a song over miskwaa rapids
linda legarde grover

author of the road back to sweetgrass
A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE
for A SONG OVER MISKWAAM RAPIDS: A NOVEL
by Linda LeGarde Grover

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“A sprawling, poignant chronicle of struggle and survivance.” —KIRKUS REVIEWS

“With its powerful, atmospheric descriptions of the natural world, A Song over Miskwaa Rapids resembles an Indigenous family saga in miniature, couching memory and mystery in a potent spirit world.” —FOREWORD REVIEWS

“In this intimate and suspenseful novel, Grover explores the complex evolving relationship between a place and the people who inhabit it.” —ELECTRIC LITERATURE

“I learned deep respect for how Grover deepens and reveals the links between the ancient world and the current one. Her plotting is deft, with splashes of humor to lighten her serious examination of current politics and environmental concerns. This is a wise and fun story to read, propelled forward by Grover’s deft pacing and real literary gifts. She is a great storyteller.” —CHRONICLE JOURNAL

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beginning with her award-winning debut story collection The Dance Boots and continuing with her novels The Road Back to Sweetgrass and In the Night of Memory, both published by the University of Minnesota Press, Linda LeGarde Grover has created and explored the imaginary Mozhay Point Ojibwe Reservation in northern Minnesota. She also wrote the poetry collection The Sky Watched and a book blending memoir, history, and Ojibwe tradition, Gichigami Hearts: Stories and Histories from Misaabekong. She is professor emerita of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota Duluth and a member of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe.
ABOUT THIS BOOK

When a rock is dislodged from its slope by mischievous ancestors, the past rises to meet the present, and Half-Dime Hill gives up a gruesome secret it has kept for half a century. Some people of Mozhay Point have theories about what happened; others know—and the discovery stirs memories long buried, reviving a terrible story yet to be told.

Returning to the fictional Ojibwe reservation in northern Minnesota she has so deftly mapped in her award-winning books, Linda LeGarde Grover reveals traumas old and new as Margie Robineau, in the midst of a fight to keep her family’s long-held allotment land, uncovers events connected to a long-ago escape plan across the Canadian border, and the burial—at once figurative and painfully real—of not one crime but two. While Margie is piecing the facts together, Dale Ann is confronted by her own long-held secrets and the truth that the long ago and the now, the vital and the departed are all indelibly linked, no matter how much we try to forget.

As the past returns to haunt those involved, Margie prepares her statement for the tribal government, defending her family’s land from a casino development and sorting the truths of Half-Dime Hill from the facts that remain there. Throughout the narrative, a chorus of spirit women gather in lawn chairs with coffee and cookies to reminisce, reflect, and speculate, spinning the threads of family, myth, history, and humor—much as Grover spins another tale of Mozhay Point, weaving together an intimate and complex novel of a place and its people.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book begins and ends at early mornings, when robins wake and are joined by women from the spirit world. In what ways do you think that the worlds of living and non-living, of human and non-human beings, intersect?

2. The old women of the spirit world observe and comment upon the rock-throwing techniques of Artense LaForce and her mother-in-law, Therese Gallette. The rock, if aimed properly, will set in motion a series of events that links past and present: if the target is missed, what might happen at Mozhay Point, and why would this be a concern to the spirit women?

3. The friendships and relationships between Margie, Dale Ann, and Theresa that began when they were young women developed throughout the passages of their lives to elderhood. Have you experienced or observed comparable friendships and relationships in your own life and the people you have known?

4. The ancestral lands of the Mozhay Point Ojibwe people have undergone some physical changes over the time since the reservation was established. In what ways did those changes affect the lives of people living on the lands?

5. Margie Robineau, as a descendant of both the Washington and LaForce families, is making effort to maintain the Sweetgrass allotment lands as they have been. What are her reasons? Have you seen, or been part of, similar efforts in land issues? In what ways might Margie’s reasons and yours have similarities or differences?

6. Characters in *A Song over Miskwaa Rapids* are often motivated by their feelings and emotions, acting sometimes wisely and sometimes not so prudently. Can you think of occasions when the feelings of one character for another, in life or in another novel, resulted in unexpected consequences and directions?

7. Several of the relationships between characters can be thought of as triangular in shape: Michael, Theresa, and Margie; Dale Ann, Jack, and Eugene, for example. In what ways do you think that these relationships contributed to the development of the story?
8. Margie, Dale Ann, Theresa, and other Mozhay Pointers of their generation were recipients of community respect and consideration; at the same time, as elders they had particular obligations and duties. What obligations and duties did you find notable in the novel? Have you seen similar honors and expectations in other communities?

9. Joey had connections, through both lineage and relationship, to many characters in the novel. Can you think of examples of ways in which those connections will manifest as he grows into adulthood?

10. The histories and tangibles of land—for example, Mozhay Point in its entirety, the LaForce/Sweetgrass allotment, the Miskwa River and the state park, and Half-Dime Hill—can be considered entities in themselves in this story. What are some of the ways in which the natural world interacts with living characters and with the characters in the spirit world?