



## Tracks

By Louise Erdrich  
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### Introduction

Set in North Dakota at a time in the past century when Indian tribes were struggling to keep what little remained of their lands, *Tracks* is a tale of passion and deep unrest. Over the course of ten crucial years, as tribal land and trust between people erode ceaselessly, men and women are pushed to the brink of their endurance -- yet their pride and humor prohibit their surrender.

Narrated by compelling characters like Nanapush, the patriarch and tribal elder who "guided the last buffalo hunt ... saw the last bear shot ... trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth" and Pauline Puyat, whose fascination with witchcraft and religion leads her down treacherous and unstable paths, *Tracks* follows the epic story of Fleur Pillager, who has been described by *The Los Angeles Times* as "one of the most haunting presences in contemporary American literature."

### Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss some of the legends that surround Fleur (her multiple deaths by drowning; her connection to Misshepeshu; her strange powers; her beauty). How do these tales contribute to her identity among the Ojibwe?
2. Describe Nanapush. To whom does he narrate his tale? How does he help Eli Kashpaw in his efforts to romance Fleur Pillager? How would you characterize his relationship with Margaret Kashpaw?
3. What does Pauline Puyat witness in Argus that makes her feel a kinship with Fleur? Why does she go to live with the Morrisseys? What motivates her to interfere in Fleur's relationship with Eli Kashpaw?
4. Where does Pauline's fascination with religion lead her? Do you interpret her powers as spiritually guided, or demonic?
5. Why do Boy Lazarre and Clarence Morrissey waylay Nanapush and Margaret? How does such violence arise among neighbors? Were you surprised by the outcomes of this dispute?
6. Describe the hunger that the Kashpaws and Pillagers experience in the winter. When they move to Machimanito to conserve on travel and on food, how does Pauline re-enter their lives? How is she treated? What is her role in this family?
7. How do the pressures of the outside world (annual fee lists, foreclosures, allotments) affect Fleur, Nanapush, and the Kashpaws? How do they resolve to save their land from the agent and other outsiders?
8. How does Margaret Kashpaw feel about Fleur Pillager? How does she treat her when she discovers that Eli is intimate with her? What role does she play in Fleur's first and second pregnancies?
9. How does Fleur punish the lumber company for daring to strip her land of its trees? Discuss the end of *Tracks*. How did you interpret Lulu's return to Nanapush and Margaret?

### About the Author

Louise Erdrich is the author of ten novels as well as volumes of poetry, children's books, and a memoir of early motherhood. Her novel *Love Medicine* won the National Book Critics Circle Award. *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* was a finalist for the National Book Award in Fiction. She lives in Minnesota with her daughters and is the owner of Birchbark Books, a small independent bookstore.