

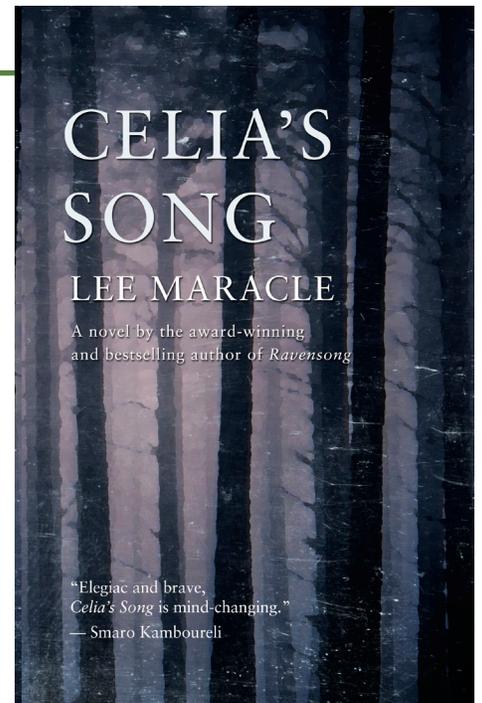
# READER'S GUIDE

## *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle

### INTRODUCING *Celia's Song*

Mink is a witness, a shape shifter, compelled to follow the story that has ensnared Celia and her village, on the West coast of Vancouver Island in Nuu'Chahlnuth territory. While Mink is visiting, a double-headed sea serpent falls off the house front during a fierce storm. The old snake, ostracized from the village decades earlier, has left his terrible influence on Amos, a residential school survivor. The occurrence signals the unfolding of an ordeal that pulls Celia out of her reveries and into the tragedy of her cousin's granddaughter.

Each one of Celia's family becomes involved in creating a greater solution than merely attending to her cousin's granddaughter. As secrets and misunderstandings are revealed, Celia's family can only begin to heal by returning to rituals and songs.



### IMPORTANT THEMES

#### *Family/Community*

Family and community are at the heart of *Celia's Song*. Celia, who often loses herself in visions, must find her way in her family after her son's suicide. As Steve and Stacey's romance develops, Steve must decide if he can accept her family and community without trying to change them. After Martha's granddaughter is brutalized, the family must come together to heal her.

#### *Ritual and Belief*

At the heart of the novel is the importance of ritual and belief. The new bones rage at being forgotten—left without the rituals that would see them buried and allow them to move on to their final resting place. The two-headed serpent, no longer appeased by ritual, spreads chaos throughout the village. Jacob must overcome his instinctive dismissal of belief to find his song and reclaim the rituals of his birthright. Judy and Steve must let go of their Western ideas of medicine and law to embrace the healing of the longhouse.

#### *Identity*

Characters throughout the story struggle with their identity. Celia has a hard time accepting that she is a seer, calling her visions "hallucinations" or "daydreams," even as she sees Jacob developing the same abilities. Jacob worries about his impulse for violence and, following his uncle's advice, takes a trip into the mountains to find out who he is. Stella has lost herself in drink and sex. Steve is caught between his love for Stacey and his whiteness, which often prevents him from understanding her or her family. Each Alice — Gramma Alice, the first Alice, and Celia's cousin Alice — provides wisdom to the family through ceremony, poetry, and song.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. At the beginning of the novel, four scientists debate about tests, knowledge, and myth. What do you make of their arguments, and what do you think the novel is trying to say about belief and truth?
2. Mink is present only as a witness to the events of the story. What do you believe is the purpose of this witnessing, in both a spiritual and literary sense?
3. Ned argues that the vote destroyed the community because it stopped talking, which stopped trusting. Do you agree with him? How does talking or not talking function throughout the rest of the novel?
4. What does Jacob see at the longhouse and how does his discussion with Jim and Ned help him start to understand it?
5. Throughout the novel, Maracle juxtaposes a white perspective with an Indigenous perspective on matters such as law, medicine, relationships, and religion. How do these perspectives clash and what do they reveal about the effects of colonialism?
6. Traditional knowledge in the novel is passed down to new generations by women: Gramma Alice, the first Alice, and Momma. Discuss the different women in the novel and how they express their knowledge.
7. At the beginning of Chapter 14, Gramma Alice says “Something has to die before something can be born.” What is she referring to?
8. After the smokehouse is built, how do the RCMP and townspeople react to the return of Sto:lo rituals?



### ABOUT LEE

Lee Maracle is a member of the Sto:Lo nation. She was born in Vancouver and grew up on the North Shore. She is the author of the critically acclaimed novels *Ravensong* and *Daughters Are Forever*. The mother of four and grandmother of seven, Maracle is currently an instructor at the University of Toronto, the Traditional Teacher for First Nation's House, and instructor with the Centre for Indigenous Theatre and the S.A.G.E. (Support for Aboriginal Graduate Education). She is also a writing instructor at the Banff Centre for the Arts. In 2009, Maracle received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from St. Thomas University. Maracle recently received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for her work promoting writing among Aboriginal Youth, and is 2014 finalist for the Ontario Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts.