Indian Horse

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RICHARD WAGAMESE

Richard Wagamese was born in Canada, to a family of Indigenous Canadians from the Wabaseemong Independent Nations. Like the protagonist of Indian Horse, Wagamese endured a difficult childhood. His parents abandoned him, along with his three siblings, and he grew up in foster homes, where he was beaten and psychologically abused. Wagamese was homeless for many years, and spent several years of his life in prison. However, he eventually got a job working for a Wabaseemong publication called *New Breed*. He spent almost a decade writing articles for newspapers, and won a National Newspaper Award in 1991. He published his first novel, *Keeper 'n Me*, in 1994, and it won several awards. Wabamese wrote five additional novels and several books of poetry and nonfiction. He died in 2017.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Indian Horse alludes to many important events in Indigenous Canadian history. The most important, however, is Canada's Indigenous school system policy. For more than a century, Canadian law required Indigenous Canadian children to attend church-run residential schools designed to assimilate the children into the predominant white, Christian culture of Canada. Indigenous Canadian children were—in some cases literally—grabbed from their parents' arms and forced to attend school hundreds of miles away, all under the guise of "civilizing" and "assimilating" the young Indigenous population. Indigenous schools were notoriously brutal, and it has been repeatedly alleged that they were hotbeds of pedophilia and sexual abuse. The last Canadian Indigenous schools were shut down surprisingly recently—as late as 1998—and less than a decade later the Prime Minister of Canada issued a formal apology to all Indigenous Canadians, saying that, with its school policies, Canada had failed the Indigenous population in a profound way. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 Indigenous Canadian children attended these schools.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

For other books about the Indigenous Canadian population, check out Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2006), Waubeshig Rice's *Legacy* (2014), and other books by Richard Wagamese, such as *Medicine Walk* (2015). All three books examine Indigenous Canadian history and confront the truth about white Canadians' efforts to wipe out the Indigenous Canadian population and their culture. Other books that more generally touch upon Native American experience in modern North America, but in the United States rather than Canada, are Sherman Alexie's novels, including *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Indian Horse
- **When Written:** 2009-2011
- **Where Written:** British Columbia and Ontario (Canada)
- **When Published:** Spring 2012
- **Literary Period:** First Nations memoir
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel)
- **Setting:** Canada, 1960s-70s
- **Climax:** Saul gets kicked off the Marlboros
- **Antagonist:** Cultural genocide, racism, the faculty of St. Jerome's, and Father Leboutilier could all be considered the antagonists of the story.
- **Point of View:** First person (Saul)

EXTRA CREDIT

Honors in spades. Richard Wagamese has won many notable awards for his writing. In 2012, he won both the Burt Award for First Nations Literature and the Inspire Award for Indigenous Canadian role models.

Lost names. Richard Wagamese's family name, revealed to him by his parents when he reunited with them at the age of 23, is Mushkotay Beezheekee Anakwat, which literally translates to "Buffalo Cloud."

PLOT SUMMARY

Saul Indian Horse is an Indigenous Canadian and a member of the Fish Clan, a tribe that lives near the Winnipeg River. He grows up in the early 1960s with his parents, John Indian Horse and Mary Mandamin, his two siblings, and his grandmother Naomi. At an early age, his brother, Benjamin, and his sister, Rachel, are kidnapped by white Canadians in the area and sent to Christian schools where the teachers' primary aim is to "remove the Indian from" them. At the time, all Indigenous Canadian children are required by law to attend such schools, which means that Canadian authorities have the legal right to tear families apart, often using kidnapping to do so.

After they lose their children, Saul's parents begin drinking heavily, and migrate from town to town in search of work. Miraculously, they reunite with Benjamin, who has run away

from his school. The family decides to journey to a place called Gods Lake, where Saul's ancestors lived generations ago.

At Gods Lake, Saul has a mystical vision. He sees his ancestors, laughing and playing at the water's edge. Then, he sees them crushed under enormous rocks. Shortly after this vision, Benjamin begins coughing up blood, a symptom of a disease he contracted during his time in school. He dies one day while harvesting rice with the family. Saul's parents take Benjamin's body into the nearest town to seek a Christian burial for him, but they never return. Naomi decides that she and Saul will have to travel down the river so that they don't freeze to death.

Naomi leads Saul through wilderness and fierce snowstorms. Eventually, the two of them make their ways to the outskirts of the town of Minaki. There, in the middle of a blizzard, Naomi freezes to death. Two white men take Saul away from his beloved grandmother's body, and bring him to St. Jerome's school for Indigenous children.

