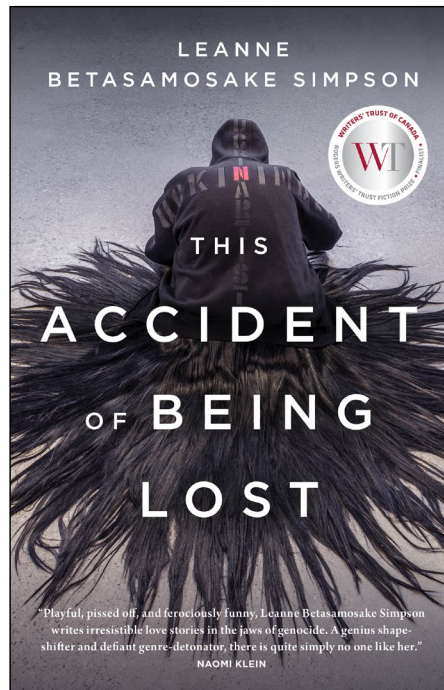




GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

This Accident of Being Lost Songs and Stories

Written by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson



A knife-sharp collection of stories and songs from award-winning Nishnaabeg storyteller and writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson that rebirths a decolonized reality, one that circles in and out of time and resists dominant narratives or comfortable categorization.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Young Adult / Grade 9 and up

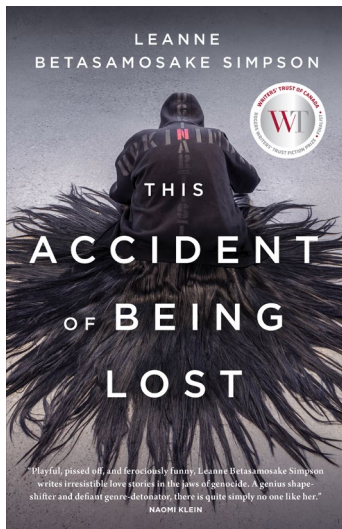
FICTION / Short Stories / Indigenous

8.5 x 5.5 / 152 pages

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

This Accident of Being Lost is the knife-sharp collection of stories and songs from award-winning Nishnaabeg storyteller and writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. These visionary pieces build upon Simpson’s powerful use of the fragment as a tool for intervention in her critically acclaimed collection *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Provocateur and poet, she continually rebirths a decolonized reality, one that circles in and out of time and resists dominant narratives or comfortable categorization. A crow watches over a deer addicted to road salt; Lake Ontario floods Toronto to remake the world while texting “ARE THEY GETTING IT?”; lovers visit the last remaining corner of the boreal forest; three comrades guerrilla-tap maples in an upper middle-class neighborhood; and Kwe gets her firearms license in rural Ontario. Blending elements of Nishnaabeg storytelling, science fiction, contemporary realism and the lyric voice, *This Accident of Being Lost* burns with a quiet intensity, like a campfire in your backyard, challenging you to reconsider the world you thought you knew.

Music videos for four of the poems / songs in this book can be found at <http://www.leannesimpsonmusic.com/videos/>

Warning: This book contains explicit sexual content and explicit language. The topics and discussions in this book are suitable for adults

BEFORE READING

This book explores the following themes and topics:

- Decolonization
- Colonization
- Racism
- Indigeneity
- White privilege
- Indigenous land rights
- The Indian Act
- Relationships
- Queerness
- Gender / gender binary
- Environmental degradation
- Environmental conservation
- Climate change
- Free-verse poetry
- Fragment writing

OVERALL ACTIVITIES

WRITING ELEMENTS AND CONVENTIONS

Throughout the book, the author chooses not to use conventions and elements of traditional writing by using lowercase letters, incomplete sentences, improper phrasing, etc. What do you believe the author's purpose is for not following traditional writing conventions? How does this technique influence how the reader feels? (Like the entire text, it is a resistance to colonization, conformity, heterosexuality, white privilege and patriarchy.)

The author drew on Nishnaabeg aesthetics and practices of storytelling when writing these poems, rather than western literary theory. The poems can be interpreted as using literary devices like stream of consciousness and free-verse poetry, as outlined below, but it is important to consider that this was not the author's intention, and that the book was written for an Indigenous audience first. When discussing the following literary devices, how does what you know about authorial intent and considerations around audiences influence how you read these poems?

For more from the author about writing for an Indigenous audience first, read this interview by Jessica Johns in *Room Magazine*:

<https://roommagazine.com/in-conversation-with-leanne-betasamosake-simpson/>

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The author uses stream of consciousness to write some parts of the book, including the following sections:

- under your always light
- A Few Good Reasons to Wear a Long Skirt
- Airplane Mode

Have students research “stream of consciousness” writing and its characteristics and use. Ask students to consider why the author uses this writing style for these sections of the book. How is stream of consciousness effective in expressing the author’s point or message?

Have students attempt a piece of stream-of-consciousness writing. Discuss as a class the differences between this and other types of writing. Is it easier or more difficult? Why or why not? What are the challenges?

FREE-VERSE POETRY

Throughout the book, the author uses free-verse poetry. Have students investigate the elements of free-verse poetry. Why do you think the author chose this style of poetry? What are the advantages? How does the lack of other poetry elements (e.g., rhyme, meter, tempo, etc.) lend meaning to the poems? Have students support their answers with examples from the book.

After reading some or all of the poems from the book, ask students to construct their own free-verse poems. You may want to have students publish their poems or share them with the whole class or in small groups. (Cross-Curricular Connection: Drama / Performance)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Throughout the book, the author uses a form of writing that represents text messaging. She also uses multiple references to social media, its use and its place in relationships and society. One selection (pages 65–68) includes Lake Ontario texting the author about how it is treated.

