



The Game of Silence

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Her name is Omakayas, or Little Frog, because her first step was a hop, and she lives on an island in Lake Superior. One day in 1850, Omakayas's island is visited by a group of mysterious people. From them, she learns that the chimookomanag, or white people, want Omakayas and her people to leave their island and move farther west.

That day, Omakayas realizes that something so valuable, so important that she never knew she had it in the first place, could be in danger: Her way of life. Her home.

The Game of Silence Details

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Melody says

I found it interesting that Erdrich came back to these people so many years later (in real time, I mean- The Birchbark House was written in 1999). I'm glad she did. I enjoyed this one perhaps more than the first- I think Erdrich does a fabulous job of showing how the changes come to the family without telling us a thing. It's all seen quite authentically through the eyes of Omaykayas, and the baggage I bring to what she sees is emphatically my own.

I love Omaykayas' family. Her interactions with her annoying little brother Pinch are spot-on. I really dig the ebb and flow of emotions that run through this family- Yellow Kettle boils over with a certain regularity, and everyone copes. DeyDey vanishes and reappears, and it's just the way things are.

My own childhood was steeped in Manifest Destiny and the Little House books. I wish I'd had these books instead. Though I'd probably have colored my face with charcoal and wandered off into the woods for a week.

Hykel says

An engaging & interesting story. It was hard to put down. So glad there are lots more books to the series, I'm super attached to these characters.

Jennifer Mencarini says

I very much enjoyed reading The Game of Silence, but I think it is important to consider that much of what is revealed (or not revealed) depends on the viewpoint of the person telling the story. It is certainly important to acknowledge Erdrich's Native American heritage and the importance of minority storytellers contributing to the "canon," for lack of a better word. But should we not also consider what does not get said? Except for Two Strike and Pinch, who are children and are therefore expected to misbehave on occasion, there are no Native American adults who behave less than nobly in the story. If we accept Erdrich's version of life among the Anishinabeg, everyone gets along, newcomers are always accepted with open arms, resources are always shared and distributed equally, and the white settlers (including the priest and Break-Apart Girl) are treated with nothing but kindness and even a winking acceptance of their "white" ways. Nokomis, Deydey, and Old Tallow are benevolent, loving leaders who nurture Omakayas and the other members of the community without strife or conflict. I felt this was somewhat unrealistic. Native Americans are human. That means they make mistakes and bad decisions, they are not always kind or unselfish, and they are not universally supportive and understanding parents. I say all of this to suggest that perhaps, in attempting to counteract the negative stereotypes contained in so many of the stories written about Native Americans, Erdrich went overboard in attempting to depict them positively, and in doing so sacrificed some of the realism necessary to effectuate acceptance and understanding by non-Native American readers.

The inclusion of Old Tallow, who acknowledges her inability to remain in a marital relationship but survives and thrives on her own, contributes to the message that girls are important and contribute to the community in significant ways. I also appreciated Erdrich's subtle inclusion of environmental issues, such as the

importance of conserving natural resources and recycling available materials rather than throwing them away. These messages were subtle, and not "preachy," but were communicated in ways that younger readers can appreciate and understand.

Kristen says

In this second book in the Birchbark House series, Omakayas and her family are still living on what is now known as Madeline Island in Wisconsin, but they begin to feel pushed westward. The "game of silence" for which the book is named is a game the children play where they must remain silent during long, serious discussions among grown ups, or forfeit a delectable prize like a lump of maple sugar, a new toy, or lovely new beads. The children play the game of silence several times over the course of the book, as the adults try to decide how to respond to these threats to their way of life.

This book, like the last, follows the family over the course of one year, but with some new additions: early in the book, distant family in the east flee settler violence with little but their lives, and they join Omakayas as her family moves from maple sugar camp to the birchbark house near their gardens, then to the fish camp, then the ricing camp, and finally into town for the winter. As before, Omakayas' play and work with her siblings and cousins is a jolly romp with a strong sense of place. More white people have arrived in the area, and we meet the Break Apart Girl (so called because the corset she wears makes her look like she could snap in half) and the priest who hopes to win converts.

By the end of the book, Omakayas has a dream of the course of her life, which makes clear that to survive, her family must leave their homeland and move farther west. We leave the characters as the children are playing an intense version of the game of silence, traveling into hostile Bwanag (Dakota) land in search of a new home.

LibraryCin says

3.5 stars

This is a children's book, a continuation of "The Birchbark House". It is 1850 and Omakayas is now 9-years old. This book goes through another year in her life, all four seasons. In the spring, Omakayas, her family, and the other Ojibwe discover that they are being told by the white people that they need to leave. They send out four men to find out what happened, why they must leave – did they break the treaty? While the four men are gone, Omakayas learns about medicines from her grandmother, while her cousin, Two Strikes, though a girl, wants to build her own little army made up of the boys. And, there is more day-to-day stuff happening, as well.

I enjoyed this. Not quite as much as "The Birchbark House", but it was still enjoyable and I will continue the series. There are very nice illustrations, and some well-done descriptions of how things were done (similar to the first book). I also appreciated the prologue, which was a bit of a recap, as it's been a few years since I read "Birchbark House".

Young Adult Historical Vault says

This is my least favourite of the first three Birchbark House books, but that doesn't at all mean it's bad. It's wonderfully written--Louise Erdrich has a true genius with words--but this one is much more quietly told than the first and third books. It's bursting with wonderful details, and despite of the terribly depressing subject matter, it's somehow uplifting at the same time.

