

Book Club Discussion Guide



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Bad Cree

By Jessica Johns

About the author:

Jessica Johns is a queer nehiyaw aunty with English-Irish ancestry and a member of Sucker Creek First Nation. Her debut novel, *Bad Cree*, was shortlisted for the Amazon First Novel Award, won the MacEwan Book of the Year award, and is on the 2024 CBC Canada Reads longlist.

Her fiction, poetry, and nonfiction has been published in *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Glass Buffalo*, *CV2*, *SAD Magazine*, *Red Rising Magazine*, *Poetry is Dead*, *Bad Nudes*, *Grain*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Brick*, *Reissue*, *Maisonneuve*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Best Canadian Essays 2019*, among others. She has spoken at various literary and arts festivals such as The Bay Area Book Festival, WORD Vancouver, Vancouver Writers Fest, FOLD Festival, Victoria Festival of Authors, London's Literary and Creative Arts Festival, and Blue Metropolis.

Her visual art has been featured at the 2022 Rhubarb Festival, grunt gallery, and at Latitude 53.

Source: <https://jessicasjohns.com/>

About this book:

A haunting debut novel where dreams, family and spirits collide

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Mackenzie, a Cree millennial, wakes up in her one-bedroom Vancouver apartment clutching a pine bough she had been holding in her dream just moments earlier. When she blinks, it disappears. But she can still smell the sharp pine scent in the air, the nearest pine tree a thousand kilometres away in the far reaches of Treaty 8.

Mackenzie continues to accidentally bring back items from her dreams, dreams that are eerily similar to real memories of her older sister and Kokum before their untimely deaths. As Mackenzie's life spirals into a living nightmare—crows are following her around and she's getting texts from her dead sister on the other side—it becomes clear that these dreams have terrifying, real-life consequences. Desperate for help, Mackenzie returns to her mother, sister, cousin, and aunties in her small Alberta hometown. Together, they try to uncover what is haunting Mackenzie before something irrevocable happens to anyone else around her.

Haunting, fierce, an ode to female relations and the strength found in kinship, *Bad Cree* is a gripping, arresting debut by an unforgettable voice.

Source: <https://www.harpercollins.ca/9781443465489/bad-cree/>

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the book's title, *Bad Cree*, work in relation to its contents? If you could give the book a new title, what would it be?
2. Grief and loss are significant themes in *Bad Cree*. In what ways do the characters experience grief and how does that show up in the novel? Do you think this is an accurate portrayal of the different ways of dealing with loss?
3. Crows appear consistently throughout *Bad Cree*, so much so they are essentially their own characters. How do the appearance of the crows inform the mood of the novel? Does the mood they create when they appear change as the novel progresses?

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4. Bad Cree is told through the first-person perspective of Mackenzie. Because of this, we see how conflicted and guilt-ridden she feels about her return home after so many years. How would Mackenzie's return be viewed through the point of view of Cassidy, Tracey, and Loretta?
5. Dreams play a central and important role in Bad Cree. How do each family member's dreams differ? How do they connect? Why do they feel they couldn't confide in each other about them sooner?
6. The oilfield industry has changed the landscape of Mackenzie's homelands. In what ways do we see these changes manifest?
7. Discuss the ways in which Mackenzie's life changes based on where she is located: Vancouver, BC, and High Prairie, Alberta.
8. When she feels like she's messing up, Mackenzie asks her auntie "Am I a Bad Cree?" What do you think Mackenzie means by that? At what other points does the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" or "right" and "wrong" come up?
9. The author intentionally highlights the strength, love, and power of Indigenous women and femmes, particularly when they are protecting each other. How have the women or gender non-conforming people in your life shown up for you in the past?
10. If you were to go to The Stardust bar with the aunties, Cassidy, Tracey, and Mackenzie, what would be your go-to karaoke song?

Source: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/707009/bad-cree-by-jessica-johns/9780593467947/readers-guide/>