



## Makoons

*Louise Erdrich*

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## **Makoons** Louise Erdrich

In the sequel to *Chickadee*, acclaimed author Louise Erdrich continues her award-winning Birchbark House series with the story of an Ojibwe family in nineteenth-century America.

Named for the Ojibwe word for little bear, Makoons and his twin, Chickadee, have traveled with their family to the Great Plains of Dakota Territory. There they must learn to become buffalo hunters and once again help their people make a home in a new land. But Makoons has had a vision that foretells great challenges—challenges that his family may not be able to overcome.

Based on Louise Erdrich's own family history, this fifth book in the series features black-and-white interior illustrations, a note from the author about her research, as well as a map and glossary of Ojibwe terms.

## **Makoons Details**

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Author : Louise Erdrich

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## From Reader Review Makoons for online ebook

### Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

I don't usually read a first book in a series and then jump the fifth book, but I'm afraid that is exactly what I've done with The Birchbark House series. But actually, it really didn't matter. Louise Erdrich is such a skillful writer that I found all the background information I needed to understand Makoons without having read Books 2, 3 and 4, while still making me want to read those three books.

Continuing the story of Omakayas, now married, and her Ojibwe family, it is 1866 and the family has moved west, living on the Great Plains of the Dakota Territory. As one of her 8-year-old twin sons, Makoons, recovers from an illness, he has a vision of what is to come - a vision that is filled with joy but also with sadness.

Away from their beloved river in Western Minnesota, there is no longer a need for canoes, and horses have become the passion of Makoons and twin brother Chickadee. Together, and they do everything together, they practice riding and hunting in anticipation of the day they can join the men in a real buffalo hunt.

After helping to prepare for and then witnessing their first hunt, the two boys find and adopt a young buffalo calf left behind as the adults buffalos fled their hunters. The young calf attaches itself to the twins and follows them wherever they go, even enjoying some of the peppermint candy they trade rabbit skins for. Gradually, the two boys began to pay attention and imitate the "language" of their "little brother" as they care for him.

So when the buffalo herds seem to simply vanish from the plains in thin air, and the Ojibwe begin to feel desperate and despairing, their father, Animikiins, convinces Makoons and Chickadee to try to call the animals back using the "language" they have "learned" from their calf. If it doesn't work, their small clan of Ojibwe will be faced with starvation and forced to move on. And though the buffalo return this time, it is clear they are moving west as the land becomes more and more populated by white settlers.

Once again, Omakayas and her family decide to move further west as well, to a place called Turtle Mountain, leaving behind her beloved sister Angeline and her husband Fishtail and their adopted young daughter Opichi.

As the joys and sorrows of Makoons vision play out, the family that readers have come to know and love face each challenge with strength, sorrow and some laughs. Makoons and Chickadee are two delightful characters, full of 8 year-old mischief, but kind and already sensitive to the world around them. Nokomis, the boy's great-grandmother, now quite old, plants a garden to help the family and spends her last days trying to keep the always hungry buffalo calf from eating it all; Yellow Kettel, their grandmother, is just a grouchy as ever; Deydey, their grandfather, is getting up in years and spends time with Nokomis but still makes the best bows and arrows for his grandsons, and continues play an important part in the daily life of the Ojibwe, though to a lesser extent.

All of this makes Makoons feels like a transition book, focusing on a younger generation, with Omakayas the bridge between the older and younger, and reflecting the changes coming in the times they are living in.

The life of the Ojibwe is described in detail, as they hunt, skin, and prepare food for the winter, when it becomes scare to find. Nothing is done without acknowledging the buffalo, called the "generous ones" for providing what is needed and nothing goes to waste. To waste what the buffalo give would be a sacrilege. But while Louise Erdrich depicts the very deep connection to the natural world that the Ojibwe clearly feel,

she also shows how it is eroding as the modern world impinges more and more on their daily lives.

Makoons (meaning little bear in Ojibwe) is written in Erdrich's same lyrical prose that is so familiar now. She has also done the black and white spot illustrations that appear throughout the book. It amazes me how Erdrich can get some much into a story using such simple, straightforward language. There are Ojibwe words used throughout, but there is a glossary and pronunciation guide in the back matter to help readers.

Erdrich really knows how to craft her novels so that there is, like Makoons vision, a nice balance between joy and sorrow. There are, of course, the hard times and survival of this Ojibwe clan, there is the sadness as loved ones pass away, but there are also the endearing antics of Makoons and Chickadee. And for real comic relief, there are the lovesick antics of the overly vain Gichi Noodin, who is so smitten with Omakayas's adopted daughter, Zozie that he seems to do nothing but make a fool of himself whenever he tries to impress her.