Ask students: Why do you think the author uses these references to social media throughout the book? What does it represent about society? About relationships? Answers can be given as part of a class discussion or as a writing assignment.

VOCABULARY

Extended metaphor: The term extended metaphor refers to a comparison between two unlike things that continues throughout a series of sentences in a paragraph, or lines in a poem. It is often comprised of more than one sentence and sometimes consists of a full paragraph.

Analogy: An analogy is a literary device that creates a relationship based on parallels or connections between two ideas. By establishing this relationship, the new idea is introduced through a familiar comparison, thus making the new concept easier to grasp.

Racism: prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

Colonialism: the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the Indigenous people of an area.

Decolonization: to free from colonial status or power.

Personification: the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something nonhuman, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form.

Stream of consciousness: a literary style in which a character's thoughts, feelings and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue. James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust are among its notable early exponents.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be used in a multitude of ways: for discussions as a whole class, in small groups or in pairs; as writing prompts for essays, journaling and opinion pieces; or for creating stories, songs, poems and dramatic representations.

PLIGHT (PAGE 5)

- Why does the author set “Plight” in a suburban neighborhood?
- Why do the main characters inform the white people in the suburb before tapping the trees?
- What imagery does the author use to express indigeneity, racism or colonialism?

22.5 MINUTES (PAGE 11)

- Why does the main character not want to think about the other person for 45 minutes?
- The author’s topics appear random. What do they tell you about the character? What issues arise within the “topics”?
- How does the author reason that 45 minutes is really 22.5? Why?

COFFEE (PAGE 21)

- On page 21, what does the author mean by “I don’t think you’re a robot”? Why is this important to the author?
- What does the author imply by the phrases “Its all good. It’s going to be good. Trust this. You’ve got me”?
- What is the character afraid of in this section?

I AM GRAFFITI (PAGE 25)

- What is the graffiti an analogy or metaphor for?

DOING THE RIGHT THING (PAGE 27)

- What is the title an analogy for? How is this evidenced in the text?
- How does the character situate herself in the gun course?
- How does the author portray racism and colonialism through the image of the instructor?

BROWN AGAINST BLUE (PAGE 35)

- What does the phrase “We’re losing fast and we all know it” mean?
- What is the thing that the speaker loves? How and when do you first know?
- Why does the author mix her lover and the moose in the narrative?

SEEING THROUGH THE END OF THE WORLD (PAGE 43)

- Who is the author speaking to?
- On page 44, what does the phrase “The malignancy coursing through my veins would also scare you” foreshadow?
- On page 45, why does the author say, “We sustained it through distance and time and struggle and persistence”? Who is she referring to?

AKIDEN BOREAL (PAGE 49)

- What is the importance of setting the love scene within the boreal forest?
- How does it symbolize loss and sustainability simultaneously?

LEANING IN (PAGE 57)

- Who is the author thinking about and talking to in this section?
- On page 58, what does the phrase “They want all of the land” reference? Why does the author use it here?

BIG WATER (PAGE 65)

- Why does the author choose to have the lake “text” her?
- What literary element does the author employ in this section? (Personification.) Why do you think the author chooses to do this?

HOW TO STEAL A CANOE (PAGE 69)

- What does the warehouse of stolen canoes represent?
- What is stealing canoes a metaphor for?

CIRCLES UPON CIRCLES (PAGE 75)

- The author continually addresses someone she refers to as “her” in this section. Who is the author talking to? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

UNSUBSTANTIATED HEALTH BENEFITS (PAGE 81)

- What is the narrator insecure about? What is she afraid of?
- How is the text structured to create a distraction from the author’s purpose?

TIDY BUN (PAGE 85)

- What is it, do you believe, that the narrator dislikes about the character Ivory?
- On page 88, what is the statement “We are in hostile tidy-bun territory without a guidebook or proper supplies or training” an extended metaphor for?

SELFIE (PAGE 91)

- What is the narrator trying to say about relationships and social media? Is it effective?

PRETENDING FEARLESS (PAGE 95)

- Discuss the implications and extended metaphor of the following passage, on page 95:
- “We know you feel pity because the largest city in the country is on top of us, thrusting in and out like it’s our benevolent Wiindigo, fucking us in time to our screams like it’s death metal. Like our loss is tragic and we are small people. Like golf courses and dreamcatchers and selling out are all we have left.”
- The author uses the title “Pretending Fearless” for this section. What is the author pretending to be fearless about?

AIRPLANE MODE (PAGE 99)

- Why do you think the author uses texting as the format for the section? What does it add to the passage?
- What is “Airplane Mode” a metaphor for?

THERE ARE TWO THIEVES IN THIS TENT FRAME (PAGE 105)

- What are the “two thieves” stealing back?
- On page 105, what is the author referring to in the phrase “we are carrying the hard parts, but they don’t weigh us down”?

SITUATION UPDATE (PAGE 107)

This section is a series of passages the author wrote during the 2013 Alberta floods. Some of the issues/themes presented here include the following:

- Lack of support/recognition for remote First Nations communities
- Climate change
- Environmental degradation
- White privilege

Have students choose one theme/issue and explain how the author addresses it in the section. Ask them to use evidence from the text to support their ideas. You may need to give context, by researching the 2013 Alberta floods, before reading this section and exploring the themes.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer, scholar, and musician, and is a member of Alderville First Nation. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Manitoba and has lectured at universities across Canada. She is the author of three previous books, including *Islands of Decolonial Love*, and the editor of three anthologies. She has released two albums, including *f(l)ight*, which is a companion piece to this collection.