

Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for “Love Medicine” by Louise Erdrich
March 21, 2026

1. Some argue that Lulu Lamartine and Marie Kashpaw share the main character role, whereas others believe June Morissey is the protagonist. Who do you think is/are the main character(s) and why? Did you find yourself sympathizing with or liking some characters more than others? Who is the main antagonist?
2. “Love Medicine” deals extensively with the love/hate relationships between family members. What are some of the positive and negative types of familial bonds and how do these ties help explore the book’s themes? What does this novel suggest about the nature of families?
3. One theme of the novel is the unavoidable impact of the non-Indian world (for example, Catholicism, alcohol, intermarriages, the Vietnam War, capitalism, the legal system) on the Chippewa. How does interaction with outsiders affect specific characters? What does the novel suggest about the difficulties and consequences of dealing with a mixed world?
4. How important is our cultural identity to who we are and why is cultural identity so important in the novel? How do generational differences play out in the novel? Are characters punished or rewarded when they resist assimilation and try to protect and value the land?
5. As a novel-in-stories, Love Medicine does not have a traditional, linear plot with jumps between different points of view and in time between 1934 and 1984. Did you enjoy reading a novel with this format? How might the form’s emphasis on individual storytelling relate to the novel’s larger themes? How do retellings of key events shape the reader’s understanding of the overarching story?
6. Does the novel have a climax?
7. Erdrich is a poet as well as a novelist. Do you find evidence of a poetic sensibility and echoes of Chippewa oral tradition, in this novel? How does this influence the novel’s impact on you? Do you find some characters more poetically-voiced than others?
8. Is the Catholic presence in the novel a positive, a negative, or a neutral presence? Is Catholicism poison or medicine to the people? In what ways does Catholicism intersect with or conflict with Chippewa spirituality?
9. How is that love shown in the novel? Does love differ in kind or intensity from the love shown in non-Indian families? Are there any antilove characters? What exactly is “love medicine” and what is your opinion about the phrase’s use as the title?
10. At the end of the first subchapter, June Morissey “walked over it like water and came home,” and, at the end of the final subchapter, Lipsha decides to “cross the water, and bring her home.” Are they both going to the same place, or has the notion of “home” somehow changed in the course of the novel? Which characters are perpetually seeking home and which find home?

EXTRA CREDIT:

1. Did you read “The Tomahawk Factory,” a story originally not included in the original 1984 publication, added in the 1993 edition, and then moved to the addenda in the 2009 version because the author felt the story “interrupted the flow.” What is your opinion of the story and would you have left it in?

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2. Louise Erdrich author’s note in of the 2009 edition explains that she is “writing one long book in which the main chapters are also books” and that the characters in Love Medicine “live out their destinies” in these later novels. Have you read or do you plan to read any of the other books in the series? Does your opinion of the answer to “Love Medicine” having a climax change knowing Erdrich’s viewpoint?
- “Love Medicine“, 1984
 - “The Beet Queen“, 1986
 - “Tracks“, 1988
 - “The Bingo Palace“, 1994
 - “Tales of Buring Love“, 1996
 - “The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse“, 2001
 - “Four Souls“, 2005
 - “The Painted Drum“, 2005

SOURCES AND REFERENCES:

Three Student Guides to Louise Erdrich’s “Love Medicine” by Peter G. Beidler:
https://escholarship.org/content/qt7w77v9zj/qt7w77v9zj_noSplash_30a621cc746c93458dff399ac6355e02.pdf

National Endowment for the Arts Big Read Guide for “Love Medicine”:
<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Reader-Resources-LoveMedicine.pdf>

Tomaquag Museum in Partnership with the Native Heritage Series at Brown University and the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology Roundtable Discussion of Louise Erdrich's "Love Medicine": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pk0t7kFHKro>

Spark Notes Study Guide and Tools for “Love Medicine”:
<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/love-medicine/>

Harper Academic Teaching Guide:
<https://files.harpercollins.com/HarperAcademic/LoveMedicineTeachingGuide.pdf>

Discussion Questions for Love Medicine from the National Endowment of the Arts and HarperCollins: <https://galesburglibrary.org/main/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Love-Medicine-Discussion-Questions.pdf>