact. They think it's far more sustainable to live in a way that does not destroy the natural habitat, because that ensures resources will be available for many generations to come. Broker describes the Ojibway's lifestyle in painstaking detail, emphasizing that they only draw minimal resources from the land. To the Ojibway, it seems unnecessary to exploit the natural landscape, as their traditional way of life proves it's possible for human beings to thrive without destroying their habitat.

Yet, when white settlers colonize the land, they cut down trees so rapidly that hardly any forests remain. The fast pace of deforestation suggests that this practice is excessive and unsustainable. At the start of the story, a clansman from a neighboring area warns Oona's family about white settlers and the logging industry, saying that "[f]ar to the east, the forests of the Eastern Keepers have been ripped from the face of the earth [...] they cut the trees and send them down the river [...] already they are looking this way, for soon there will be no forest where they are now." In contrast to the Ojibway practice of taking only what the forest yields, loggers cut down the forests so rapidly that they must constantly look for new ones to harvest. Settlers force Oona's father to work in a lumber yard, and by the time Oona is thirty years old (around 1910), "the big logging companies move[] west," suggesting the lumber industry has consumed all the forest in the Midwest and moved on to the western United States. The sheer pace of the logging industry's deforestation makes it seem deeply unsustainable. Just fifty years later, Oona's descendent Ignatia describes her

own neighborhood as being "whittled down by urban renewal and the freeways which reach their tentacles all around us," suggesting that in under 100 years, deforestation has transformed the United States from a vast natural forest to endless housing, highways, and infrastructure. By highlighting how quickly the landscape changes from forest to urban sprawl, Broker exposes the effects of widespread deforestation, prompting the reader to wonder if the payoff (namely, urban sprawl) is worth the damage it has caused.

The Ojibway strive to preserve their ecosystem rather than exploit and destroy it. In stressing how easy it is to thrive as part of an ecosystem without damaging it, Broker encourages the reader to see the logging industry and urban expansion as destructive, unsustainable, and unnecessarily harmful.

MONEY, SHARING, AND COMMUNITY

In *Night Flying Woman*, author Ignatia Broker's ancestor Oona is a young girl living in an Ojibway village that sustains itself through communal living and sharing possessions. However, when incoming settlers introduce currency and trade into Ojibway society, the Ojibway people begin working for money and selling handicrafts to buy goods (like homes, clothes, and food). As the Ojibway grow more dependent on this new lifestyle, they experience poverty and hardship, in contrast to the self-sufficiency they've known for countless generations. The book suggests that living a communal, self-sufficient lifestyle made them happier than working for money to buy things. Broker also highlights how supporting one another and sharing enable her community to survive hard times, both in Oona's generation and her own, reinforcing the idea that community and sharing are far more essential to human flourishing than money and material goods.

Ignatia stresses the importance of sharing in Ojibway culture, emphasizing that it is ethical and that it helps the Ojibway survive. The Ojibway do not think about owning the land, but rather think of its resources as precious gifts to be shared. Ignatia notes, "We did not own the land acre by acre as is done today, but we respected the right of all people to share in the gifts given by the Great Being [...] We do not waste the precious gifts, but share them with our brothers." Sharing thus helps the Ojibway make sure thay they do not exploit the land or create conflict with each other over territory and resources, enabling them to better sustain their communities over many generations. When struggling to survive on underfunded reservations, Native people maintain their commitment to community and sharing, enabling many people to survive the hardships they face. Oona's community continues to share their resources with the sick and needy, which helps many people survive when the reservation faces a food shortage. Broker notes that "[t]he many changes in the Ojibway material life did not change their traditional way of sharing. There was a kindness in the people and in the help they gave to those in distress." This suggests that the community's sharing also helps to lift people's spirits, helping them to cope in hard times. Ignatia also stresses that the Ojibway culture's emphasis on sharing helps her community survive urban life in the 1940s while facing harsh discrimination. Ignatia shares her home, money, and food with other Ojibway people, noting that "[o]ur paydays were on different days and so whoever had money lent carfare and bought meat and vegetables [...] I know other Indian people did the same thing, and sometimes whole families evolved from it. This was how we got a toehold in the urban areas—by helping each other." While discrimination prevents Native Americans from earning enough to sustain themselves, by pooling their resources and sharing everything, they're able to pull through and survive.

In contrast, when settlers introduce currency and trade into Ojibway communities, the Ojibway find themselves growing poorer and more miserable, suggesting that they lived far better lives when they shared everything. The settlers who run the reservation explain that the Native community must work for money, which they need to buy things. As a result of this unfamiliar practice, many Native Americans find themselves trapped in seasonal, underpaid jobs and struggle to feed themselves, suggesting that they were better off living off the land and sharing their resources. Many Native Americans in Ignatia's generation also struggle to find work after World War II, and they cannot afford food and housing, reinforcing the idea that they struggle more when working for money than when they used their labor to gather and share food and resources from the land. Those who *are* able to find work that supports them, like Oona and her husband Michael, have little time left for other pursuits. Oona has no time to meditate and loses her ability to dream, which both saddens her and suggests that she has to work much harder to get by in this new lifestyle—she can survive, but she doesn't thrive as she presumably would in a traditional Ojibway community.

Overall, the book suggests that working for money to buy things is more laborious, less fruitful, and more emotionally taxing than living as a community that shares their resources, suggesting that the Ojibway lived better, happier, and easier lives before settlers introduced currency and trade into their lives. Moreover, despite embracing a lifestyle centered on earning money to survive, the Native community still relies on sharing and supporting each other to get by, suggesting that it's a more reliable way to ensure a community's cohesion and well-being.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SICKNESS

Sickness symbolizes the dramatic losses that white colonists caused Native American culture. In addition to its metaphorical meaning, sickness was a catastrophic historical event in indigenous people's history. When European colonists seize the forests in which the Ojibway live, the Ojibway are forced to move to land that eventually becomes a reservation. On the reservation, Oona watches many people around her die from a mysterious sickness. The symptoms that Oona describes (including skin pustules, coughing, and death) reveal that the sickness she describes is smallpox. Infected European settlers introduced smallpox into North America, where it killed an estimated 90 percent of the Native American population between 1770 and 1840. Like the disease, which causes death wherever it goes, the settlers who seize the land (known in the story as "strangers" or "pale men") cause death and destruction wherever they go: they kill the forests and destroy most of the natural ecosystem through logging, they kill many Native Americans, and they even "kill" Native American culture by forcing Native Americans to change their language (to English), names (to Anglicized names), religion (to Christianity), and lifestyle (from hunter-gatherers to farmers and industrial laborers). By the time Oona is an old woman, very few remnants of Native American culture remain. In fact, many young Native Americans barely know about their own history and culture, because of the "sickness"—meaning the settlers' oppression—that spreads throughout their land and people, destroying everything in its path.

BIRCH BARK

Birch bark symbolizes Ojibway culture. Before settlers displace them, the Ojibway live in birch forests. Their traditional lifestyle entails subsisting modestly on the land, while striving not to disrupt the natural ecosystem. The Ojibway only use the bark from birch trees—rather than the whole tree trunk—to build their homes, ensuring that the forest they call home continues to thrive. Birch bark thus symbolizes core Ojibway values, like honoring nature and living sustainably within it. (In contrast, colonists all but destroy the forest by chopping down trees for lumber.) The Ojibway association with the forests is so strong, in fact, that European colonists begin distinguishing the Ojibway by the fact that they carry birch bark with them. Birch bark thus represents the Ojibway's close connection with their natural environment, as well as their desire to thrive without destroying it.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Minnesota Historical Society Press edition of *Night Flying Woman* published in 1983.

Prologue: The Forest Cries Quotes

❝ Now the neighborhood is only four blocks long and two blocks wide, whittled down by urban renewal and the freeways which reach their tentacles all around us.

Related Characters: Ignatia Broker (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Ignatia Broker, the book's narrator, begins the story by describing her hometown in Minnesota in the 1970s. It's clear from the outset that she lives in an area without any forests: she's surrounded, instead, by urban sprawl comprised of highways and neighborhoods. This is important because the story's central narrative—which describes her indigenous ancestors' lives just a hundred years earlier—describes the same landscape as a vast forest wilderness. This juxtaposition informs the reader that deforestation has been rapid and widespread, to the point that there are no forests left in Ignatia's ancestral home. The reader will shortly learn about the importance of forests to indigenous Ojibway culture. The notable absence of forests in Ignatia's generation shows that her culture must have had to change tremendously to accommodate this new landscape: not only are the forests gone, but so are most Native Americans. The melancholy tone of Ignatia's narration also suggests that the loss of her people's native forests is a source of personal grief.

❝ Our paydays were on different days and so whoever had money lent carfare and bought meat and vegetables. […] This was how we got a toehold in the urban areas—by helping each other.

Related Characters: Ignatia Broker (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after describing her hometown, Ignatia offers a brief synopsis of her life. She emphasizes how poor most Native Americans are when they try to carve out lives in modern

American society. In the 1940s, Ignatia lives in a cramped room with nine other indigenous people, and they take turns sleeping on beds and buying food, even though they all work full time. This suggests that white employers underpay them. In pointing out her poverty, Ignatia shows that Native Americans still experience substantive oppression and hardship, making it hard for them to survive in American society. Ignatia also stresses that her people help each other by sharing everything they have, which is crucial to their survival. Here, the book introduces the idea that Ojibway culture centers on sharing and community, and that these cultural values continue to serve the Ojibway, no matter what external pressures they face. This suggests that sharing and community are good for human flourishing in general.

I answered many advertisements and always I was met with the words, "I'm sorry but we don't hire Indians because they only last the two weeks till payday. Then they quit."

Related Characters: Ignatia Broker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Ignatia loses her job after World War Two (1939-1945), and she struggles to find work. She notes here that many white business owners in the 1940s discriminate against Native Americans, falsely believing them to be lazy and unreliable workers. This kind of stereotyping makes it very hard for people like Ignatia to find work and earn enough to live in urban society. Ignatia feels unwelcome: it seems to her like many white Americans don't want Native Americans to participate in urban life. This saddens Ignatia, because less than a hundred years ago, settlers forced her people to abandon their own indigenous lifestyle and adopt white settler culture. Yet, many white people still don't accept Native Americans into the society to which they're forced to adapt, thereby limiting their opportunities. Thus, many Native Americans feel displaced no matter where they turn: they struggle to connect with Native American history and culture, but they also feel unaccepted in American society.

No Indian family dared approach the relief and welfare agencies of the Twin Cities. They knew that they would only be given a bus ticket and be told to go back to the reservation where the government would take care of them as usual.