Whether you have followed the lives of Omakayas and her clan from the beginning or whether Makoons is your first introduction to these wonderful multigenerational characters, I can't recommend them highly enough.

This book is recommended for readers age 8+

This book was an EARC received from Edelweiss/Above the Treeline

This review was originally posted on Makoons

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## **Mary says**

For some reason, the Birchbark House series never appealed to me, so I hadn't read it. Well that has changed! This 5th volume in the series is so delightful that I'm headed back to vol. 1! The family was so warm and wonderful and I never expected the humor that brought great big smiles from me.

quotes:

When Two Strike tries to get a horse (Fly) who lost her foal to nurse an orphaned sheep:

"The sad mare bent around to put her soft nose to the lamb. She knew something was not right. She pulled away suspicious. But the lamb trotted forward, nuzzled her, insisted on nursing. Fly stared in consternation. She looked at the humans, at Two Strike, who stood by anxiously, wringing her hands. Fly's expression was almost comical. What is happening she seemed to say with her shocked eyes, startled ears and flaring velvet nostrils. She took a final look down, at the sinister baby. Oh well, she seemed to shrug. Then she put her head down to crop grass as the lamb drank and drank." pp. 31-32.

Then, as if poor Fly weren't confused enough, an orphaned buffalo calf befriends the boys and the calf is brought to Fly to mother as well:

"Staked in the grass, Fly was grazing, closely followed by Two Strike's lamb. The hungry calf trotted up to Fly and knew exactly what to do. Fly snorted, threw her head around and stared in shocked disgust at her new baby. First that curly thing! Now this square-headed thing! My, she seemed to think, my babies are ugly! The calf was just old enough to chew grass, but needed to be with a mother. Right there, it adopted Fly by affectionately banging its head against her. What is happening now? her eyes seemed to say. Then she

shrugged and settled back into eating, as if to say, Well, I love them anyway. From now on it would be a battle for Fly's attention between the buffalo calf and the lamb. They weren't very good at taking turns." p. 63

"Zozie was riding Whirlwind because Makoons was riding Angeline's horse, Fly. He walked Fly slowly, behind the rest of the trailing camp. She was followed by the lamb and baby buffalo. Both trotted along, trusting and confident, on strong-boned legs. They seemed extremely fond of their mother." pp 74-75

Gichi Noodin also provides some comic relief! (p. 76 among others)

When speaking about her death some day, Old "Nokomis had said:

'I do not need a marker of my passage, for my creator knows where I am. I do not want anyone to cry. I lived a good life, my hair turned to snow, I saw my great-grandchildren, I grew my garden. That is all.' p. 127

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### **Jen says**

This is a novel of quiet strength. It tells beautifully of family life, of the cultural customs, of a buffalo hunt. It stands alone, but it is also intricately entwined with the books that have come before it in the series, and with the books that will follow. As this is the first I have read, I look forward to going back and reading the rest of the series.

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### **Martha says**

I loved this series.

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### **Ellen Tveit says**

This is the fifth in a five-book series. I loved the characters, the storytelling, the glimpses into Ojibwe language, culture and tradition, and moments in American history seen from the perspective of a Native person. Erdrich's beautiful drawings illustrate and enrich the stories.

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### **Kate says**

Excellent book. The illustrations were incredible and it was such a well written work of historic fiction, authentic, respectful and carefully crafted. I want to read the rest of the series now. Though, it was not difficult to follow even though I had not read the first four.

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### **Janice says**

Although this is the fifth book in the Birchbark House series, it's the first one I've read. It stands well alone, its characters and setting richly drawn. That said, I now want to read the other books in the series to meet the younger versions of characters that I grew to love, particularly Okamyas, Two Strike and Nokomis.

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## Mary says

Although part of the Birchbark House series, this powerful narrative about two brothers and their multigenerational family stands alone. Erdrich is a hypnotic storyteller. She brings the 19th century Ojibwe people living on the Great Plains of the Dakota Territory to life. Her narrative is authentic and compelling. This is a beautiful story with plenty of action, humor, and heartwarming relationships.

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## Laurie says

Even though this is the least of my favorite "Birchbark" books, I still give this four stars and count it as a must read.