St. Jerome's is a terrifying place. The teachers, priests, and nuns believe they have a mission to teach their Indigenous Canadian students about Christianity, the English language, and Western laws. They severely punish anyone who speaks their native language, and effectively torture little children for acting up in even the smallest ways. Some of Saul's classmates are beaten to death, or kill themselves out of despair. At night, priests rape and abuse many of the children.

Saul has one protector at St. Jerome's: a young, kind priest named Father Gaston Leboutilier. Father Leboutilier is protective of Saul, and encourages him to learn to play **hockey**. Although Saul is too young to join the school hockey team, Leboutilier allows him to clean the ice every morning, which gives Saul an opportunity to practice in private. On his own time, Saul teaches himself how to skate and shoot the hockey puck. Even though he's much younger and smaller than the other hockey players, he becomes a brilliant athlete. Leboutilier, recognizing his talent, allows Saul to play in hockey scrimmages, and Saul does very well. In some games with opposing teams, however, Saul is ridiculed for being Indigenous Canadian.

One day, an Indigenous Canadian man named Fred Kelly arrives at St. Jerome's and offers to adopt Saul. Kelly recognizes Saul's talents, and offers to give him a home and a family, in return for which Saul will play for Kelly's local team, the Moose. Saul accepts. He says an emotional goodbye to Father Leboutilier, who tells him that hockey will set him free.

Saul begins living with Fred Kelly, his wife Martha Kelly, and their son, Virgil Kelly, who is a couple years older than Saul. Virgil is the captain of the hockey team, and he encourages Saul to do well. Saul is much younger than the other players, but he wins their respect with his phenomenal talent. The hockey team competes in tournaments with other Indigenous Canadian teams, and wins almost all its games, thanks in part to Saul, who quickly emerges as their star player.

The team experiences a milestone when a talented team of white Canadian players challenges them to a game. Saul reluctantly agrees to play with his Moose teammates, even though he has strong reservations about playing against white Canadians because of the racism he has experienced before. In the game, the Moose get off to a rough start, but with Saul's brilliant playing, they come back to win, 6-5. Afterwards, the Moose begin traveling more frequently, playing the best teams in Canada and often winning. After one particularly impressive victory against a white team, however, the Moose teammates are attacked and savagely beaten by white townspeople. Following this horrific incident, Saul begins to notice small instances of racism and prejudice more regularly in his daily life.

One day, a talent scout comes to watch the Moose practice. The scout tells Saul that he has the talent to play professionally, and offers him a chance to train in Toronto and eventually go professional. Saul is reluctant to leave his friends and adopted family, but with Virgil's encouragement, he agrees.

In Toronto, Saul plays brilliantly for his rookie team, and the future seems bright. But as the season goes on, he notices that opposing teams, and even his own teammates, mock him for being Indigenous. Journalists call him a "savage" and a "crazy redskin," even when they praise his performance. Saul becomes more aggressive during games, and eventually begins regularly fighting with members of the opposing team. Before long, Saul has been kicked off the team, and heads back to the Kelly family. Saul begins working for a living, and quickly leaves town to find a better job.

Saul spends the next couple years working in various low-paying outdoor jobs. He makes little money, and spends whatever he saves on alcohol. Sometimes, his white coworkers give him a hard time for being Indigenous, and he usually fights back. By 1978, Saul has become a full-blown alcoholic. He begins living with a kindly farmer named Ervin Sift, who seems to think of him as a surrogate son. With Ervin's help, Saul tries to cut down on drinking. But eventually he relapses, begins drinking more and more heavily, and is so ashamed of himself for this that he leaves Ervin without any explanation.

Saul drives around the country, going on drinking binges and eventually trying to quit drinking altogether. However, he begins having seizures as a symptom of withdrawal and ends up in the hospital. After this, he checks into a rehabilitation facility called the New Dawn Center, where he works with a counselor named Moses to recover from his alcoholism. Moses urges Saul to write down his experiences—which Saul does, in the form of this book.

Saul leaves the New Dawn Center and drives out to St. Jerome's, which is now in ruins. There, he has vivid flashbacks to his time as a student, and realizes the truth: that Father Leboutilier had raped and abused him as a child. For years, Saul

has repressed his memories of the abuse.

Furious and confused, Saul journeys out to Gods Lake. There, he has a vision of his great-grandfather, Slanting Sky, who tells Saul that he must learn how to carry Gods Lake within himself.