Related Characters: Ignatia Broker (speaker), Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Michael , Little Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Ignatia continues describing the discrimination that Native Americans face when they attempt to integrate into urban society off the reservation. She suggests here that government officials don't actually help Native Americans integrate into society, even though it's their job to do so. They prefer, it seems, to send Native Americans back to their reservations to subsist on government handouts, instead of helping them integrate into urban life as fully functioning members of society. This reveals that Native Americans are still deeply unwelcome in American society: Ignatia feels like the government officials' reluctance to help Native Americans integrate means that they would prefer Native Americans to stay segregated and separate from the dominant culture. This discrimination echoes the hostility that Ignatia's ancestors (notably, her great-great-grandmother Oona, great-great-grandfather Michael, and great-great-uncle Little Brother) faced almost a hundred years earlier whenever they attempted to leave the reservation. Broker shows that Native Americans have few options in American society, prompting her readers to consider that this ongoing suffering is deeply unethical.

"What good are these tales in today's world?" asked many people, never realizing that the Ojibway tales teach a philosophy for living. They tell of the purity of man and nature and keeping them in balance.

Related Characters: Ignatia Broker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

After telling her own life story, Ignatia reveals that Ojibway people think it's important to pass on stories about their lives, history, and culture. Many Ojibway people don't find

these stories relevant for modern life, but Ignatia disagrees. Traditional stories either describe her ancestors' indigenous lifestyles or share mythical origin stories about the natural ecosystem and its inhabitants (for example, one story describes how the squirrel got its tail). It's true that the Ojibway no longer live nomadically in the forests as they used to. Nonetheless, Ignatia explains that traditional stories are allegorical, and what they *really* communicate are indigenous values. Notably, Ojibway people think it's important for human beings not to exploit their habitat, but to strive to keep their ecosystem in "balance." By taking only modest resources to survive, the Ojibway ensure that resources remain abundant for future generations. Ignatia thinks this message is more relevant now than ever: even though her people live in a completely different, urbanized society, it's still important for human beings to avoid wasting or exploiting the earth's resources to the point that they run out, since that will threaten humanity's long-term survival. Ignatia concludes that indigenous stories are still valuable, because they teach life lessons that will ultimately serve humanity.

Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe Quotes

❝ These strangers […] are again asking the Ojibway to mark a paper. […] The Ojibway to the east have made the mark, and now they are on the big water where they must stay forever. The strangers promised never to enter their forests but they came anyway[.]

Related Characters: The Clansman (speaker), Grandfather , Grandmother , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, A-bo-wi-ghi-shig/Warm Sky , Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

After telling her own life story, Ignatia begins telling her great-great-grandmother Oona's life story. Oona grows up living a traditional indigenous lifestyle among her Ojibway community in a vast forest in the Midwestern United States. When she is just a few years old, a clansman from a neighboring tribe comes to her village and explains to Warm Sky (the village chief) that "strangers" are coming to seize the land.

The "strangers" that the clansman is talking about are white settlers who have already colonized the Eastern United States and are now moving on to colonize the Midwest. The "paper" that the clansman describes references treaties and legislation that Native Americans signed to hand over control of the land to settlers. Here, the story alludes to early legislation that eventually became formalized as the 1887 General Allotment Act (or Dawes Act), which forced Native Americans onto reservations. The clansman suggests that the chiefs who signed these treaties did so in the spirit of trust and sharing, which are a big part of Ojibway cultural values. However, the Ojibway soon learn that the "strangers" (or settlers) don't honor their promises, suggesting that they are exploiting the Native American community. The fact that the story refers to white settlers as "strangers" underscores that settlers are not indigenous to the land. Thus, the book suggests that colonizing and displacing the native community—to whom the land actually belongs—is unethical.

Six Days' Journey Quotes

❝ Poor Trees, we are leaving, but you will be gone too after the strangers come. […] Poor squirrels, where will you go after the strangers come?

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman (speaker), Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, A-wa-sa-si

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

When the people in Oona's village learn that settlers (or "strangers") are coming to move them to a reservation, a smaller group (including Oona's family) decides to retreat deep into the forest to avoid detection. The community knows—based on what has already happened in the Eastern United States—that the settlers intend to cut down trees for lumber. As Oona's family flees, she feels bad for the trees and animals who will suffer when the looming deforestation destroys their habitat. Oona's sadness shows that she—like the rest of her indigenous community—thinks of the forest as a diverse habitat that belongs to all the creatures within it. The forest is not only home to the Ojibway, but it is also home to countless animals and trees: and it belongs to *all* of them. Destroying the forest for human consumption will thus cause widespread damage to many living creatures, which seems unethical to Oona. Based on her culture's values, Oona also thinks of the trees and animals in her habitat like extensions of her family, so the thought of their destruction causes her sorrow.

The Rainy Country Quotes

The women wove reed mats and cut birch bark. They fastened the mats around the base of the lodge frames and put overlapping birch-bark sheets on the upper part. Then the lodges were ready.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, A-wa-sa-si , Grandmother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona's family flees deep into the forest to set up a new home where settlers won't find them, they build their village using traditional indigenous methods. Broker notes that the Ojibway only use resources that replenish themselves quickly, like reeds and birch bark. Taking only the bark from the tree, for example, enables the tree to survive and produce more bark for the next season. Cutting down the whole tree for lumber like the settlers do, in contrast, has a much more devastating impact on the habitat: it takes far longer for a whole tree to grow back, and the tree's absence disrupts other creatures who also make their homes in the forest. Birch bark, the symbol of Ojibway culture, thus represents the Ojibway ethos of taking only what is needed for survival from the ecosystem, rather than exploiting the landscape's resources. This ensures that resources renew themselves and remain abundant for future generations, and it disrupts the ecosystem minimally, ensuring that other living creatures have a chance to thrive.

Our lives must now revolve around this lodge, because we must not meet the strangers. But remember that we, the Ojibway, have always moved freely from a summer place to a winter place, with a blueberry place, a ricing place, and a sugar bush in between.

Related Characters: Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe (speaker), Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona's family creates a new village in the forest, Oona asks her mother how their lives will change, now that they are hiding from encroaching settlers. Oona's mother explains that the community can no longer move around in the forest, in rhythm with the seasons, as they always have done. Instead, they must stay put to avoid being discovered.

Here, Broker suggests that this lifestyle adjustment will negatively impact the Ojibway's survival. Traditional Ojibway life is sustainable because the Ojibway do not exploit their habitat. They travel to different parts of the forest with each passing season, allowing each part to replenish itself for next year before revisiting it. They also take minimal resources from the land and strive to replace what they've taken (for example, by scattering seeds whenever they consume the forest's food, to ensure that more food will grow to sustain the wider ecosystem). The Ojibway's philosophy, thus, centers on sustainable living. Rather than view the forest as a resource to be consumed, they think of the forest as a habitat to be maintained and kept in balance. This, in turn, ensures that the forest's resources will remain abundant for many generations, enabling the Ojibway to survive in the long term.

This philosophy contrasts sharply with settler culture. For example, the logging industry attempts to cut down as many trees as possible, as quickly as possible, to generate wealth. Broker suggests here that settler culture's focus on exploiting the natural habitat for quick money is damaging to humankind: it gives too little thought to the resources that future generations will need to survive.

We know the secrets of the forest and receive the gifts of a Generous Spirit. These we repay by honoring and respecting the living things in the forests: the animal people and the plant life which in itself is life-giving. We do not waste the precious gifts, but share them with our brothers.

Related Characters: A-wa-sa-si (speaker), Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Gitchi Manito

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona is a young girl, she spends a lot of time with A-wa-sa-si, the oldest woman in her village. A-wa-sa-si is a storyteller who shares many traditional stories with Oona. Here, A-wa-sa-si explains that a "Generous Spirit"

(otherwise known as "Gitchi Manito," the deity in Ojibway culture) gives the forests to the Ojibway as a gift. A-wa-sa-si's story reveals that the Ojibway don't think they own the forest. Rather, they consider themselves guests to whom the forest offers gifts to be shared among its inhabitants. A-wa-sa-si's story communicates important indigenous values, centered on the ideas of belonging to (rather than owning) the land, taking from it modestly, and sharing its resources. The reader learns, through this example, that such stories are important because they communicate indigenous beliefs, ideas, and values. This story in particular underscores the Ojibway's close connection with—and respect for—their forest habitat. Thus storytelling, in Ojibway society, is a way of sharing cultural knowledge.

White Earth Quotes

❝ The people [...] welcomed the stranger who had traveled with him. They prepared a feast and made a place of rest for them.

Related Characters: The Stranger , Grandfather , Grandmother , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , A-bo-wi-ghi-shig/Warm Sky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Oona and her family have been living secretly in the forest for two years, but a "stranger" (white settler) eventually discovers them. They know that the stranger's arrival means trouble for their community: the stranger will likely want to take control of the forest and send the family far away to a reservation. Despite knowing that the stranger will apply legislation that oppresses them, Oona's family still treats the stranger like a guest. They offer him a feast, make a bed for him, and host him for several months. The family's behavior towards the settler underscores the importance of sharing and community in Ojibway culture. Everybody—even somebody with potentially hostile intentions—is a guest in their village, underscoring how ingrained sharing is in Ojibway culture. This sharply juxtaposes the lifestyle that Oona's family will soon adopt—in which people work and buy and sell things (instead of simply sharing what they take from the forest)—which seems jarring and unnatural to them.

❝ He said that they must mark a paper before a man called Agent, and afterward they would be given food and clothing.

Related Characters: The Agent , Grandfather , Grandmother , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , E-quay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving their secret forest home, Oona and her companions make a long and tiring journey to a reservation called White Earth. As soon as they arrive, a villager tells them they must sign a piece of paper in exchange for food and clothing. The agent is the white settler who runs the reservation.

This passage highlights several historical events that many Native Americans experienced. White Earth was established on March 19, 1867, when ten Ojibway chiefs signed a treaty with then-president Andrew Johnson, allocating that land for the Ojibway people. At the outset, the reservation occupied approximately 1,300 square miles of land between Minneapolis, Minnesota, and what's now Fargo, North Dakota. However, settlers continued to encroach on the land, substantively reducing the reservation's size. The settlers forced Native Americans to sign contracts on arrival that effectively sold off parts of the reservation in exchange for resources like clothing. It's clear from this passage that Oona's family don't understand what they are signing: land ownership contracts are completely foreign to them. Moreover, they don't *need* clothes and food from the government, as they know how to provide for themselves by leveraging the forest's ecosystem. All this suggests that settlers are exploiting and manipulating Native Americans.

❝ I do not like cutting the trees [...] I think too often of the animal people. They will be few, and they will be gone from this land. When we have enough of the lumber, I shall no longer cut the trees or travel the rivers on them. My heart cries too often when I do this.