This book suffers because of the inevitable comparison to "Chickadee", which is the story of the first of Omakayas' twins. Where Chickadee dives deeply into Chickadee's story and his own personal development, this book does not go as deep into what makes Makoons who he is. And a small thing - it felt like many of the Ojibwe words were left out of the glossary, which made me a little sad, because I had used the glossary frequently in the other books to look up meanings.

The beautiful elements that made the other books so lovely were still there though. The close-knit human family. A makeshift animal family consisting of a nursing horse a lamb and a buffalo calf. The intricate stories of survival (mostly based on the hunting and tracking of buffalo in this book.)

This is the most recent book in the "Birchbark" series, meaning I have to wait in anticipation for more. ::sigh::

I just love this world. It is beautiful and scary and totally captivating. Such a wonderful discovery.

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## Pete says

My family has loved reading these books together. Erdrich is able to paint such compelling portraits of family life together—through all its trials, tribulations, and successes. We anxiously await any additional books she writes for this series.

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## Karen says

Cute little book about twin Native American boys living in the plains in the 19th century. The twins are funny and endearing. The descriptions of everyday life was FASCINATING and illuminating. I began wishing all history books for adults were written like this. Sure, the history textbooks I teach out of show the bigger picture of how Mongol rule ended up killing 1/3 of Europe (black plague spread through trade routes), but I'd also be super crazy interested in a book that just lays out how they lived their every day lives as neatly as this book does. It goes into intricate detail about how you preserve buffalo meat, tan hides, make pemmican, grow crops, etc. I'm gonna be real, those were my favorite parts. All of it was good, though.

Definitely would recommend!

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## **Charles says**

### **Native American Little House**

Little House on the Prairie is, of course, a masterpiece. But it's not difficult for an author to make white pioneers come alive for their white ancestors.

This book makes a totally foreign culture come alive for this 21st century white guy in a compelling and enjoyable way.

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## **Betsy says**

They say these days you can't sell a novel for kids anymore without the book having some kind of "sequel potential". That's not really true, but there are a heck of a lot of series titles out there for the 7 to 12-year-old set, that's for sure. New series books for children are by their very definition sort of odd for kids, though. If you're an adult and you discover a new series, waiting a year or two for the next book to come out is a drop in the bucket. Years fly by for grown-ups. The wait may be mildly painful but it's not going to crush you. But series for kids? That's another matter entirely. Two years go by and the child has suddenly become an entirely different person. They may have switched their loyalties from realistic historical fiction to fantasy or science fiction or (heaven help us) romance even! It almost makes more sense just to hand them series that have already completed their runs, so that they can speed through them without breaking the spell. Almost makes more sense . . . but not quite. Not so long as there are series like "The Birchbark House Series" by Louise Erdrich. It is quite possibly the only historical fiction series currently underway for kids that has lasted as long as fourteen years and showing no sign of slowing down until it reaches its conclusion four books from now, Erdrich proves time and time again that she's capable of ensnaring new readers and engaging older ones without relying on magic, mysteries, or post-apocalyptic mayhem. And if she manages to grind under her heel a couple stereotypes about what a book about American Indians in the past is "supposed" to be (boring/serious/depressing) so much the better.

Chickadee is back, and not a second too soon. Had he been returned to his twin brother from his kidnapping any later, it's possible that Makoons would have died of the fever that has taken hold of his body. As it is, Chickadee nurses his brother back to health, but not before Makoons acquires terrifying visions of what is to come. Still, there's no time to dwell on that. The buffalo are on the move and his family and tribe are dedicated to sustaining themselves for the winter ahead. There are surprises along the way as well. A boasting braggart by the name of Gichi Noodin has joined the hunt, and his posturing and preening are as amusing to watch as his mistakes are vast. The tough as nails Two Strike has acquired a baby lamb and for reasons of her own is intent on raising it. And the twin brothers adopt a baby buffalo of their own, though they must protect it against continual harm. All the while the world is changing for Makoons and his family. Soon the buffalo will leave, more settlers will displace them, and three members of the family will leave, never to return. Fortunately, family sustains, and while the future may be bleak, the present has a lot of laughter and satisfaction waiting at the end of the day.

While I have read every single book in this series since it began (and I don't tend to follow any other series out there, except possibly Lockwood & Co.) I don't reread previous books when a new one comes out. I don't have to. Neither, I would argue, would your kids. Each entry in this series stands on its own two feet.

