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Book Discussion Guide

***People of the Whale* by Linda Hogan**

created by Tyler Mark Nelson

Introduction

The Summer Fiction Book Club was an invitation for participants to become immersed in the creative world of fiction books while daring to explore challenging topics related to climate change and environmental injustice. Each month, participants read a selected book on their own time, and then we gathered virtually to discuss as a group. In addition to small group discussion, a guest conversation partner joined to offer their thoughts on the book and share about its impact in their life.

Simply put, fiction has the potential to reveal present realities and imagine possible futures. Through truth-telling, a good story confronts the current systems of power, the unequal material conditions, or the overwhelming circumstances that prevent all life from flourishing. It gives voice to whomever or whatever has been silenced, forgotten, or ignored — the lives of marginalized humans and exploited nonhumans, the values or perspectives that advocate for collective good, or the complex emotions that humans may experience during planetary polycrisis. Fiction can also be a window through which we envision compelling and creative possibilities, whether social, ecological, political, or economic. Imagining what worlds are possible creates the opportunity for us to build towards a better and more just future.

Reading fiction together is a dynamic way for humans to make sense of the world(s) in which we live. By coming together to discuss these books, we also collectively share the weightiness of the subjects. Readers may find a book club to be a space where they can encounter fictional worlds, exercise their imaginative capacities, and even explore and experience their own emotions through the narrative lens of fiction.

The following discussion questions can be used by any group wishing to engage around the novel *People of the Whale* by Linda Hogan. A video clip from the discussion of the novel during our Summer Fiction Book Club in June 2023 is offered to provide additional perspective and basis for discussion.

Intro to *People of the Whale*

People of the Whale is a gripping tale written by Chickasaw poet and Pulitzer Finalist Linda Hogan. This enchanting book follows the lives of A'atsikan characters, members of a fictional Indigenous community located on the Pacific Northwest coastline, along with the complications that arise within their relations, identities, and traditions. In a narrative that spans multiple generations, Hogan weaves a tale that includes love and loss through the Vietnam War, traditional whale hunting, animal rights activism, Indigenous sovereignty, trauma and transformation, and capitalist profiteering.

Guest conversationalist for Summer Fiction Book Club June 2023: Ryan Darr

Video clip

[Link to Session Recording](#)

Discussion: 06:19 — 33:35 (27:16 minutes long)

Discussion questions

1. What is one theme, scene, or quote that stood out to you, and why?
2. What lessons might you learn from *People of the Whale* about the experience and role of religious/spiritual/traditional communities who face environmental and social injustices?
3. Consider what Ryan Darr said about maps and mapping onto landscape. What type of mapping do you notice in the places around you?
4. How do the women of this story engage in the work of relationship repair? How do their characters contrast with the male characters?
5. What do you make of the presence of trauma, violence, and loss throughout the book? How do these inform your understanding of trauma and transformation?
6. Whose voices did you encounter, and what are their worlds like? How might it relate to or differ from your own world?