Related Characters: Father/Me-ow-ga-bo (speaker), Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, The Agent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona's family moves to White Earth reservation, the agent (the white man who runs the reservation) explains that the Ojibway can't just take what they need from the forest. Instead, they must work and earn money to buy what they need. This is a completely foreign concept to Oona's parents, but they comply. The agent makes Oona's father work in a lumberyard, which highlights the rampant deforestation that is sweeping the nation. When discussing his job with Oona's mother, Oona's father expresses deep sadness at having to cut down trees for a living. He worries about the animals who live in the forest. In calling them "animal people," Oona's father reveals that he thinks of the animals like equals—they are also "people" to him—and he therefore thinks it's unethical to destroy their habitat, as it belongs to them, too. His job violates his moral values and therefore makes him deeply unhappy as well. This suggests that Oona's father is much unhappier living this new lifestyle in which he must work for money (something that's never been necessary before) in a job that goes against his cultural values.

> Each ricing time the man will come for the children. If they live in the longhouse of the school they will never know our ways. Our strength will be lost. If we move close to the big village, the children will stay home at night and we can still teach them the old ways. We must decide—shall we stay separate and not see the children from ricing to planting, or shall we speak to them each night about the good of our people?

Related Characters: Grandfather (speaker), Grandmother , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Warm Sky/David , Sam

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

After Oona's family settle in a remote corner of the reservation, a man named Sam arrives and explains that Native American children must, by law, attend Christian schools. The first of such schools opened on White Earth reservation in 1871.

This requirement leaves Oona's family with a troubling dilemma: the school is very far from the part of the forest in which the family lives. In order to stay together, the family will have to move to an urbanized part of the reservation. This means that Oona's family must either be separated from their children or separated from the forest. Either option makes the family lose something. If the adults send their children away to school and stay in the forest, they can keep their traditional day-to-day lifestyle alive, but their children will have no exposure to it and likely lose touch with their own culture. If the adults move into the village, they will no longer be able to live traditionally by foraging and hunting in the forest, but their children will be able to come home to their families every night and at least learn about their culture through stories. This reinforces the idea that the rules on the reservation are designed to distance Native Americans from their own culture, one way or another. In the end, the family decides to move to the village and stay together. This choice makes traditional stories even more important: such stories provide the younger generation with crucial exposure to their own culture, which is disappearing more and more with each passing day.

New Homes, Old Ways Quotes

> Maybe it will start them learning civilized ways.

Related Characters: The Agent (speaker), The Agent's Wife , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , E-quay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona's family moves into the urbanized part of the reservation, Oona's mother wants to learn how to live in a European-style home. Her enthusiasm pleases the agent (the white man who runs the reservation). He encourages Oona's mother, Oona, and E-quay to visit his wife and learn how to run a home the way his wife does. The agent believes that this exposure will make Oona's family more "civilized." Here, Broker captures the kind of stereotypes that motivated much of the oppression that the Ojibway face. Incoming white settlers think that Ojibway culture is primitive. They fail to realize, however, that the Ojibway live the way they do—self-sufficiently in the forest—on purpose. They make an intentional choice to remain connected with nature and live sustainably. The agent also fails to realize

how "civilized" indigenous culture actually is, with its emphasis on sharing, community, and mutual respect. The agent's attitude suggests that he hasn't bothered to learn anything about Ojibway culture: he only acts based on stereotypes that he's absorbed from other settlers. This, in turn, fuels further discrimination, thereby increasing the Ojibway's oppression.

But always there was the sorrow that the sickness brought, and life was shortened by it. Many times the sickness took mothers and fathers. The children who were left behind were raised as little brothers and sisters by those for whom they were namesakes.

Related Characters: The Agent , Grandmother , Grandfather , Mother/Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe, Father/Me-ow-ga-bo, Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

While Oona and her family are living on White Earth reservation (run by a man they call the "Agent"), they realize that many fellow Native Americans are falling ill and dying from a terrible "sickness." The "sickness" refers to the smallpox epidemic, which settlers bring to the United States from Europe. At the time, Native Americans had no natural immunity against smallpox, so the disease was deadly for them. Historians estimate that the smallpox epidemic killed over 90 percent of the Native American population between the 1600s and 1900s. Broker alludes to this when she explains that many people on the reservation die from the "sickness." She also suggests that the settlers' policy of rounding up Native Americans and forcing them to live in close proximity during an epidemic is unethical, as it causes the disease to infect the majority of the population, leaving grief and "sorrow" in its wake. Metaphorically, the "sickness" also represents the wider suffering that Native Americans experience when settlers oppress them: wherever settlers go, they bring death, destruction, and sadness to Native Americans and the living ecosystem from which Native Americans are displaced. Thus, Broker suggests here that settler colonialism is itself a destructive "sickness" of sorts.

The New Ways Quotes

They say we must forget what was taught by our people and we must believe only what we learn now at the church.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman (speaker), Grandfather , Sam

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

When a man named Sam informs the family about the new law requiring Native American children to attend Christian school, the family moves into the village from the woods to be nearer to the school. After attending Christian school for a while, Oona discusses her experiences with her grandfather.

The teachers at school tell Oona that her native culture is wrong, and that she must abandon her own traditions and embrace Christianity instead. Broker suggests here that such schooling is designed to replace Native American culture and beliefs. This distances Native American children from their own culture's values. At school, Oona's teachers demonize indigenous traditions as primitive and sinful. The teachers encourage children like Oona to exchange their own cultural beliefs with Christian values, thereby bringing the children closer to white settler culture. In doing this, the teachers attempt to minimize Native American culture's impact on indigenous society more broadly, leaving Native people with little choice but to assimilate to the norms of the white majority. Thus, forced schooling, according to Broker, is problematic because it attempts to erase Native American culture by encouraging an entire generation of young people to forget their own history.

So it is the custom that at the very first time—and only the first time—a young girl has the physical signs of change, she must go into the forest [...] and fast. [...] The longer she fasts, the clearer will be her dreams of what she will do in life. If she is a Dreamer or a Medicine Person, her visions will confirm this.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , E-quay , The Agent , The Agent's Wife

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona reaches adolescence, she attempts to participate in a traditional ritual involving meditating and fasting in the forest. This ritual indicates that the forest habitat has strong spiritual significance for the Ojibway: they view meditating in the forest and connecting with the natural environment as crucial to figuring out their calling in life. Thus, the forest's destruction—through the lumber industry—not only prevents the Ojibway from sustaining themselves practically from its habitat, but also limits their ability to connect with their spiritual traditions. In this way, deforestation brings about both practical and spiritual losses for Native American people.

Moreover, Oona and her cousin E-quay only meditate for a few days in the forest (rather than the ten days that the ritual normally takes) because the agent and his wife (the white settlers who run the reservation) dislike this tradition. This suggests that even on the reservation, Native Americans face pressure to distance themselves from their own culture's traditions and conform to white settler culture. This pressure, in turn, gradually erases Native American rituals from their society.

❝ It is well that we plant and harvest and hunt, for this food given us by the White Father would not be enough.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman (speaker), Father/Me-ow-ga-bo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

While living on the reservation, Oona's father decides that the family should work in exchange for money to buy things (per the settlers' rules), but that they should also keep foraging and hunting as they always have. Oona soon realizes that this was a good strategy, as the family learns that their labor doesn't earn them enough money to buy the food they need to survive. The "White Father" is a generic reference to white people who sell the Native Americans their food (or provide food rations for the reservation). Broker suggests here that the Ojibway's traditional lifestyle provided better for them than their new lifestyle of working to earn money to buy what they need. Before, they felt like their resources were abundant. Now, however, they spend a lot of time working but don't get what they need to survive.

The fact that the Ojibway's traditional food-gathering practices continue to sustain them, even after they embrace the settlers' lifestyle, also reinforces the idea that indigenous traditions continue to serve Native Americans, even though their society has changed. This suggests that indigenous stories—which contain crucial information about how and where to hunt and forage—pass on important indigenous knowledge that helps Native Americans survive, even in this new society.

Oona Becomes a Woman Quotes

❝ Oona was so busy with the farm work that she had little time to meditate, so her powers as a Dreamer lay dormant.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Michael , E-quay , Little Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona grows up, she marries a man named Michael and runs a farm, along with the surviving members of her extended family (including her cousin E-quay and her brother-in-law Little Brother). The family's communal efforts help the farm thrive, underscoring that working together as a community is good for human flourishing. However, despite the farm's success, Oona finds the work incredibly time consuming. She works so hard that she has no time to meditate, and she loses her ability to dream. Dreams are important in Ojibway culture as the Ojibway believe that dreams predict the future. Oona's situation suggests that she must work much harder as a farmer than she did when her family subsisted as hunter-gatherers in the forest. This work, in turn, limits her ability to participate in activities that are important to her, like dreaming. This suggests that Oona is worse off in her new lifestyle than her traditional one, as she must work harder, but has less time to do things that she values and that help her stay connected to her culture.

❝ There were white peoples' homesteads here and there, so the three were very careful and quiet. They did not want to be seen by the pale strangers.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Michael , Little Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

After living on the farm for a while, Oona decides to go into the wilderness with her husband Michael and her brother-in-law Little Brother, so that she can meditate and reconnect with nature. However, when the trio leave the farm, they feel they must travel quietly and try to avoid detection. Their fear of running into white people suggests that Native Americans face hostility and violence whey they venture off their reservation. Here, Broker alludes to violent confrontations between the Dakota tribe and white Americans, such as the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn. Violent clashes like this (which, in the story's timeline, took place a few years ago) make white settlers think that *all* Native Americans are dangerous and violent. This, in turn, makes Oona and her family feel like unwelcome trespassers in their native land, showing how much discrimination they face when they attempt to access the environment beyond the reservation.

Times of Change Quotes

❝ Then came the laws to control the fishing, the hunting, and the trapping, even on the reservation lands.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Michael , E-quay , Little Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

As Oona grows older on the farm (where she lives with Michael, E-quay, Little Brother, and several others from her community) she witnesses more legislation that prevents Native Americans from foraging and hunting. She notes here that the government requires Americans to acquire expensive licenses for fishing and hunting. Since most Native Americans are poor, they can't afford such licenses. This legislation thus prevents the Ojibway from participating in their traditional food gathering methods. To Oona, this is deeply unfair. Settlers originally promised the Ojibway that they would be able to live freely on the reservation and that their own indigenous society would coexist alongside the settlers' society. However, as time passes, the government makes more rules that restrict the Ojibway's activities on the reservation. This, in turn, triggers significant cultural losses, as many traditional practices (that the Ojibway strive to keep alive) gradually fall out of day-to-day Ojibway life. Broker suggests here that such laws are oppressive because they limit Native Americans' freedom to live according to their own traditions.