Erdrich doesn't spend inordinate amounts of time catching the reader up, but you still understand what's going on. And you just love these characters. The books are about family, but with *Makoons* I really felt the storyline was more about making your own family than the family you're born into. At the beginning of this book Makoons offers the dire prediction that he and his brother will be able to save their family members, but not all of them. Yet by the story's end, no matter what's happened, the family has technically only decreased by two people, because of the addition of another.

Erdrich has never been afraid of filling her books with a goodly smattering of death, dismemberment, and blood. I say that, but these do not feel like bloody books in the least. They have a gentleness about them that is remarkable. Because we are dealing with a tribe of American Indians (Ojibwe, specifically) in 1866, you expect this book to be like all the other ones out there. Is there a way to tell this story without lingering on the harm caused by the American government to Makoons, his brother, and his people? Makoons and his family always seem to be outrunning the worst of the American government's forces, but they can't run forever. Still, I think it's important that the books concentrate far more on their daily lives and loves and sorrows, only mentioning the bloodthirsty white settlers on occasion and when appropriate. It's almost as if the reader is being treated in the same way as Makoons and his brother. We're getting some of the picture but we're being spared its full bloody horror. That is not to say that this is a whitewashed narrative. It isn't at all. But it's nice that every book about American Indians of the past isn't exactly the same. They're allowed to be silly and to have jokes and fun moments too.

That humor begs a question of course. Question: When is it okay to laugh at a character in a middle grade novel these days? It's not a simple question. With a high concentration on books that promote kindness rather than bullying, laughing at any character, even a bad guy, is a tricky proposition. And that goes double if the person you're laughing at is technically on your side. Thank goodness for self-delusion. As long as a character refuses to be honest with him or herself, the reader is invited to ridicule them alongside the other characters. It may not be nice, but in the world of children's literature it's allowed. So meet Gichi Noodin, a pompous jackass of a man. This is the kind of guy who could give Narcissus lessons in self-esteem. He's utterly in love with his own good looks, skills, you name it. For this reason he's the Falstaff of the book (without the melancholy). He serves a very specific purpose in the book as the reader watches his rise, his fall, and his redemption. It's not very often that the butt of a book's jokes is given a chance to redeem himself, but Gichi Noodin does precisely that. That storyline is a small part of the book, smaller even than the tale of Two Strike's lamb, but I loved the larger repercussions. Even the butt of the joke can save the day, given the chance.

As with all her other books Erdrich does a E.L. Konigsburg and illustrates her own books (and she can even do horses – HORSES!). Her style is, as ever, reminiscent of Garth Williams' with soft graphite pencil renderings of characters and scenes. These are spotted throughout the chapters regularly, and combined with the simplicity of the writing they make the book completely appropriate bedtime reading for younger ages. The map at the beginning is particularly keen since it not only highlights the locations in each part of the story but also hints at future storylines to come. Of these pictures the sole flaw is the book jacket. You see the cover of this book is a touch on the misleading side since at no point in this story does Makoons ever attempt to feed any baby bears (a terrible idea, namesake or no). Best to warn literal minded kids from the start that that scene is not happening.

It is interesting that the name of this book is *Makoons* since Chickadee shares as much of the spotlight, if not a little more so, than his sickly brother. That said, it is Makoons who has the vision of the future, Makoons who offers the haunting prediction at the story's start, and Makoons who stares darkly into an unknown void at the end, alone in the misery he knows is certain to come. Makoons is the Cassandra of this story, his predictions never believed until they are too late. And yet, this isn't a sad or depressing book. The hope that emanates off the pages survives the buffalos' sad departure, the sickness that takes two beloved characters, and the knowledge that the only thing this family can count on in the future is change. But they have each other and they are bound together tightly. Even Pinch, that trickster of previous books, is acquiring an odd

wisdom and knowledge of his own that may serve the family well into the future. Folks often recommend these books as progressive alternatives to Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books, but that's doing them a disservice. Each one of these titles stands entirely on its own, in a world of its own making. This isn't some sad copy of Wilder's style but a wholly original series of its own making. The kid who starts down the road with this family is going to want to go with them until the end. Even if it takes another fourteen years. Even if they end up reading the last few books to their own children. Whatever it takes, we're all in this together, readers, characters, and author. Godspeed, Louise Erdrich.

For ages 7-12.

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### **Nancy Walters says**

Read with Little Frog Workshop. All three of us continuing to love, love this series with its melancholy and humor and everyday details.

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### **Natalie says**

I'm a Giveaway Winnnnnnner! I'm a Giveaway Winnnnnnner!

Eagerly awaiting my copy. :)

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