Saul returns to the visit the Kelly family. He tells Martha and Fred what he has realized about his past at St. Jerome's, and they tell him they understand: they went through similar experiences themselves. They encourage Saul to stay and rebuild his life with their support. Saul rejoins the local hockey team, and rekindles his friendship with Virgil, who coaches one of the local teams. Moving forward, Saul knows that he will continue to struggle with the pain of his past, but he's grateful to have loyal friends and a loving adopted family.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Saul Indian Horse – Saul Indian Horse is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. In many ways, his life is modeled on that of Richard Wagamese, the author. Saul is a member of the Fish Clan, an Indigenous Canadian tribe that lives near the Winnipeg River. At a young age, Saul's family is torn apart by white Canadians who steal away his brother, Benjamin, and his sister, Rachel, and force them into a Canadian school system for Indigenous children. Later, Saul himself is kidnapped and sent to such a school. There, Saul endures brutal physical abuse, sexual abuse (a fact which he represses for many years), and a prolonged attempt to break his spirit. At school, however, he becomes a talented **hockey** player, and is adopted by an Indigenous Canadian man who sees potential in Saul. For a time it appears that hockey will provide Saul with a path to a better, happier life. But as Saul grows older, the trauma from his past and the racism he faces everyday bear down on him. He becomes violent, sullen, and an alcoholic. It's not until many years later, when he is a grown man, that he begins to acknowledge the roots of his unhappiness. As the book comes to its cautiously optimistic ending, Saul is busy trying to address and repair the pain that lingers from his childhood.

Naomi – The grandmother of Saul Indian Horse, Naomi is, in many ways, the key maternal figure in Saul's life. A strong and sensitive woman, Naomi takes care of Saul by telling him stories, keeping him warm, and reassuring him that everything is going to be all right, even when it seems otherwise. Naomi is a matriarchal figure in her family, commanding respect from everyone around her and maintaining the family's heritage and traditions. Tragically, her life comes to an end while she's carrying Saul through the snow, trying to lead him to warmth. Her death coincides with Saul being taken to St. Jerome's, one of the milestones of his life.

Father Gaston Leboutilier – A teacher and priest at St. Jerome's, Father Gaston Leboutilier initially seems to be the only ally Saul Indian Horse has at the school. Leboutilier teaches Saul how to play **hockey**, and gives him endless encouragement and love. Without Leboutilier, Saul leads readers to believe, Saul would never have developed his skills as a hockey player, and would have continued living at St. Jerome's in utter misery. However, as the book comes to an end, it becomes clear that Father Leboutilier, quite contrary to being Saul's friend, was actually a rapist who abused Saul under the guise of nurturing him.

Virgil – The youngest son of Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly, Virgil is Saul Indian Horse's closest friend in the novel. A confident, friendly, matter-of-fact teenager when Saul meets him, he encourages the much younger Saul to play on the **hockey** team (of which he, Virgil, is the captain), and eventually becomes Saul's main confidant. Years later, when Virgil is reunited with Saul, he's angry that Saul left town so suddenly, but he also understands some of what Saul has gone through. He is, in short, a true friend: someone who continues to love and respect Saul, "warts and all."

Fred Kelly – Fred Kelly is one of the gentlest and most likeable characters in the novel. He adopts Saul Indian Horse, freeing Saul from St. Jerome's, and encourages him to play **hockey** for his local team. He continues to provide Saul with love, food, and encouragement, even after Saul has been away for years and returns to wrestle with his tumultuous past. Fred is an important character in Saul's life, in part because, like Saul, Fred was a victim of sexual abuse at St. Jerome's, and therefore has some idea of what Saul is going through.

Sister Ignacia – A nun and teacher at St. Jerome's school, described by Saul Indian Horse as being a cruel, narrow-minded woman. Ignacia is perhaps the most vocal proponent of the cultural genocide that Saul and other Indigenous Canadians experience during the book: she openly claims that Native Americans should be prevented from speaking their own language or celebrating their own culture. As such, she's the embodiment of an evil and destructive ideology.

Slanting Sky – Saul Indian Horse's great-grandfather, and an important figure in the Fish Clan. Slanting Sky appears before Saul at several points in the novel, always as part of a dream or vision. He is portrayed as a wise leader and a calming presence, who inspires Saul to be strong and proud.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Father Quinney – A priest and teacher at St. Jerome's school, described by Saul Indian Horse as a foolish, hard-headed man. It is Father Quinney, however, who finally agrees to allow Saul Indian Horse to leave St. Jerome's, effectively freeing him from a life of sexual abuse.