❝ Oona's heart broke many times when she saw the faces of the young ones. Many of the children had swollen necks from infections of the tubercular germ, and they easily caught the diseases of the lungs. The change of diet left them with no way to fight the germs of the strangers who were dominant in the land of the forest and lakes.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

As Oona ages and has children of her own, she grows sadder witnessing the rise of disease among her children's generation. Throughout the story, Broker has suggested that the Ojibway were happier living according to their traditional forest-dwelling lifestyle than in urbanized society. Urban life leaves the Ojibway, on balance, with less time (as they must constantly work) and fewer resources (as they earn very little and can't afford to sustain themselves) than forest life did: there, resources remained plentiful, making the Ojibway feel that their lives were richer. Here, Broker reinforces that idea by suggesting that the settler's diet (based on bread and dairy products) is far unhealthier than the Ojibway's nutrient-rich foraging-based diet of fruits, berries, and meat. The Ojibway already have no natural immunity to diseases that settlers bring with them from Europe (like smallpox and tuberculosis). Moreover, the settlers' diets are poorer in nutrients, leaving the Ojibway with weaker immune systems. All this rapidly increases the death rate among indigenous communities, making people like Oona feel heartbroken. Broker suggests here, as before, that settler culture makes Native Americans "sick": both literally (through increases in diseases and deaths) and metaphorically (through the heartbreak that they endure under oppression).

Around 1910 the big logging companies moved west and many Ojibway had to find work in smaller camps.

Related Characters: Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman , Michael , E-quay , Little Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

Oona has been living on White Earth reservation for almost forty years. Around this time, the logging industry leaves the area and moves on to the Western United States.

This signals to the reader that deforestation has been so rapid and widespread that there are no trees left in Minnesota to sustain the lumber industry. The fact that the industry moves west suggests that loggers intend to continue ravaging the entire nation for lumber, destroying the vast forests that used to populate the United States. Broker suggests here that the logging industry is unsustainable: deforestation destroys the natural landscape so quickly that there is no time for the forests to recover, and soon, there will likely be too few trees left to sustain it at all.

In addition, when the logging industry moves west, many Native Americans (whom settlers forced into logging jobs) find themselves out of work. Oona and her family (including her husband Michael, brother-in-law Little Brother, and cousin E-quay) pull through because they run a farm. Many others, however, are unable to sustain themselves, leaving them in poverty. They no longer have jobs that will earn them money for food, but they also have no forests left in which to gather or hunt food. Broker thus finds the lumber industry to be shortsighted: it consumes and depletes the natural habitat, leaving most people worse off—and less self-sufficient—in the long term.

The Circle Quotes

I should like [...] to hear the stories of our people.

Related Characters: Mary (speaker), Oona/Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe/Night Flying Woman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

When Oona is around 80 years old and approaching death, she worries about dying without sharing the traditional stories she knows. Oona feels that her culture has changed so much over the course of her lifetime that traditional Ojibway culture now only exists in the stories that she's learned from older generations. As one of the few elderly people left who knows such stories, Oona feels that passing her stories on will be important to help her culture stay alive for future generations to absorb. This shows that such stories are incredibly valuable, functioning as an oral history of Ojibway culture, which has all but disappeared from day-to-day reservation life. When Oona is on her deathbed, a little Ojibway girl named Mary visits Oona and asks to hear the stories. This allows Oona to die in peace, as she now knows that her culture—encompassing traditional values, beliefs, and knowledge—won't die with her, but will live on.

Broker effectively closes her story by stressing that indigenous knowledge is important, worth preserving, and contained in traditional stories. The stories' teachings include ideas like sharing resources, working communally, respecting nature and other living creatures, and living sustainably. Broker herself continues this storytelling tradition in telling Oona's life story, and she thus prompts the reader to absorb the teachings contained in it and pass them on.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: THE FOREST CRIES

Ignatia gets off the bus and walks toward home. When she moved to this neighborhood in the 1950s, it was larger and more diverse. Now, it's surrounded by freeways and is only a few blocks wide. When Ignatia first moved here with her children, they were the only Native American family trying to blend in among a community of Latinx and white people. Ignatia imagines the time when her people still possessed the land, and she imagines everyone else trying to blend in, instead of her. When she tells her children traditional stories about their Ojibway culture, it seems foreign to them. Their lives are saturated with American culture and rock and roll.

Ignatia Broker, the story's author and narrator, describes the extent of urban sprawl in her neighborhood. Her reflections highlight that there are few forests left (in contrast to the 1850s, when the book's central narrative takes place). Ignatia's struggles to blend in reveal that she feels like an unwelcome outsider in the United States, even though she is indigenous to the land. The fact that traditional Ojibway stories feel foreign to her children suggests that her children are disconnected from their heritage, which makes Ignatia sad.

Ignatia closes her eyes and thinks back to the past. Her story begins when she's 22. She leaves her reservation and moves to the Twin Cities in Minnesota in 1941, the year Pearl Harbor is attacked. It's hard to find work, and a lot of people discriminate against Native Americans. She ends up living with six other Ojibway people in one room with three beds. The landlady is supposed to charge five dollars a week for the whole room, but she collects five dollars a week from each person. Despite how crowded it is, Ignatia and her roommates often squeeze in other Ojibway people who need shelter.

In describing her financial and employment struggles, Ignatia highlights the oppression that many Native Americans experience when they try to integrate into United States society, despite being indigenous to the land. Many white Americans underpay and cheat them, forcing them into poverty. At the same time, Ignatia reveals that her community shares resources and helps each other, despite how little they have. This communal support helps them survive their oppression and get by.

Ignatia feels like she's in an alien materialistic culture, but she feels more at home among other Ojibway people. After the war, many Native Americans struggle to find work, as white people are reluctant to hire them. Ignatia meets her future husband, an Ojibway veteran who's returning from the war. Ignatia works as a cleaner, while her husband works on the railroad. They move to a poor neighborhood in St. Paul, where the houses are more like shacks, and they have two children. Public services officials are reluctant to help Native Americans integrate into urban society (even though that's their job), so the Ojibway people in Ignatia's neighborhood help one another.

Ignatia continues highlighting the oppression that Native Americans experience in the United States. Despite being educated and qualified, Ignatia and her husband must subsist on low-income manual labor, causing them to remain in poverty. The public service officials' reluctance to help Native Americans also shows the discrimination they experience. Ignatia also stresses that sharing their resources and supporting each other enables Native American communities to survive their oppression, both physically (through food, shelter, and possessions) and emotionally (in providing a community support network that makes people like Ignatia feel less isolated).

After Ignatia's husband dies in the Korean War, Ignatia starts clerical training and works in a health clinic. Eventually, she forms an agency to help other Native Americans integrate into urban society. Her work connects her with many Native Americans, and she feels less lost in modern society. Many Native children who are born in urban society want to know more about their history. So, Ignatia tells them the old stories that her grandmother told her. Ignatia is glad that young Native children want to learn about their culture. She's happy to pass on the philosophies and lessons contained in Ojibway stories, so that the young generation can keep passing them on.

Ignatia's efforts to help her community highlight the Native American ethos of sharing resources, working communally, and supporting each other. As noted earlier, this ethos helps Native Americans overcome some of their oppression and their feelings of being unwelcome or isolated in society. Ignatia also thinks that storytelling will help to keep indigenous knowledge alive, which suggests that Native American stories contain important information about indigenous culture and values.

Ignatia begins telling the reader her story, explaining that the Ojibway are forest-dwellers who live in harmony with many other forest tribes. Nobody owns the land—instead, all the tribes share its bounties. When strange people from foreign lands began arriving, many Ojibway people befriended them, but Ignatia's family moved deeper into the forest. Ignatia thinks about her great-great-grandmother, Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe, or Night Flying Woman. Her nickname was Oona.

The reader learns about the importance of forests in Ojibway culture: their indigenous society and lifestyle is designed for living in forests (rather than tearing down forests to set up towns and local infrastructure). Broker also introduces the story's protagonist: her ancestor Oona. The strange people are European settlers who are colonizing the United States. From the outset, Oona's family worries about the settlers' intentions, uncertain what the settlers intend to do.

When Oona was young, more strangers arrived. They made the Native Americans sign treaties, and then they chopped down the forest for lumber. As more settlers arrived, they surrounded the Ojibway people, pushing them into smaller pockets of land that eventually became reservations. The settlers also wanted the Ojibway people to change their culture and follow the advice in the settlers' books. Oona grew up with all this going on around her.

Broker highlights that displacing Native Americans, destroying their habitat through deforestation, and attempting to change or erase their indigenous culture is highly oppressive. The reader learns that Oona's life story will capture these difficult experiences, which many Native Americans experienced under colonization.

NI-BO-WI-SE-GWE

The Ojibway people remember Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe as a great woman. Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe is born during an eclipse, so the community knows that she is a special child. Her parents, Me-ow-ga-bo (Father) and Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe (Mother) are happy to finally have a child. Three weeks after the birth, a healer named A-wa-sa-si gathers herbs, and she names the new baby "Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe." It means "Night Flying Woman," in honor of the dark, fleeting eclipse that marked the baby's birth. The baby's nickname is "Oona," which resembles the sound of her laugh. The community holds a huge feast on a beautiful golden autumn day to celebrate Oona.

Oona's birth highlights her indigenous society's communal structure. When Oona's born, the whole community celebrates together. Moreover, rather than naming Oona themselves, her parents defer to an elderly community member (A-wa-sa-si) to name Oona. This shows how closely involved the community is with one another's lives, and it also stresses the importance of respecting the elderly in Native American culture. The fact that Oona's name references the physical environment around the time of her birth highlights the Ojibway's close connection with the natural landscape.

Oona's family straps Oona into a cradleboard, so that they can carry her around, enabling her to watch the adults as they go about their tasks. When Oona cries, the adults gently brush twigs over her face and pinch her mouth so that she knows to stop. This is important for times when enemies are near. Oona spends her first few winters nestled in the family lodge watching shadows from the warm fire dance around the room. In the summers, when Oona's family travels through the forest, she eats berries from the bushes. She's surrounded by love and laughter as the cycle of Ojibway life unfolds around her.

The reader learns about the traditional day-to-day lifestyle of Ojibway people. As before, Broker emphasizes that traditional Ojibway culture centers around living in the forest, surviving on its resources (like berries), and living communally. Broker highlights Oona's happiness and feelings of contentment to show that the Ojibway thrived when living according to their indigenous traditions.

