

Book Club Discussion Guide



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Five Little Indians

By Michelle Good

About the authors:

Michelle Good is of Cree ancestry, a descendent of the Battle River Cree and a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation. She has worked with indigenous organizations since she was a teenager and at forty decided to approach that work in a different way obtaining her law degree from UBC at 43. She has practiced law in the public and private sector since then, primarily advocating for Residential School Survivors.

She graduated from UBC with a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing MFA in 2014 where her novel *Five Little Indians* first started taking shape. Her poetry, and short stories have appeared in a number of publications. Her first novel, *Five Little Indians* won the HarperCollins/UBC Best New Fiction Prize and her poetry has been included in Best Canadian Poetry in Canada 2016 and Best of the Best Canadian Poetry in Canada 2017. Michelle is currently working on her second novel.

Source: Author's website (<https://www.michellegood.ca/biography.htm>)

About this book:

Taken from their families when they are very small and sent to a remote, church-run residential school, Kenny, Lucy, Clara, Howie and Maisie are barely out of childhood when they are finally released after years of detention.

Alone and without any skills, support or families, the teens find their way to the seedy and foreign world of Downtown Eastside Vancouver, where they cling together, striving to find a

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place of safety and belonging in a world that doesn't want them. The paths of the five friends cross and crisscross over the decades as they struggle to overcome, or at least forget, the trauma they endured during their years at the Mission.

Fuelled by rage and furious with God, Clara finds her way into the dangerous, highly charged world of the American Indian Movement. Maisie internalizes her pain and continually places herself in dangerous situations. Famous for his daring escapes from the school, Kenny can't stop running and moves restlessly from job to job—through fishing grounds, orchards and logging camps—trying to outrun his memories and his addiction. Lucy finds peace in motherhood and nurtures a secret compulsive disorder as she waits for Kenny to return to the life they once hoped to share together. After almost beating one of his tormentors to death, Howie serves time in prison, then tries once again to re-enter society and begin life anew.

With compassion and insight, *Five Little Indians* chronicles the desperate quest of these residential school survivors to come to terms with their past and, ultimately, find a way forward.

Source: Author's website (<https://www.michellegood.ca/published-works.htm>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think the author, Michelle Good, chose to depict the characters' lives after they left the school, and not during their time there?
2. Each character in the book shows us a different method of coping, healing, and living with the trauma inflicted by the Church and the Canadian government. Which character's story impacted you the most?

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3. How do you see the effects of the schools be felt throughout the victims' lives and generations after?
4. Did this book change the way you think about Residential Schools and its last effects in Canada? If so, how?
5. Michelle Good weaves the five stories together, and each chapter focuses on a different character. What did you think about the format and structure – how did it affect your experience of reading?
6. Have you read or watched other stories about the Residential School experience? Was Five Little Indians different or similar, and in what ways?

Source: Squamish Public Library (<https://squamishlibrary.ca/>)