Ervin Sift – A kindly farmer who befriends Saul Indian Horse and offers him work and lodgings. Ervin takes a strong liking to Saul and eventually becomes a kind of father figure, whom Saul

leaves suddenly one night in a drunken stupor.

Moses – A counselor who works closely with Saul Indian Horse at the New Dawn Center for alcoholics. Moses encourages Saul to begin writing down his story, which is how Saul begins writing the book in the first place.

John Indian Horse – Father of Saul Indian Horse.

Mary Mandamin – Mother of Saul Indian Horse.

Rachel Indian Horse – Saul Indian Horse's little sister, who is separated from her family when she is kidnapped by white men and taken to a Christian school for Indigenous children.

Benjamin Indian Horse – Saul Indian Horse's brother, who is separated from his family when he is kidnapped by white men and taken to a Christian school for Indigenous children.

Minoose – Nephew of Naomi.

Lonnie / Aaron Rabbit – A young student at St. Jerome's.

Arden Little Light – A young student at St. Jerome's who later kills himself.

Sheila Jack – A young student at St. Jerome's who has a nervous breakdown.

Shane Big Canoe – A young student at St. Jerome's who is deeply traumatized by the abuse he endures.

Angelique Lynx Leg – A young student at St. Jerome's who, it seems, is sexually abused by the teachers.

Levi Dieter – Coach of the White River Falcons **hockey** team.

Martha Kelly – The wife of Fred Kelly.

Garrett – One of the sons of Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly.

Howard – One of the sons of Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly.

Jack Lanahan – **Hockey** talent scout who offers Saul Indian Horse an attractive offer to play in the NHL.

Elissa Sheehan – Wife of Patrick Sheehan, and host of Saul Indian Horse during his brief spell in Toronto.

Patrick Sheehan – Husband of Elissa Sheehan, and host of Saul Indian Horse during his brief spell in Toronto.

Rebecca Wolf – A young student at St. Jerome's who later kills herself.

Katherine Wolf – Younger sister of Rebecca Wolf, who dies mysteriously.

Jorgenson – Coworker of Saul Indian Horse, who picks a fight with Saul.

Jim Gibney – Man who speaks with Saul Indian Horse when Saul returns to the ruins of St. Jerome's.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FAMILY AND TRADITION

Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* takes its title from the protagonist Saul Indian Horse's family name, so it's no surprise that family (and the traditions that families preserve) is one of the book's central themes. Saul Indian Horse is a member of the Fish Clan, an Indigenous Canadian tribe that lives near the Winnipeg River. Saul's family has always been influential in the Fish Clan. Saul's great-grandfather, Slanting Sky, was a shaman—an important healer and religious figure in his community. The novel takes place during the 1960s and '70s, at a time when Indigenous Canadian traditions were under attack in Canada. Laws—for example, the Indian Act of 1876 (and its amendment in 1884)—required Indigenous Canadian children to attend Christian, English-speaking schools, where they were separated from their families and forced to un-learn their tribe's traditions. Wagamese shows Saul Indian Horse struggling to maintain ties to his family and his culture, even after he's taken away from his family and sent to school. In some ways, Saul embraces his longstanding family traditions, but in other ways he embraces new customs and even new family.

While Wagamese doesn't go into a tremendous amount of detail about Fish Clan culture, he does suggest that the Fish Clan has strong beliefs about the importance and structure of family, as well as strong traditions that sometimes conflict with those of the white Canadian population. One of the first things Saul writes about his culture is that it places a lot of emphasis on respect for elders, especially women. Indeed, the *de facto* leader of Saul's family isn't his father (as is often the case in societies of European heritage), but rather his grandmother, Naomi. In the first part of the book, Naomi leads her family in search of food and safety, and also is a spiritual leader of the family, often overruling the younger, less experienced people in her family. Saul's family and culture also place a lot of emphasis on respecting and living in harmony with the natural world. The family believes that there are forests and lakes in Canada that offer spiritual enlightenment that no manmade community can match. But furthermore, these sites only offer enlightenment to certain families and certain people—they're not for everyone.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Fish Clan tradition in *Indian Horse* (and the biggest difference between Fish Clan culture and white Canadian culture as Wagamese depicts it) is the way tradition itself is conceptualized. To Saul and his family, tradition isn't a vague, wishy-washy concept—it's a real, tangible thing that can be experienced through visions and dreams. Over the course of the book, Saul has visions in which

he sees his distant ancestors and receives advice from them, based on their own wisdom and experiences. In this way, Wagamese seems to see tradition and family as two sides of the same coin: families are the bearers and inheritors of traditions, and many of the most important traditions concern the structure of the family.