One spring, just as the forest is springing into life, a clansman arrives from the east. He tells Oona's family that strange pale men are coming, and they want the Ojibway to sign some papers. When the Ojibway in the east signed the papers, the strangers began tearing down the forest for lumber. The village leader, A-bo-wi-ghi-shig (or Warm Sky) asks if the strangers will be friends or enemies. The clansman says that some of the strangers are kind, and that they even bring gifts—but others are deceitful. The clansman explains that soon after the pale men arrived, the eastern Ojibway people fell ill with a **sickness** that causes terrible coughs and bumpy rashes.

In mentioning papers, the clansman references legislation from the late 1800s, including the General Allotment Act (or Dawes Act), which forced Native Americans onto reservations, and the Nelson Act, which allotted woodland to the lumber industry. These acts were designed to displace indigenous people from the land and reallocate their habitat to white settlers. The "sickness" refers to a smallpox epidemic, which settlers introduced to the Native American community. On a metaphorical level, the "sickness" symbolizes the broader suffering that Native Americans experience under colonial oppression. Broker emphasizes that this oppression is a nationwide phenomenon, since it's happening both in the Eastern United States and in the Midwestern United States (where Oona's family live).

Oona's grandfather (Grandfather) has seen the strangers before. Everywhere they go, they cut down trees and force the Ojibway to live in small pockets of land that they can't leave. Grandfather thinks that the strangers are here to stay, because they're building lodges and planting corn. A-bo-wi-ghi-shig suggests that the village should move deeper into the forest, where the land is boggy, knowing that the strangers won't be able to plant crops on boggy land. Hopefully, this will deter the strangers from coming after them. The villagers discuss the idea for three days, as they smoke a peace pipe and reflect on their future. Some decide to leave, and others decide to stay and meet the strangers.

Oona's grandfather offers a Native American perspective on the oppression that his people face. He knows that Native Americans are facing a radical upheaval to their way of life, and that their oppression is so significant that his community can only escape it by hiding deep in the forest. The forest continues functioning as a safe haven for the community, showing the forest's importance to them. The whole village reflects on their options together before making a plan, highlighting the communal nature of Native American life.

One morning, five-year-old Oona wakes up and listens to the forest around her. She can feel a change in the air. She runs out to Grandfather, remembering to keep her eyes downcast until he greets her. In Ojibway culture, the elders must always speak first. Grandfather and Mother are packing bundles. Grandfather explains that they've been happy in their village for many years, but they must leave and travel west. Oona runs to pack her own small bundle. The villagers stand in a circle, so that they can remember one another's faces as they part ways.

Oona's childhood memories show that respecting one's elders is an important facet of Native American life: Oona always keeps her eyes cast down when greeting her grandparents as a sign of respect. Broker highlights that the Ojibway's displacement breaks up their community and separates them from each other, which, given the importance of community to the Ojibway, causes the villagers significant emotional suffering.

SIX DAYS' JOURNEY

Oona's family leaves the village by canoe, traveling silently so that the strangers won't find them. Grandfather and Grandmother lead the way in the first canoe, followed by Father, Mother, A-wa-sa-si, and Oona. The river is straight, quiet, and shallow. The family will travel on this river for two days before meeting another river and continuing their journey. Oona likes traveling by canoe, but she feels sad for the trees and animals, and she wonders where they'll go when the strangers come. Oona wonders if they'll ever come back to the village, and Mother says no. But she reminds Oona that their ancestors' bones are in the old village, so they'll always be connected to it.

Oona's family travels stealthily to avoid crossing paths with settlers, showing how threatened and unsafe they feel. Oona feels sad about the trees and animals because she knows that settlers will destroy the forests to cut trees for lumber. Oona's sadness indicates that Native Americans respect the other living creatures in their ecosystem, and they worry about the profound suffering that deforestation will cause to that ecosystem as a whole. Mother's remark about ancestors' bones offers bittersweet comfort, since only the dead remain in the old village.

Oona wants to stay awake and see everything, but the sun and the water lull her to sleep. When she wakes, the family is hiding the canoes and setting up camp for the night. Grandfather sprinkles herbs on the ground as a token of gratitude for their successful journey. The next day, they walk very far; Oona feels as if she's walked forever. She enjoys the second night's camp more than the first, because she can explore the woods and play with the animals. On the third day of the family's journey, they cross a lake to reach the next river, which is surrounded by fallen trees and stumps.

Oona's grandfather thanks the forest for keeping the family safe and sheltered, emphasizing that the Ojibway feel deep sense of respect for their natural habitat. Oona reinforces this idea when she plays with the animals, which she feels connected to: the animals and trees feel like an extension of her family and community, rather than resources to be exploited. The fallen trees and stumps hint ominously of exploitation to come.

The family crosses another lake. The forest grows so dense that they can barely find an opening to make camp. They build temporary shelters and roast venison, and they decide to stay there for a few days while Grandfather scouts the land. At first, Oona is scared of this forest, but then she listens to the trees. Even though they're much taller and have leaves that look like needles, their rustling sounds feel friendly, so Oona feels safe. A-wa-sa-si and Grandmother agree, knowing that forests have always been safe havens for the Ojibway. A-wa-sa-si explains that the Ojibway always hear the sound of the rustling trees, and that it connects them with the land.

Broker continues emphasizing the close connection that the Ojibway feel with the forests they live in. When Oona discusses the trees sounding friendly, she subtly bestows agency on them, suggesting that they, too, like human beings, are living creatures that deserve respect. The elderly members of the community (like A-wa-sa-si and Oona's grandparents) feel safe in the forest, underscoring both their love of the land and the threat posed by deforestation.

As the adults prepare for the last stretch of their journey, the girls play in the water. Oona sees a beaver making a dam, and she notices little tadpoles swimming. She feels like the forest is bustling with new life, and she thinks this is a good sign, because her family is making a new life too. Mother agrees. When Grandfather returns, he has good news. He's found a place with a spring deep in the forest, surrounded by many marshes. He thinks that the strangers will not find them there for a long time. He proposes making it their new home, if the others agree.

Broker describes all the living creatures in the forest to highlight the diverse array of wildlife that forests support: the Ojibway celebrate and respect the ecosystem and all the life forms it sustains. By extension, all these creatures will suffer when the lumber industry closes in. This suggests that the Ojibway think deforestation is unethical, because it destroys so many creatures' lives and habitats.

In the morning, the family hides all traces of their camp and sets off for their new home. Oona notices that the forest is darker, but she likes the soothing darkness. Little patches of sunlight bleed in, dancing around like sparkles. Oona feels comforted and safe. Soon, the ground gets wetter and boggier, slowing them all down. Grandfather goes ahead to set up camp, leaving a trail for the others to follow. They keep stepping into boggy ground and falling, but eventually, the ground hardens as they walk to a higher elevation. There are boulders and rocks, and the forest thins a little. This is their new home. Oona falls asleep feeling content.

The damp, boggy landscape is clearly not an ideal habitat for the family, as it's so hard to navigate. Nonetheless, they have no option but to make a home here. This situation reinforces the fact that the Ojibway are already experiencing hardship and oppression. It also shows how important it is for Oona's family to dwell in the forest and be connected to the land; they would prefer to stay in this unforgiving forest habitat rather than move to a reservation.

THE RAINY COUNTRY

A sheltered grove surrounded by pine trees becomes the family's new home. Grandfather sprinkles herb offerings on the ground. Then, the adults carefully strip bark from the trees and create huts (or lodges) to live in. Their new little village is a semi-circle of huts facing the sun. Oona wonders if they'll move through the forest in the summer like they used to, but Mother says no: from now on, they must stay put so that the strangers don't find them. They must also erase all traces of their presence when they move through the forest.

In this chapter, Broker paints a picture of traditional Ojibway life. The Ojibway only use the bark from the trees to build their homes, rather than chopping the trees for lumber, since they strive to live in their natural habitat without destroying it. In the story, birch bark symbolizes the Ojibway's respect for the forest's ecosystem. The fact that Oona's family has to change their lifestyle to avoid detection (for example, by staying put instead of roaming through the forests) signals that their traditional lifestyle is under threat and already changing.

After the family builds their village, they hold a feast to celebrate their new home. The adults smoke a peace pipe and make herb offerings in gratitude for their new home. The children explore the surrounding forest and learn where the berry bushes are. They also learn where to hide if the strangers attack their village. Oona likes her new home. The bogs surrounding the village always have a beautiful mist on them, and the pine trees smell sweet and fragrant.

The group builds their new village by working together. They also eat and celebrate together, emphasizing that they share everything and live communally. Broker emphasizes that the Ojibway live self-sufficiently in the forest, which makes them feel happy and content, especially in discussing the children's connection with the forest, and the community's feeling of comfort in the food, protection, and safety it offers them.

Each morning, Oona goes to Grandfather and Grandmother's hut. As usual, she keeps her eyes cast down until they greet her. She learns how to cut deer skin with a sharp beaver tooth, and how to decorate the skin with colored porcupine quills. Grandfather teaches her how to trap fish. Oona also goes into the forest with A-wa-sa-si and learns how to find healing herbs. She visits her cousin E-quay's hut where there's a new baby. Each night, Grandfather and Grandmother ask Oona what she learned, and she tells them what she's done that day to show that she's tried her best.

Broker continues explaining the traditions that enable the Ojibway to live self-sufficiently in the forest. They use modest resources from their ecosystem (like animal teeth and herbs) to provide everything they need, like food, clothing, and medicine. Because they don't exploit their ecosystem and only take what they need, the forest's resources remain abundant and plentiful, enabling the community to thrive.

Oona learns how to plant and harvest vegetables. Most days, Oona and E-quay also visit A-wa-sa-si. A-wa-sa-si is the oldest person in the village, and she's like a grandmother to everybody. Today, Oona and E-quay enter A-wa-sa-si's hut with their eyes cast down, hoping to hear another story or legend about their people. A-wa-sa-si is busy winding twine, so they watch her do that instead. When the children get up to leave, A-wa-sa-si thanks them politely for their visit. The adults are always polite to the children.

Broker explains that Ojibway children learn about their culture through stories that the elderly people in their community (like A-wa-sa-si) share with them. This suggests that storytelling is an important way to pass on indigenous knowledge, history, and values. Oona and E-quay's eagerness to hear the stories underscores their importance. Even when there isn't time for storytelling, watching elders work is another way of gaining indigenous knowledge and culture.

As summer approaches, the village falls into a rhythm. Oona and E-quay plant seeds in the ground and visit them each day to see how they are growing. Father plants rice in the lake and watches over it. When it rains, Oona and E-quay stay indoors, threading shells and animal teeth. Oona gets scared when she hears thunder, which sounds like conflict. In the fall, the family harvest their food and have a big thanksgiving feast, beginning with rice offerings to the north, south, east, and west. The next year passes in the same way, much like it has for generations. Everyone feels safe, content, and protected from the strangers.

