

This Accident of Being Lost Discussion Questions

1. The book's cover features a photograph of a mixed-media sculpture titled *Mixed Blessing*, by Anishinaabe-Canadian artist Rebecca Belmore. The text on the back of the hoodie from which a woman's long, flowing hair streams reads "Fuckin' Indian" and "Fuckin' Artist." What does this image evoke for you, and what expectations does it set up for the stories within?
2. *This Accident of Being Lost* feels especially poignant due to its release in the year of the "Canada 150" celebrations. How does Simpson's writing create a dialogue with the government's "official" narratives about the founding and history of this country?
3. The first piece in the book, "under your always light," uses jolting language, with violent imagery interspersed with affirmations of strength, passion, and survival. How does this introductory piece set the tone for the rest of the book?
4. Why do you think Simpson chose to call the book *This Accident of Being Lost*? What does the "this accident" refer to and what might "being lost" entail? What else might the phrase symbolize?
5. Imagery of fragmentation and dissolution pervades many of Simpson's stories and songs, perhaps as a way for Simpson to explore her identity as something fragmented. How do the book's structural and tonal shifts relate to this sense of fragmented identity? How do the different styles Simpson employs correspond to different elements of her identity and different ways of being in the world?
6. Simpson intentionally juxtaposes traditional Anishinaabe practices and ways of living with the mediation and alienation of modern, technologized life. What are some of the strategies she uses to create this dialogue between the traditional and the modern? Which pieces in the book most exemplify this dialogue?
7. In a CBC Radio interview, Simpson said "I wrote this book, in my mind, for Anishinaabe people and for Indigenous people, so that was the audience I was trying to connect to." Do you think this intention on Simpson's part is reflected in the finished book? How does your own cultural identity influence your reading of the songs and stories?
8. How does Simpson use language to destabilize reader expectations? How do the pieces in the collection subvert stereotypes of Indigenous people?
9. In his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*, postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon develops the concept of "double consciousness" to refer to the psychic splitting that colonized, oppressed people must endure in order to survive in a world dominated by their oppressors. In "Situation Update," Simpson writes that if Fanon walked into her artist residence at the Banff Centre, he'd either be "so fucking disappointed" in her or he'd love her for validating the premise of his work (107). How does Simpson engage with this idea of double consciousness? How do we see this sense of a double or split identity play out in this story and others in the book?

10. What role does humour play in Simpson's stories?

11. Many reviews of Simpson's work have focused on how Simpson interweaves elements of traditional Anishinaabe storytelling with contemporary realism to create a stylistically hybrid text that explores the hybridity of Indigenous identity. But in an article for the *Winnipeg Review*, poet Gwen Benaway, who is of Anishinaabe and Métis descent, writes, "What fascinates me about Simpson's work is not its Anishinaabe cultural roots, but its examination of intimacy and love." How do narratives about Indigenous identity and narratives about love intersect in the book? What does Simpson suggest about the transformative power of love?

12. The book is subdivided into three distinct parts, respectively titled "*rebellion is on her way*," "*a witness on unkept-promise land*," and "*stealing back red bodies*." How does the book's tone shift between the three parts? Do you see an overarching narrative progression?

13. Simpson released an album of songs and spoken word pieces called *f(l)ight* as a companion piece to the book. Listen to some of Simpson's audio versions of songs that appear in *This Accident of Being Lost* (<https://leannesimpson.bandcamp.com/album/f-l-ight>) and discuss how they add to or change your interpretations of the written pieces.