Family and tradition play an important role in Saul's coming-of-age. They give him a sense of higher purpose and remind him that he's not alone in the world—that, on the contrary, he's connected to his family members, both living and dead. During the long middle section of the book, when Saul is feeling depressed and lonely, he seems to lose touch with his family and traditions. As he explains in the first chapter, he loses the ability to have mystical visions, which causes him great sadness. By the same token, Saul seems to regain his confidence and sense of purpose following a vision he has at the end of the book. During this vision, his great-grandfather, Slanting Sky, tells him to keep Gods Lake (a place where, according to tradition, only Saul's family may live) within himself. As Wagamese sees it, Saul attains enlightenment when he accepts that he is a member of the Fish Clan tribe, the descendant of countless ancestors, and the bearer of proud traditions.

At the same time, Wagamese makes it clear that Saul is not *just* the bearer of the traditions of the past. As a young man growing up in a tumultuous time, Saul discovers new customs and cultures and incorporates them into his identity. He plays **hockey**, speaks and reads English, and embraces many other aspects of white Canadian culture, balancing Fish Clan tradition with the culture of a changing world. Balancing Indigenous tradition with white culture—in other words, living one's life in the present without losing touch with the past—is the crux of Wagamese's point about family and tradition. Doing so gives Saul the resilience and sense of community that he needs to live a happy life.

CULTURAL GENOCIDE

In 1994, the United Nations defined cultural genocide as "Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving [an ethnic group] of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities." By this definition, 20th century Canadian laws and government policies qualify as one of the most flagrant and destructive cultural genocides of modern times. For more than a century, the Canadian government officially required all Indigenous Canadian children to attend Christian, English-speaking schools, so that the children could assimilate to European Canadian culture. Law enforcers had freedom to take Indigenous Canadian children from their families and send them to schools hundreds of miles away (in effect, kidnapping them). In addition to being underfunded and conducive to high rates of sexual abuse, these schools were institutionalizations of a cultural genocide campaign: they were explicitly designed to weaken Indigenous Canadian languages and traditions. In *Indian Horse*, Saul Indian Horse attends an indigenous school called St. Jerome's, where he experiences firsthand the viciousness of the cultural genocide that took place in Canada.

By portraying the Indigenous Canadian cultural genocide from the perspective of a small child, Wagamese emphasizes the terror and chaos that it caused. Saul's siblings, Benjamin and Rachel, are abducted from their communities at an early age with no explanation given, other than that they're required by law to go to school. Benjamin and Rachel's kidnappings cause Saul's parents tremendous grief, which leads to their becoming alcoholics. Wagamese portrays Saul's abduction, which occurs a few years later, as a confusing, disorienting event. Two men drag Saul away from his dying grandmother, Naomi, and send him to St. Jerome's. The men make no effort to take care of Naomi, and they seem to have no hesitation about taking a child away from his dying grandparent. This suggests that the men are not motivated by a desire to help nor tempered by any sympathy for the family. Rather, it seems, at best, that they're following orders, and, at worst, actively trying to destroy the Fish Clan's family structure. At the time, the Canadian government offered many justifications for its education policies, usually suggesting that the policies were designed for Indigenous Canadians' own good. By depicting the effects of these policies from a child's point of view, Wagamese cuts through the government's claims and shows the policy for what it really was: a mass kidnapping scheme, which had the effect of destroying Indigenous Canadian families, and inevitably weakening Indigenous Canadian culture.

Saul and his Indigenous Canadian peers are sent to St. Jerome's for one reason: to un-learn the culture they grew up with. He and his classmates are told that they're going to learn the English language and the Christian religion. The teachers are constantly talking about the importance of English and Christianity, but Saul never says what, if anything, he learned about these subjects. Indeed, few of the teachers at the school seem to take Christianity seriously at all. Instead of practicing love and mercy, the teachers brutally beat their children, and in some cases sexually abuse them. Eventually, it becomes obvious that the only real "lesson" the teachers teach is the inferiority of Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous Canadian culture. The students are tortured and abused until they agree to reject their old languages and customs and become meek and subservient to their white instructors. In effect, St. Jerome's wipes out Indigenous Canadian culture and teaches Indigenous Canadian students to fear and obey white Canadians.