Broker reveals that traditional Ojibway life centers closely on the natural rhythms of their forest habitat: the Ojibway live in sync with their ecosystem's seasons, planting food in the spring, harvesting in the fall, and replenishing the forest with seeds each year (through their offerings), to make sure that the forest's resources remain abundant. This combination of self-sufficiency (living entirely off the land) and harmony (living in balance with their ecosystem without exploiting it) enables the Ojibway to sustain their lifestyle over many generations.


OONA DREAMS

When Oona is seven, she awakes one morning to find a piece of charcoal beside her bed. The charcoal marks her time to choose her destiny: she can either take the charcoal into the forest and become a dreamer, or she can leave it and become a medicine woman. Oona takes the charcoal, heads into the forest, and falls asleep for several hours. She has dreams about a man standing on a log by the big river, and others about men with pale faces. She doesn't know what the dreams mean, but when she returns to the village, Grandfather tells her that their meanings will come to her.

This chapter focuses on Ojibway spiritual values and social dynamics. Ojibway children choose their future role in their communal society before they reach adolescence. Oona chooses to become a dreamer, which brings to light the importance of dreams in Ojibway culture. Oona's dreams about pale men suggest that the settlers are closing in on the community.


As another summer passes, A-wa-sa-si moves deeper into the forest to meditate, knowing that she is approaching death. She only has one wish: to see her two sons again. Oona is sad and wants A-wa-sa-si to feel at peace. Oona keeps dreaming about the man on the log, and eventually, she realizes that the man has A-wa-sa-si's face. Grandfather decides to send an old man, A-ki-wa-a-si, to scout the river and see if A-wa-sa-si's son is there. Oona also dreams that A-wa-sa-si will be happy, and the adults decide that Oona is a special person.

Elderly Native Americans meditate in the forest as they approach death, a way to reconnect with nature. Dreamers, like Oona, also meditate in the forest to manifest their dreams. The previous chapter highlighted the practical resources that the forest offers the Ojibway. Now, the book reveals that the forests also have a strong spiritual significance in Ojibway culture.

Oona visits A-wa-sa-si in the forest. A-wa-sa-si tells her their people's story, so that Oona can pass it on to her grandchildren. The Ojibway believe that a great spirit (Gitchi Manito) gives power to the earth, and that the earth gives gifts to the Ojibway. That's why they follow the cycle of the land, planting in the summer and harvesting in the autumn. They strive to take only what they need and to thank the earth for what it gives them. The earth is like their grandmother, and the animals and trees are like their brothers and sisters. A-wa-sa-si will return to the earth and replenish it when she dies. This is the cycle of Ojibway life.

A-wa-sa-si's traditional stories contain important information about Ojibway spirituality, suggesting (as before) that storytelling is an important way of passing on indigenous beliefs. The stories reinforce the close connection that the Ojibway feel with their forest habitat: they view the forest and its inhabitants as family members. The stories also underscore that the Ojibway strive not to exploit their ecosystem and try to replenish everything they take from it. All this suggests that deforestation will cause Native Americans tremendous cultural and physical losses.

A-wa-sa-si continues, telling Oona that the earth loves the Ojibway children. When Ojibway children grow older, they receive their calling. The special girls receive charcoal, and the boys do vision quests. Some become hunters, some become dreamers, others become medicinal healers. They acquire feathers, drums, and headbands as their role in the community grows. A-wa-sa-si wants Oona to remember all these traditions so that she can pass them on. Oona promises to fulfill A-wa-sa-si's wishes.

A-wa-sa-si wants to tell Oona her stories before she dies so that the indigenous cultural knowledge her stories contain lives on. Broker explains that Native Americans gain respect and honor (reflected in their feathers, headbands, and other symbols) based on their contributions to their community. This suggests that individual callings are meant to support the Ojibway community.

A few days later, A-ki-wa-a-si returns with a stranger: it's the man from Oona's dream, and—as she saw in her dream—he looks like A-wa-sa-si. The man is A-wa-sa-si's son, and his brother arrives a few days later. The villagers talk about Oona, and they decide that she's special because her dreams predict the future. A-wa-sa-si dies a few days later, and the villagers whisper her name to the river. The river water is calm, meaning that A-wa-sa-si lived a good life and respected the earth. The villagers honor A-wa-sa-si with a feast. Oona repeats the stories that A-wa-sa-si told her, so that she can remember them and pass them on.

Oona's experience shows that for the Ojibway, dreams are spiritually significant because they predict the future. Oona takes great pains to learn A-wa-sa-si's stories, suggesting, as before, that they are full of important information about indigenous culture that the Ojibway want to pass on. The river is an important part of Ojibway death rituals, emphasizing once more that their spirituality is closely connected with the natural environment.

A-wa-sa-si's sons say that the pale people have chopped down many forests to make logs. Many Ojibway people have fallen ill and died from a terrible **sickness**. The big chiefs have signed papers promising that all the Ojibway people will move to designated land, far away. The villagers decide to stay for two more winters, but they agree to move to the designated land if the pale strangers find them. The mood in the village grows oppressive and fearful. One winter night, Oona dreams about a pale man walking into the village, and she knows that the strangers are nearby. Oona is right: a few days later, a pale stranger walks into the village.

When Oona's community learns about the lumber industry's encroaching deforestation, they feel deeply worried: the forest, as explained thus far, sustains their people both practically and spiritually. It's clear that settlers don't share the Ojibway's values, as they prefer to exploit the forests for lumber rather than live in balance with the forest's ecosystem. The "sickness" is a smallpox epidemic that ends up killing the majority of the Native American population. Metaphorically, the sickness also represents the Ojibway's suffering under settler oppression, which dramatically increases after Native American chiefs agree to sign treaties that force them onto reservations.

WHITE EARTH

The villagers welcome the stranger and prepare a feast for him. The stranger has a piece of paper that instructs the villagers to move far away, where they can live in peace with the other Ojibway. It seems that this boggy part of the forest belongs to the strangers. The villagers agree to move, and the stranger smokes a peace pipe with them. He stays with the villagers for the winter, and when the snow thaws, they pack up and set off for their new home by canoe. The winter is long, and the forest is silent. Flowers won't even bloom. It's as if the forest knows that the Ojibway are leaving.

Even though Oona's family knows that settlers are seizing the land, they still welcome the stranger into their community, showing how highly their society values sharing with others. The stranger's piece of paper references legislation like the 1887 General Allotment Act (or Dawes Act), which the United States government used to relocate Native Americans to reservations. The family's sadness at this news—represented by the forest's cold winter silence—is palpable.

After several days, the family arrives at a place with many Ojibway people, who make them feel welcome. Another stranger wants to send them away to a different piece of land that's been designated for the Ojibway. He says there are too many Ojibway people here. The other Ojibway tell the family not to listen: strangers can't distinguish Ojibway faces, so they'll never know if the family actually stays or leaves. Oona's family decide to leave anyway, even though the journey will be long and tiring.

Despite their sadness at having to leave their native forest, Oona's family still feels welcome among other Ojibway people, emphasizing (as before) the strong sense of community in their culture. In mentioning that white settlers can't (or don't try to) distinguish Ojibway faces, Broker subtly highlights the racial discrimination that settlers engage in: they only see Native Americans as different to them, *not as distinguishable from one another. Beyond that, the settlers don't bother to get to know the Ojibway as individual people.*

Oona's family sets off, and the journey is arduous. It takes a long time, as they have to camp and gather food often along the way. When they see other strangers, they look away. Their old leader comes with them, but he is too old to survive the journey and dies along the way. By the time summer approaches, the family reaches the designated land. It seems like a strange place to Oona: all the huts look different, and some of the Ojibway dress up like the strangers. The family meet an agent who makes them sign a piece of paper. Then, they search the forest for a new place to live.

Broker highlights the long, difficult, and tiring journeys that many Native Americans endure when settlers move them to reservations: many Native Americans are too old and weak to survive the journey, resulting in countless deaths. Oona's family winds up at White Earth Reservation in Minnesota (established in 1867). Like Oona's family, many Native Americans at White Earth signed legal papers upon arrival without knowing that they were signing away their freedom and rights to the land.

The family walks for two days into the forest, and they set up camp. They offer herbs in thanks for their new home. They have a lot of work to do to prepare for winter, because their food stores are low, but they continue as usual, planting rice and vegetable seeds. Luckily, the harvest is kind to them. Oona and her family travel to the big Ojibway village to celebrate the harvest with a big feast. Two winters pass peacefully, and the family are happy that they don't have the **sickness** that many other Ojibway people have.

Oona's family tries to preserve their traditional lifestyle by living in an isolated corner of the reservation's woodland for as long as they can, instead of the big village, which is much more urbanized. This suggests that preserving their traditional lifestyle is very important to them. The sickness (smallpox epidemic) continues to rage, spreading quickly in the crowded reservation, killing many Ojibway. This demonstrates that the settlers' strategy of forcing Native Americans onto crowded reservations during a smallpox epidemic caused widespread death and disease. As before, the sickness also metaphorically represents the Ojibway's broader suffering at the hands of the settlers.

One day, Oona dreams that a man will come. Soon after, an Ojibway man named Sam arrives. Sam's dressed like the strangers, and he reads a piece of paper that says he must take the children away to a school in the big village after the winter. Soon after, Oona dreams that she sees Mother dressed like the strangers. Her family discusses the dream, and Mother admits that she thinks it might be easier for the family to integrate into the strangers' ways. Their own ways are dying, and she doesn't want her children to suffer.

Sam's arrival signals another form of oppression that Native Americans experience on the reservation: the government passes legislation that forces Native American children to attend Christian schools, in an effort to distance them from their native culture. Oona's mother senses that the settlers are erasing her culture. She believes that complying—rather than resisting—will minimize the family's suffering under their oppression. Mother's instinct suggests that Ojibway culture values peaceful compromises over hostile confrontations.

Grandfather thinks long and hard about Oona's dream. Eventually, he decides that the family will move to the village, into a log hut like the strangers have. They will accept some the strangers' ways but also try to retain their own. They learn that Father must go somewhere to work, and then the family will have logs to make a hut. After that, Oona will go to school to learn the strangers' language. Mother trusts Oona, knowing that she will also remember the Ojibway's traditions and pass them on to her own children. They also learn about something called money, which they will need to get food and clothing.

It's clear that even on the reservation—which is supposed to be a safe place for Native Americans—the settlers are gradually forcing the Ojibway to abandon their traditional forest-dwelling way of life. Settlers want the Ojibway to live in houses and speak English. They also introduce the concept of currency into the reservation, meaning that the Ojibway can no longer subsist self-sufficiently on the forest's resources, but must work to earn money in exchange for what they need to survive. Oona strives to remember traditional stories, knowing that they contain Ojibway cultural knowledge that the settlers are trying to eradicate. She believes that the stories will help her people remain connected with their culture despite their oppression.

