

# READERS' GUIDE

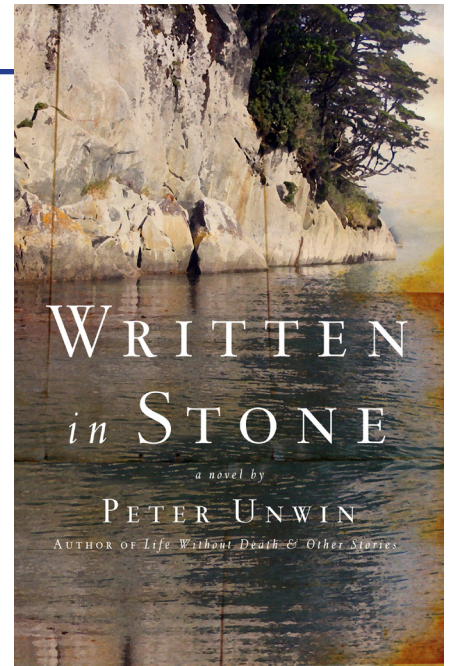
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*Written in Stone* by Peter Unwin

## INTRODUCING *Written in Stone*

Paul Prescott's desire to catalogue and comprehend the Aboriginal rock paintings of the Canadian Shield is told through the eyes of the woman he loves, and who, for her own reasons, accompanies him on his travels to the deep north. Her journeys with her husband, and then alone, returning to the north shore of Lake Superior to commend his ashes to the water, draw her deeper into a history that, while foreign to them both, seems to offer a meaningful alternative to a world that has gone wrong.

Peter Unwin turns his unique talents to a story that lies at the heart of this country and to the crucial issue of our times. *Written in Stone* maps the exhilarating and ultimately tragic consequences of one man's commitment to the land of his birth, a land whose deep and unwritten past is outside the reach of his understanding. *Written in Stone* goes beyond the surface acknowledgments of settler impacts, and exists on the border of two solitudes, where the known and unknown cannot be separated, where mythology and reality are one, and where an old and inaccessible knowledge holds the means to a possible reconciliation.



## IMPORTANT THEMES

*History* – “The paintings, Paul had always insisted. The paintings on the rock. They were the record, a living record.” (Chapter 32). Paul and Linda are both captivated by different forms of historic records. These records — the pictographs and the Dictionary of Canadian Biography — shape the way they view Canadian history.

*Wisdom* – Paul is attempting to know the Indigenous reality of the land in which he lives. He is not Native, but he is not afraid of what is Native, and he seeks that understanding for himself. He seeks to understand Canada deeply, and understands that any such knowledge absolutely must include an understanding of the Native.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Paul's experience of the Indigenous petroglyphs inform his understanding of history and shape his desire for reconciling what he learned through formal education with what he experiences on the north shore of Lake Superior?

2. Discuss the role of Canadian history in the novel. How do the petroglyphs fit into it? How does the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* fit into it?

3. Think about your own education in the history of Canada. Where in time did your education begin? Were you taught anything about pre-settler Native history?

4. How has your education in Canadian history shaped your understanding of the country?

5. Paul, a non-Native, is trying to deeply know his country, to understand its full history and how that history has affected people today. What is standing in his way?

6. Do you believe it's possible that the mythologies, the histories and the dreams of all those who have come before us, may yet inhabit the rock, the water, and the very land of Canada itself?

7. Paul seeks formally to discover those mythologies, histories, and dreams, to hear and see them for himself. Linda, however, seems, in some ways, to be already intuitively aware of this presence. Would you agree? Why or why not?

8. Over the course of the novel, two different churches come to a drastic end. What role does the church play physically and metaphorically?

9. Does the destruction of the two churches suggest something about the world that Linda and Paul inhabit? What structures do they have in place to guide their lives?

10. The characters make various journeys in the novel, physically and mentally. What was your favourite journey? Why?



### ABOUT PETER

Peter Unwin is the author of ten books, including his novel *Searching for Petronius Totem*, as well as many short stories, essays, and poems. His short story collection *Life Without Death* was shortlisted for the 2014 Trillium Book Award, and his poetry collection *When We Were Old*, was a Relit Award finalist. He is currently pursuing post-graduate work at York University.