The laws that brought about cultural genocide in Canada are especially frightening because they were framed as being unambiguously good for Indigenous Canadians: they promised to bring religion, language, and "civilization" to the native inhabitants of the land. The cultural critic Walter Benjamin said

it best: "There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism."

ABUSE AND TRAUMA

Toward the end of *Indian Horse*, Saul Indian Horse remembers some information that he's been repressing for many years. As a child, his beloved mentor at St. Jerome's, Father Gaston Leboutilier, sexually abused him. Saul's shocking realization cements trauma as one of the key themes of the book. Wagamese shows how trauma, particularly when it's caused by abuse, as it is in Saul's case, can be a crippling burden for its victims.

It's crucial to understand why Wagamese presents Saul's abuse years after the fact, instead of portraying it in the present tense. To begin with, his decision to do so emphasizes the psychological realism of the novel. In many cases, victims of sexual abuse, particularly if the abuse began when the victims were small children, repress or forget about it for many years as a defense mechanism. Such a response is especially common when the abuser is a person the victim had a close relationship with. Father Leboutilier's apparent kindness toward Saul seems to have caused Saul a great deal of confusion and doubt, leading him to bury the memories of abuse altogether. But Wagamese focuses on Saul's recollection of traumatic abuse for another reason: in doing so, he wants to emphasize the point that the aftermath of abuse can be as painful (and in some ways more painful) than the experience of abuse itself. Over the years, Saul seems to repress all memory of Father Leboutilier's contemptible behavior. And yet, like many abuse victims, he becomes depressed and frustrated. He cuts himself off from other people—in part because of the racism he experiences among white Canadians, but also in part, it's implied, because he believes that other people wouldn't understand what he's been through. Again, Saul's behavior is consistent with that of victims of sexual abuse in many cases. Because of the horrific crime that Father Leboutilier committed, Saul goes through years of loneliness, isolation, and self-loathing.

Indian Horse comes to a cautiously optimistic conclusion about trauma and abuse. It's possible for abuse survivors to lessen their burden by finding the courage to talk about their experiences. Years after his time at St. Jerome's, Saul comes to stay with his two adopted parents, Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly, both of whom went to St. Jerome's as children. Saul finds the courage to tell Fred and Martha about his abuse, and Fred and Martha admit to him that they experienced similar abuses at school. It's unfair that Saul should have been put in a position where he has to summon the strength just to talk about his feelings. Nevertheless, the experience of doing so undeniably proves helpful to him—since, instead of burying his pain as he's done for years, he communicates it to other people, thereby lessening his burden. Wagamese is *not* saying that talking cures Saul of his trauma. Rather, Wagamese suggests that healing from trauma is an ongoing process, with no definite endpoint. Saul will continue struggling with Father Leboutilier's abuse, but the support of his friends and loved ones means that he stands a better chance of living a happy life.

RACISM AND PREJUDICE

In *Indian Horse*, Saul Indian Horse experiences many different forms and degrees of racial prejudice. There's the racism implicit in his being kidnapped, sent to St. Jerome's, and forbidden from speaking his own native tongue—i.e., the suggestion that his entire society is inferior to white Canadian society. Then there's the condescending racism of sports journalists who call him a "crazy redskin" and other belittling terms, even when they're praising his prowess. Saul experiences a huge amount of direct, verbal racism from white peers and sports opponents, who never miss an opportunity to call him names. And finally, he experiences his share of direct violence from racist whites who try to beat him into submission. All these behaviors stem from the fact that Saul is an Indigenous Canadian living in a country run by white people, many of whom believe that Saul is inherently inferior because of his race.

This racism seems to spring from an irrational need on the part of white Canadians to prove that Indigenous Canadians are inferior to them. During Saul's time at St. Jerome's Christian school, he's beaten and abused by the racist white teachers. These teachers regularly tell Saul and his classmates that their indigenous culture is inferior to white Canadian culture. Of course, the indigenous students are not, in fact, inferior to whites, and so the teachers use violence to *force* them into submission. In a similar sense, most of the white Canadians who hit and bully Saul are motivated by their own failures. Saul is a talented **hockey** player who regularly defeats his bigger, more privileged white opponents. After particularly humiliating defeats, white hockey players or racist townspeople take out their anger on Saul and his Indigenous Canadian teammates. In other words, Saul is evidently better than they are at hockey, which is an important sport in Canada, and a traditionally *European* sport, which makes Saul's success even more humiliating for them. As a result, Saul's white opponents try to compensate by asserting their power in other ways.