Father tells the family about his work. He has to chop down trees with a big saw, and then haul them onto a big piece of metal and send them down the river. He feels sad every time he chops a tree down, watching the forest disappear. He worries about the animals. Mother is sad too, and she feels like they're surrounded. She grieves for the wilderness her grandchildren will never have. Oona is also sad. The family is worried about moving to the big village and getting the **sickness**.

The men who run the reservation assign Oona's father a job in the local lumberyard. He feels visceral sadness at being forced to destroy the forests, showing how much deforestation conflicts with his own values. As before, his concerns about the animals losing their habitat show that the Ojibway feel like the forests belong to all the wildlife they sustain. They think deforestation is unethical because it destroys the wildlife's habitat. The family's worries about the deadly sickness (smallpox epidemic) show how widespread the disease is. They already feel emotionally "sick" in being forced to participate in the destruction of their ecosystem.

The family thinks about their options. They can send the children to school in the big village and stay in the forest, living as they have, or they can all go to the big village together and change their ways, but be with their children every day. They know that they've avoided the **sickness** through their current lifestyle. But in the end, they decide to move to the village so that they can all be together.

Broker highlights the reservation's oppressive conditions: the men running the reservation force Native children into Christian schools, and they force Native families to live in crowded housing during a deadly smallpox epidemic. This also suggests that the reservation is shrinking as the lumber industry destroys forests, forcing Native Americans into smaller, urbanized pockets of land. Oona's family feels such a strong sense of community that they risk contracting the deadly disease so that they can all stay together. Their limited choices cause them heartache, an example of the dilemmas presented by their rapidly constricting way of life.

NEW HOMES, OLD WAYS

The family moves to the big village, and they pick out a spot of land by a stream to build their log home, exactly where Oona dreamed they would be. After some months, one of the family's sons returns from school. They're shocked that he can speak the strangers' language. He tells them that in the strangers' language his name is David. He had to choose a second name, and he chose "Green," for the color of the forest. Father decides that the family shouldn't rely on the strangers for food, so they will continue gathering food in the forest.

Broker highlights how forced schooling attempts to indoctrinate Native children into replacing their own culture: Oona's cousin has to speak in English and use an English name, effectively distancing himself from his own language. His decision to choose "Green" as a last name emphasizes his desire to feel connected with the disappearing forests. Even though the family faces pressure to change their lifestyle, they are not confident that this new lifestyle will sustain them, so they rely on their traditional food-gathering methods to get by. This suggests that the Ojibway's traditional lifestyle serves them better than their new one.

Father keeps working at the lumber plant, and his boss offers him money, but he refuses: he wants the logs he was promised, so that he can build his hut. His boss agrees. A soldier arrives to take the children to school, and Mother decides they must do as the soldier says. A lot of people in the big village are suffering. The strangers didn't give them enough food, and many children have the **sickness**. The family is worried, but Mother feels like they should try and integrate and embrace this new life.

Oona's family struggles to understand the concept of currency, showing that earning money to pay for things feels foreign to them. The family begins to sink into poverty and struggles to afford enough food, highlighting that this new lifestyle leaves them worse off than their traditional self-sufficient, forest-dwelling lifestyle. Broker highlights how the family feels coerced when soldiers force their children into schools, distancing them further from their traditional lifestyle.

In the summer, 14-year-old David returns from school. He wants to go and work with the strangers, building fences around their homes. The family agrees that it will be good for David, as his father also built things like huts and arrows. Mother wants to learn more about the strangers' ways. She goes to the agent's home and sees many strange objects inside. The agent suggests that Mother work with his wife in the home; she'll teach Mother about all the objects and how to use them. Mother agrees.

Broker reinforces the idea that forced schooling and urbanized reservation life distances Native Americans from their traditions: David is swiftly integrating into settler culture, and Oona's mother, too, begins to adopt the settlers' way of living. The agent's suggestion that she work as a servant in his home highlights the family's limited work options and ongoing poverty.

Mother goes to work in the agent's home every day, and she learns how to sew clothes and use a stove. She also becomes familiar with furniture like tables and chairs, and she even learns the strangers' language. The agent's wife is a kind, generous woman, and the Ojibway people like her, so they give her many gifts. Meanwhile, Oona goes to school. Her family builds their home, and it looks like the agent's home. The other Ojibway people are happy to see that even though Oona's family are embracing this new way of life, their children still remember old traditions, like keeping their eyes downcast around adults.

Life on the reservation shifts Oona's family further away from their traditions. The Ojibway's efforts to maintain aspects of their own traditions show that they do not want to change the way they live, but they feel like they have no choice. Their ability to see kindness in their oppressors (especially the agent's wife) suggests that they still want to retain a sense of community and generosity toward others, even the settlers who force them to change their way of life.

After Oona's family builds a house, the big village has a feast. They give offerings and tell stories for the children to remember. They are happy, and they almost forget about the strangers. David returns and names their village Greenwood. Their lives have become a mixture of their old traditions and the strangers' new ways. Their homes have Christian pictures in them, next to traditional items. The Ojibway people wear muslin clothes like the strangers' clothes, but they keep their old clothes for traditional ceremonies.

The Ojibway strive to maintain some of their society's cultural practices: like feasting communally, making traditional offerings, and sharing indigenous knowledge through traditional stories. Broker nonetheless highlights the subtle cultural erasure that reservation life causes: the Ojibway now live a hybrid lifestyle that integrates settler culture more firmly into their day-to-day lives.

The next harvest is better, as the people in the big village have learned to rely both on their traditional food-gathering methods as well as the strangers' food. The **sickness** still rages on, taking many people's lives. Father gathers herbs to help the sick, but this angers the agent—he wants to ban traditional medicines. Soldiers surround the village to make sure that the Ojibway people don't use herbs. Many Ojibway people die, but those that remain are grateful to have one another, and they don't grow bitter.

According to this passage, embracing the settlers' culture leaves the Ojibway worse off. The Ojibway can't sustain themselves by living as the settlers do, and they only survive by relying on their traditional food-gathering practices. This fact suggests that they lived more comfortably before adopting the settlers' ways. Settlers continue to oppress the Ojibway by banning more of their traditions, like herbal medicine. This, in turn, causes more sickness and death, emphasizing the Ojibway's suffering under colonialism.

THE NEW WAYS

In the spring, Oona begins dreaming about Mother's angry, weeping face. One day, Oona comes home from school and explains that her teacher wants the family to forget their Ojibway traditions and become Christians so that they can become better people. Mother makes the same angry face that Oona sees in her dreams, but she agrees that they must do as the strangers say. That night, Oona visits Grandfather to discuss her dream. Grandfather tells her that there's a conflict within Mother: Mother wants to embrace this new life, but she's struggling to let go of her beliefs and traditions.

Despite her willingness to embrace a new culture, Oona's mother is angry and sad because of the grief she feels about losing a connection with her own culture. Her mental conflict highlights the emotional toll of her oppression. Being forced to abandon their traditional lifestyle thus causes Oona's family a tremendous amount of emotional suffering, and it imbues them with a profound sense of loss.

Grandfather is open-minded about becoming Christian. He decides to talk to Mother to ease her mind. When Oona learns about Christianity, she's confused. They have a Gitchi Manito as well, and their book also tells them to respect their parents and love their brothers and sisters. Oona doesn't understand why she must forget her old beliefs if they are the same as Christian beliefs. Grandfather explains that the strangers probably don't know about Ojibway beliefs, so it's up to Oona to accept the new ways. But she should also remember the old ways and pass them on, because both ways are good.

Broker emphasizes that the settlers wrongly demonize Ojibway culture, highlighting how thoughtless their discrimination is: the settlers don't respect the Ojibway enough to learn about their values, even though many traditional Ojibway beliefs align with Christian values (especially ideas about helping each other and fostering a sense of community), and believing in a deity (which the Christians call "God" and the Ojibway call "Gitchi Manito"). Oona remains determined to remember the traditional stories she knows so that her Christian schooling won't erase her knowledge of her own culture.

In Ojibway culture, when a girl becomes a woman, she goes into the forest to fast for 10 days. Oona does this too, but for a shorter time, so that the agent's wife won't be angry. She learns about Christianity in school, but she also accompanies Grandmother to gather herbs in the forest. Strangers begin visiting the Ojibway village, and Grandmother uses her traditional skills to make mementos like beaded necklaces and fish traps for the strangers. The strangers pay Grandmother much less than they pay for these things in strangers' stores, but Grandmother is happy, as she enjoys feeling connected to her traditions.

Broker continues describing the gradual way that settlers force the Ojibway to distance themselves from their culture: Oona, for example, feels pressured to avoid participating in her own cultural traditions, highlighting the reservation's oppressive atmosphere. The family struggles financially, and they survive by leveraging their traditional skills. This suggests that their traditional lifestyle served them better than their new one. Broker suggests that even when Native Americans embrace settler culture, they still experience discrimination: she notes that Americans treat the reservations like tourist attractions (which is demoralizing) and often cheat or underpay Native Americans (which keeps them poor).

The family continues honoring their old traditions by visiting sick people, sharing what they have, making offerings, and participating in traditional dances and ceremonies. When Oona turns 14, the strangers return to give the village food and supplies they promised them. There is a big party, and everybody signs a piece of paper. When Oona sees the rations that the family receives, she realizes how meager they are. She's glad that her family has continued hunting and planting on their own, so that they won't go hungry.

Oona reinforces the idea that living like the settlers leaves her family worse off. They work more and have less: they can't even afford enough food to sustain themselves. As before, the Ojibway's traditional food-gathering methods sustain them. This suggests that their indigenous knowledge of the land (captured and passed on in their stories) helps them to survive, underscoring the ongoing importance of both the stories and the knowledge they contain.

David is 17 now, and he's decided to leave the village and go with the strangers to teach them about Ojibway culture. Oona's cousin E-quay falls in love with a man named Walter. Walter has learned to plant crops the way the strangers do, but he still approaches the family for a blessing to marry E-quay. The family is happy that he's acting according to Ojibway traditions. E-quay marries Walter, and she moves away with him, like many other young Ojibway people who are leaving the village.

Broker highlights the rapid rate of cultural change on the reservation. As Oona and her cousins approach adulthood, they have almost completely changed their day-to-day lives: they live on farms and plant crops, and they leave their communities to seek out better fortunes. This makes the older Ojibway people sad: before this generation, they never left their families or felt poor, as they lived communally, sharing everything in the forest.

