

Approved for use in English IV

Summary of the Work:

"In this beautiful first novel, set on the Flathead Reservation of Montana in the 1940s, Earling traces the youth and young adulthood of Louise White Elk and the men who try to win her heart and soul" (Library Journal). Louise and her lover Baptiste Yellow Knife dance a complex relationship of love, hate, jealousy, and old medicine. Louise stumbles in self-doubt, making destructive choices that lead her to pain and sorrow. Charlie Kicking Woman, the reservation cop, finds her irresistible, and so does Harvey Stoner, the rich white man who alternately treats and abuses her. Self-doubt leads Louise into more and more tragic situations; she becomes a victim powerless to stop her spiral into heartbreak, while the magic of traditional ways offers an underlying pattern of belief and action.

Dorothea Susag, author of *Roots and Branches*, states the following about Louise Yellow Elk in the unit she developed for the novel: "Louise makes her own choices and survives: where and how she'll live, what she'll value, and whom she'll trust and love. While others try to save or capture her, ultimately, she prevails because she frees and saves herself."

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Publishers Weekly 05/20/02
 Library Journal 5/01/02
 Choice 12/01/02
 Multicultural Review 12/01/02
 Kliatt 07/01/03
 Booklist 06/01/02

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Perma Red is for mature readers, for scenes of violence and sexuality. Yet in bravely depicting the hostile though beautiful world between the old ways and the new, Earling gives the reader rare insights into the Native American condition today.

Rationale

Perma Red gives the reader a portrait of the stark realities of life on the reservation. Clinging to alcohol, men, and the old stories, Louise tries to fashion a good life for herself, but those who abuse and use her ensure her efforts are in vain. At once a portrait of problems on the reservation and a heartfelt statement of the beauty and truth in the Native American's traditions, the novel impacts the reader with its almost visceral tone of sorrow. For the mature reader to gain an insight into the depth of difficulty of those on the reservation is a moving and irreplaceable experience. As James Welch of the Blackfeet tribe, noted Montana author, said, "[The novel is] A startlingly spiritual novel of the lives and loves and heartbreak on a Montana Indian reservation. The characters, especially the strangely destructive loves, Louise and Baptiste, are so sharply drawn that they will bring tears to your eyes. And the landscape, the richly detailed backdrop against which these characters play out their roles, adds a dimension that borders on mythic. . . . Earling is a truly gifted writer, and *Perma Red* is a wonder-filled gift to all of us."

Noted Distinction:

- Western Writers Association Spur Award for Best Novel of the West in 2003
- The Mountain and Plains Bookseller Association Award
- WWA's Medicine Pipe Bearer Award for Best First Novel
- A WILLA Literary Award
- The American Book Award.
- Montana Book Award Honor Book
- Part of Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers

Readability:

- Lexile Score: Not available at this time
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2004

Connection to the Curriculum:

Louise White Elk as a character suffers in part because of mistreatment as a woman, and in part because of mistreatment as an Indian. This novel not only presents a study of the American Indian, but of prejudice at many levels. Debra Earling's prose - spare, deliberate, and stark - elevates the story to art, memorable and honest.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

Perma Red is often taught in connection with Native American studies.

Connections reviews how the book fulfills a curricular objective or how it provides insight for the students related to curriculum.