The cumulative effect of years of racism and prejudice on Saul is almost incalculable. But it's clear that racism ruins some of his potential in life by leaving him angry and frustrated. For a time, Saul is able to ignore the racism of his teachers and hockey opponents. But eventually, their cruelty proves too overwhelming for him, and he gives in to the (very understandable) temptation to fight back. The result is that Saul grows into an aggressive and embittered man—so much so that he's kicked out of the NHL in spite of his enormous talent as a hockey player. The central tragedy of the book is that racism, in all its forms and degrees, crushes Saul's spirit and

turns what could have been a brilliant athletic career into years of fighting, soul-searching, and drinking.

TRANSCENDENCE

In *Indian Horse*, Saul Indian Horse experiences countless tragedies and setbacks. But there are also many scenes—usually intense, lyrically written, and very brief—during which he seems to escape tragedy momentarily. One might use the word transcendence to describe the experience of escaping tragic or traumatic circumstances, especially when the experience takes on a mystical or religious form. It's impossible to understand Saul fully without understanding the role transcendence plays in his life.

For Saul, transcendence takes two principle forms. First, Saul experiences a series of mystical visions. During these visions, he interacts with his family members and ancestors, living and dead, and learns important lessons about the relationship between his family and the natural world, as well as between himself and his family. Second, Saul experiences a feeling of transcendence when he plays **hockey**. During his time at St. Jerome's, and later when he lives with Fred Kelly, Saul enjoys the sense of exhilaration that comes with skating on the hockey rink. He feels as if he's limitless, no longer encumbered by sadness or shame. It's no coincidence that Wagamese uses some of the same language to describe Saul's visions as he uses to describe his hockey games: words like "escape," "flying," "soaring," and "free" appear again and again, suggesting that the two categories of experience serve the same transcendental purpose. For brief moments, Saul is able to transcend the tragedies of abandonment, abuse, and racism, and feel nothing but excitement and freedom. If not for these brief moments, it's implied, Saul would never be able to summon the optimism necessary for surviving St. Jerome's and, like so many of his classmates, he'd give up on life altogether.

But as the book goes on, transcendence becomes more and more difficult for Saul to achieve. His hockey games don't provide him with an escape from his ordinary troubles. On the contrary, they *are* his ordinary troubles. He encounters more intense teasing and racist bullying during hockey games than he does at almost any other time. As Saul grows older, he begins to associate the sport of hockey itself with racism. Hockey is further tarnished in his eyes when he realizes that his teacher and first hockey coach, Father Gaston Leboutilier, abused him as a child. In a similar way, Saul's later visions of his family don't provide him with an escape from the "real world." Instead, they force him to confront the real world in an especially intense and painful way. Toward the end of the novel, Saul has a vision in which he sees his great-grandfather, Slanting Sky, looking very thin and weary. This vision makes Saul weep, and immediately leads him to visit St. Jerome's, where he realizes that Leboutilier abused him. In short, Saul's visions no longer "free" him, or help him "escape"—instead, they help him see the sources of his misery more clearly.

Transcendence is important to Saul's coming-of-age—without it, he might not have had the strength to survive. And yet, by the end of the novel, Saul appears to have traded transcendence for something more mature and ultimately more valuable. He continues to play hockey and love it, but he's realistic about the racial prejudices in his society, both in and out of the rink. Similarly, Saul vows to carry Gods Lake (a place that has spiritual significance for his family) within himself, suggesting that he'll maintain strong spiritual ties to his past and his family's traditions. This further suggests that Saul's ancestors will guide him through life at all times, instead of revealing themselves to him in brief, transcendent visions. In short, Saul abandons transcendence as a form of coping with life at the same time that he becomes a mature, experienced man. Instead of escaping from his problems, he summons the courage to meet them head-on.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HOCKEY