For my full review including spoilers, check it out at Young Adult Historical Vault
<https://yahistoricalvault.com/2017/07...>

Zoë says

Although I read this book at least once as a child, I had forgotten most of it. It is still excellent!! These are labeled as children's books but anyone should feel comfortable reading them, as they are pertinent and captivating at any age.

Mary says

This is a beautiful continuation to The Birchbark House, set in the 1850s, that tells the story of Omakayas and her Objibwe family. Erdrich does a wonderful job telling a bittersweet story of a loving family whose way of life is about to change dramatically. A culturally rich middle grade story that adds much depth to a lesser known historical viewpoint.

Carolynne says

Omakayas begins to learn her strengths and abilities as Nokomis (her grandmother) teaches her about healing plants, and she begins to have prophetic dreams. The most important dream is one in which she sees her family leaving their beloved Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker to try to find living space in the lands occupied by the Dakota Indians. On this journey, the Game of Silence becomes a matter of life or death. This is a fitting sequel to Erdrich's *The Birchbark House*. Fans of the Little House books will probably enjoy these books told from the Anishabe (Ojibwe) point of view.

Pete says

Erdrich just writes so beautifully. Even in a "kids book", she infuses beautiful prose, and does not hold back or dumb things down. But more importantly, the ideas, the paradigms about life, are complex and nuanced, giving all readers a glimpse of this incredible Ojibwe world.

Caroline Daniel says

- o Summary: This book talks about a little girl name Omakayas who is a native american. She loves the life she lives and then one day realizes that it can all be taken away from her. The white people come and try to take over her tribes land and she is scared of what is to come.
- o Grade level: 5th
- o Appropriate classroom use: When learning about all the things that happened to the native americans. This can be read in a reading class at the same time that they are learning about native americans in their history class.
- o Individual students who might benefit from reading: students who are unaware of the things that native americans went through
- o Small group use: Student can talk about how they would have felt if they were the little girl in the book.
- o Whole class use: Will read at the same time that history is teaching a similar lesson and test over comprehension of the book as a whole.
- o Related books in genre/subject or content area: Crossing Bok Chitto
- o Multimedia connections available: None of this book

Brenna says

I bought the first book in this series for my 10 year old daughter. One day she left it in the bathroom and I happened to pick it up. Once in hand, I could scarcely put it back down. I loved how true-to-life these stories are. Unlike many children's books about Native American life, the author doesn't portray it as one long camping trip. She doesn't tiptoe around the hardships they encountered. As much as I don't want to ache and cry over the ordeals they suffered, the realism of this story is part of it's beauty. It is the perfect balance of history and fiction. It is a perfect glimpse into what life was like for them, seen through the eyes of a child's experiences and emotions.

Michael says

The enthralling, beguiling tale of the coming of age of an Ojibwe girl, Omakayas (Little Frog) in northern Minnesota in the 1850's was a fine ?read? by audiobook. It is a sequel to The Birchbark House. Though targeted to young adults, I found the portrayal of the rhythms of life in a tribal clan on an island in Lake Superior plenty satisfying enough to recommend to any adult reader. The girl telling the story is on a path of excellence in both crafts and snare-trapping and fishing, but is recognized for her prospects of becoming a spiritual leader. Her frequent nemeses include her unruly young brother and another girl who bullies her but has her respect and jealousy over her warrior and hunting skills. Her love for certain elders leads her to learn much about canoe building, clothing making, meat and fish drying, vision quests, and various rituals. The ?Game of Silence? of the title is a wonderful ritual where kids are rewarded for keeping quiet while the elders convene discussions--the fun of it lies in all the faces and antics the youth go through to make each break silence in laughter or anger. The slice of life portrayed in the tale is a cherishing of what was doomed to largely be lost. The preciousness and fragility of this way of life is a major current in the mind of our hero, as conflicts with white settlers and Army policies are moving toward removal of the tribe?

Laurie says

I love these books. They have this special, warm place in my heart and it makes me feel more at peace just to read them. Sigh.

There is so much good in here. The introduction of the Angry One. Two Strike's transformation into a warrior. Omakayas' transformation into a healer. The continued presence of strong, tough women in the shape of the grandmother, mother, and Old Tallow. The love story of Fishtail and Angeline. The characters are so beautifully represented you feel like you know them...or if not, that you want to.

As with "The Birchbark House", I appreciate that Erdrich does not back off of the difficulties that were experienced by the early Native people because the main audience for this series is children. There are real stakes to the world that these people are living in, and the outcome for dark situations is often not positive. This is a brave, writerly move in a country that often wants to rewrite the history of its Native people in order to make the story of our past more "palatable" to mainstream audiences.

The "About the Author" portion of this book says that Erdrich plans to write seven more of these stories, and I have the next three on my shelf waiting to be read. When it's complete, I believe this series will stand out among the classics of children's historical literature. And as a Native girl that will one day have Native girls of her own, that makes me so happy.

Kilian Metcalf says

I didn't realize that this is a children's book. I enjoyed it as an adult and was sorry when it ended. The illustrations did not display well on my Kindle, but aside from this, the story was highly enjoyable. A young girl's memories of hard times for her tribe form the heart of her story. Happy in her island home, she and her family are forced to leave it behind due to pressure from the white people. Aside from this major trouble, her life is full of happy events and minor annoyance. She enjoys making friends, growing up, learning her own gifts, and how she fits in with the tribe.

I grew up in the Southwest, and my knowledge of Native Americans has been limited to the tribes of California, Arizona, and New Mexico. It was a real treat to learn about another tribe, this time the Ojibway.