OONA BECOMES A WOMAN

When Oona is 15, Mother falls ill with the **sickness**. After several months, Mother dies. Father stops joking and smiling, and Oona knows that he will not live much longer either. The weather rages, and Oona knows that the earth is angry. That year, Father dies, and the family buries him next to Mother in the Christian burial ground. Oona goes into the forest, but she can't hear the trees rustling, and her heart is heavy. Eventually, Oona dreams that she sees Mother and Father happy together. When she wakes up, she can hear the trees rustling again. They sound like they're crying.

Even though Oona's family took great precautions to avoid the "sickness" (smallpox), it still reaches them, showing how widespread and ongoing the epidemic is. Oona's parents' sickness and deaths exemplify the physical losses (from death and disease) that Native Americans endure under oppression. Oona's grief makes her feel disconnected from the forest, which deepens her sadness even more. Her grief represents the emotional suffering that oppressors cause her people (by forcing the Ojibway to disconnect from their habitat and culture). In noting that the earth and trees feel sad and angry, Broker suggests that from a Native perspective, this suffering pervades the natural ecosystem, affecting many species and not just humans.

Oona visits Grandfather and Grandmother to ask about Mother's past. Grandfather explains that he found Mother alone in the woods when she was a little girl, next to a dead woman. He took her in as his own and raised her. He tells Oona not to worry: her parents were good people, and they handled a difficult time of transition very well. Soon after, Oona marries a man named Michael, who's half Ojibway. When Oona moves to Michael's farm, she takes her whole family with her. She also takes in E-quay, whose husband died while working on a logging plant.

Even as she grows up, Oona continues to learn from the stories her grandparents tell her. Here, Oona's grandfather communicates the importance of supporting those in need. Oona heeds this advice, taking in many people from her community. This, in turn, helps her farm thrive. The wisdom contained in her grandparents' stories thus continues to serve Oona and her community, even as they face unfamiliar circumstances. This underscores the stories' value.

The whole family works hard to make the farm thrive. Oona is too busy to meditate and stops dreaming. But one year, when Michael leaves to go hunting, Oona wants to go with him so that she can revive her dreaming skills in the wild. The family worries about Oona leaving the reservation. They've heard about fearsome battles at places like Little Big Horn, and they're afraid of strangers catching and killing Oona. But she insists, and because she's a dreamer, the family respects her wishes.

Broker emphasizes that Oona works much harder on the farm than she would have if she lived in the forest: so much so that she has no time to meditate and dream. She is only able to reconnect with her dreaming ability by going into nature, showing, as before, that the natural environment has strong spiritual significance for the Ojibway. Despite integrating into settler culture, the family still faces threats of violence from settlers, showing that oppression is unavoidable.

Michael, Oona, and Michael's brother (Little Brother) head into the wild, stealthily avoiding strangers' homesteads. They hunt and meditate peacefully. When they are heading back to the reservation, some soldiers catch them. The soldiers tie Little Brother to a horse—they want to drag him to death. But every time they set the horse off, Oona shouts a word, and the horse stops moving. Eventually, she shows the soldiers some **birch bark** from her bag, and the soldiers recognize the bark as the Ojibway people's peace symbol, so they stop. Instead, the soldiers keep Oona, Michael, and Little Brother captive in a tent.

Oona, Michael, and Little Brother have to sneak around when they leave the reservation. Even though they've completely changed their lifestyles, they're still not welcome in settler culture and face violent threats when they attempt to roam freely about the land. The birch bark in Oona's bag represents the Ojibway's peaceful cultural values: traditionally, they only strip the bark from trees, instead of killing the whole tree. The settler violence they face now—marked by disregard for the value of human life—contrasts starkly with the Ojibway's respect for all living things.

That night, Oona dreams and asks Gitchi Manito for fog. By dawn, a thick fog surrounds the tent. Oona, Michael, and Little Brother escape, hidden in the fog. Instead of heading north to the Ojibway village as the soldiers would expect, they travel west, because Oona saw herself walking toward the setting sun in her dream. Eventually, they find a lodge where an old Ojibway man sits inside. He explains that he is also a dreamer, and he summoned Oona to take him to the Ojibway village, as he's too old to make the journey himself. The four of them leave together, traveling slowly and stealthily, and they make it safely to the village.

Being in nature enables Oona to connect with her spirituality and save her family. As before, Broker emphasizes that dreams have deep spiritual significance in Ojibway culture, as the Ojibway believe that dreams guide their actions in life-saving ways. Oona continues showing her community spirit by helping the old man back to the reservation. As before, the group must hide when they travel home, emphasizing how unwelcome they are in settler territory and how much danger they face off the reservation.

TIMES OF CHANGE

Oona has two sons, and she gives them both Ojibway and Christian names: Warm Sky (or David) and Brother (or John). Her family respects her for keeping her Ojibway traditions alive. A few years later, Grandfather and Grandmother die. Oona buries them according to Ojibway tradition, by laying **birch bark** over their bodies. She whispers their names to the water and the wind, so that the earth will always remember them.

As Oona ages, the elderly people around her die, and the younger generations increasingly integrate into settler culture. Oona thus becomes one of the few remaining people with knowledge of her people's traditions and stories. The traditional burial rituals emphasize the Ojibway's close connection with—and respect for—their natural environment. The birch bark also symbolizes this respect for nature.

Oona and Michael's farm thrives, and they harvest a lot of potatoes and corn. They also have milk cows, though they sell the milk because they prefer traditional Ojibway drinks, which Oona makes with wild berries. Her sons, Warm Sky and Brother, go to school and learn how to become skilled farmers. Oona's sons don't learn about ancient Ojibway herbal medicine traditions, but she makes sure that they go on vision quests, hear traditional stories, and learn how to hear the trees rustling, so that they can pass these traditions on. Her grandchildren also learn these traditions.

Oona and Michael's children don't know much about their own culture beyond the parts that Oona shares with them. This emphasizes how, in the span of a single generation, the Ojibway's traditional way of life is all but wiped out. The only remnants are what Oona remembers. She wants to teach Ojibway stories and traditions to her children so that her culture will stay alive. A large part of these traditions centers on feeling connected with trees, something that's been important in Oona's life as well as her ancestors'.

By the time Oona is in her forties, the Ojibway village grows into a suburban town. The government makes Ojibway children go to boarding schools run by nuns, and this makes it harder for Ojibway children to learn their own cultural traditions alongside Christian values. The government also begins to regulate many traditional practices like fishing, hunting, and growing rice, even on reservations. The Ojibway have to conduct these activities in secret so that they don't get caught.

As time goes on, the government continues to prohibit Ojibway cultural activities even more. They force children to go to Christian boarding schools (to distance them from Native American culture) and ban many food-gathering practices that connect the Ojibway with the land. This highlights the systematic erasure of Ojibway culture and the lack of freedom the Ojibway have, even on the reservation.

Oona feels sad when she sees her grandchildren's generation growing ill with many new diseases. She knows their food is less healthy than traditional Ojibway food. Ojibway people also begin consuming alcohol, and this saddens Oona too. She thinks that many people drink to forget that American society turns Ojibway people into caricatures. Many Ojibway people seek work in lumber yards. The people in Oona's village learn how to square dance, and they integrate this dance into their rituals. By 1910, the logging industry moves farther west, leaving many Ojibway people unemployed.

As Oona ages, she notices that her people are now physically more ill and emotionally more unhappy than they've ever been. This suggests that their new culture makes them suffer much more than their traditional lifestyle did, both emotionally and physically, because of the way it distances them from their land and traditional practices. The fact that the lumber industry moves further westward suggests that deforestation is so rapid and consuming that the lumber industry has run out of trees in the Midwestern United States.

Despite the hardships of unemployment, the Ojibway people rely on ancient traditions to get by, such as digging out medicinal roots and weaving. The only difference is that they now sell their wares to tourists. Oona starts a club (called the First Daughters Club) for Ojibway women to meet every month to weave together, so that they can sell their woven products and raise money for their community. Oona decides that Grandmother was wise to teach her such traditional skills—without them, the community wouldn't survive.

Broker reinforces the idea that the Ojibway's new lifestyle of working to earn money for things leaves them poor and unhappy. The only way they survive is by relying on their traditional skills and their community values. As before, their traditional practices continue to serve them better than their new lifestyle does, suggesting that it's a better way for them to thrive.

By the 1930s, new taxation policies begin driving the Ojibway people further into poverty. The government forces their children into boarding schools that are far away, where they're taught to forget their heritage and learn Christian traditions instead. At the same time, the Ojibway lean on the churches in their village for community gatherings. The adults begin to embrace activities like bingo and card games, while the children learn baseball and football instead of traditional Ojibway dances. When those children become adults, they don't know enough about Ojibway traditions to pass them on.

Broker continues describing the cultural erasure that takes place on reservations: in less than 50 years, the Ojibway's lives are unrecognizably different, and very few Ojibway people know about their traditions, stories, and culture. Because of this, Broker worries that the culture will die out completely. Broker also continues emphasizing that the Ojibway struggle more and face greater poverty than they did when they lived self-sufficiently off the land.

THE CIRCLE

By 1930, Oona's great-grandson Carl or, Two Standing) is running the farm. When people who are around Oona's age die, the Ojibway bury them according to Christian rather than Ojibway rituals. Oona feels such a deep sense of loss and sadness that she stops dreaming. She rarely leaves the farm to go into the Ojibway village, which is now called a reservation. She feels like an outsider visiting an alien culture. By the time Oona is 80 years old, she spends her days sitting in her rocking chair, reminiscing about her youth, when there were only Ojibway people on the land.

As Oona reaches the final years of her life, she realizes that her family members are completely disconnected from their heritage. There are so few elements of her culture left, compared to her early years, that she feels like she's living in an alien society, even though she's indigenous to the land. This emphasizes how thoroughly settler culture has taken over the United States. Broker emphasizes the intense sense of loss that many Ojibway people like Oona feel as a result of this cultural erasure.

Oona thinks about her people, and how well they've fared in the strangers' culture, as doctors, teachers, and soldiers. She thinks that today's Ojibway children don't care about the past, and she worries about Ojibway history being lost forever. One day, Oona hears the trees rustling, and a little girl named Mary enters, keeping her eyes cast down. Mary wants to hear about the Ojibway. Oona's heart swells with joy, and she begins talking. She knows now that the Ojibway's history will not be lost.

Broker closes the story by stressing how important Ojibway stories are: given the profound cultural erasure that the Ojibway people have endured, the only place their culture lives on is in their traditional stories. Thus, the stories are deeply valuable because they are the last lifeline that connects Native Americans with their heritage. Broker concludes that as long as the stories live on, there is still hope for her culture to survive.

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