The most important and explicit symbol in the book is the game of hockey. After being forced to attend St. Jerome's school, Saul Indian Horse discovers that he's a naturally gifted hockey player. He becomes so adept at the game, in fact, that he gets the opportunity to move to a new town and play with a talented team of significantly older boys. Again and again, Wagamese uses hockey as a symbol for Saul's life more generally. In Canada in the mid-twentieth century, hockey is viewed by many as a "white person's game," and therefore Saul's love of hockey is symbolic of how different his life is from the lives of his ancestors. The story of Saul's career as a hockey player in many ways mirrors the story of his life as an Indigenous person living in Canada at a time when racism against Indigenous people is rampant throughout Canada, since Saul struggles on and off the ice to remain true to his identity while also finding his place in a world that many people think he doesn't belong in (i.e., the world of hockey). Furthermore, the sensation of gliding on the ice that Saul has while playing hockey is repeatedly described as a feeling of freedom, which itself becomes a metaphor for the state of freedom Saul seeks as a young Indigenous man who, pursuing his passion, is met with a great deal of resistance from racist, white Canadians (who, paradoxically, destroyed his people's culture but don't want him to have anything to do with theirs).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Douglas & McIntyre edition of *Indian Horse* published in 2012.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Our people have rituals and ceremonies meant to bring us vision. I have never participated in any of them, but I have seen things. I have been lifted up and out of this physical world into a place where time and space have a different rhythm. I always remained within the borders of this world, yet I had the eyes of one born to a different plane. Our medicine people would call me a seer. But I was in the thrall of a power I never understood. It left me years ago, and the loss of that gift has been my greatest sorrow.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Saul Indian Horse is depressed and deeply conflicted. Although he's still a young man, he has become a bitter, aggressive alcoholic. During his time in a rehabilitation center, he begins writing down his thoughts in a journal. This leads Saul to think back on his childhood—a time when he was living in a Fish Clan community. As a child, Saul had the gift of "vision"—meaning that he could see visions of the past and communicate with his deceased ancestors. In the intervening years, however, Saul has lost this gift.

For Wagamese, "vision" isn't just a magical power. Rather, vision evokes Saul's connection with his family and his Indigenous culture. As a young man, Saul loses touch with his roots, and as a result he becomes unmoored and alienated from his peers. The passage also suggests the state of the Indigenous Canadian community at the time. In the 1970s, Indigenous communities had been devastated by the Indian Act, a law which mandated, among other things, that Indigenous children be placed in English-speaking, Christian schools, thereby weakening Indigenous culture. In this way, Saul's loss of "vision" could symbolize the weakening of Indigenous peoples' connection with their own culture in the 20th century.

Chapter 3 Quotes

So we hid from the white men. Benjamin and I developed the quick ears of bush people. When we detected the drone of an engine we knew to run. We'd grab the old lady's hand and scuttle into the trees and find a place to secret ourselves away until we knew for certain that there was no danger.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker), Mary Mandamin, John Indian Horse, Naomi, Benjamin Indian Horse, Rachel Indian Horse

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

For more than a century, the Indian Act mandated that Indigenous Canadian children had to attend English-speaking Christian schools. These schools were miserable places: the teachers were cruel, and used corporal punishment on their students, and some of them were sexually abusive. Furthermore, Indigenous children were sometimes forcibly taken from their families and moved to schools hundreds of miles away. In effect, the Indian Act make it legal to kidnap Indigenous children, separating them from their families.

In this passage, Wagamese portrays the effects of the Indian Act from a child's point of view. Growing up in the Fish Clan, Saul learns to think of white Canadians as cruel aggressors, who raid his community and steal small children from their parents.

Chapter 5 Quotes

I wondered what would become of us there. I wondered if the spirit, the *monitous*, of Gods Lake would look upon us with pity and compassion, if we would flourish on this land that was ours alone.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul and his family have made the difficult decision to travel by canoe to Gods Lake, a remote and beautiful place. Most Fish Clan people aren't allowed to visit Gods Lake, but there's traditionally been an exception for Saul's family. Thus, Saul's parents and grandmother agree

that they should journey to this important, spiritual location and live off the land.

The passage is a valuable example of how Saul's tribe conceives of the natural world. Interestingly, the Fish Tribe seems to take a proprietary view of the natural world, in which there are specific places that are off limits for some, or most, members of the tribe. However, natural sites aren't just plots of land for the Fish Clan; rather, they're important, spiritual places that offer spiritual refuge—not just material resources.

Chapter 6 Quotes

I crept to the edge of the ridge and looked over. The face of the cliff had collapsed, and the camp was gone. Vanished. Even the trees had been scraped away and the beach was strewn with boulders. The chalky smell of rock dust brought tears to my eyes and I stood there weeping, my shoulders shaking at the thought of those people buried under all that stone.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul experiences his first vision. In the vision, he sees his ancestors, stretching all the way back to his great-grandfather, Slanting Sky. But then, he witnesses his ancestors being crushed beneath enormous stones.

Saul's vision paints a vivid, and tragic, picture of his family's legacy. While Saul is proud of his ancestors and their culture, he also comes to understand that the Indigenous community has been devastated by European-Canadian colonization. The Canadian government's policies have torn apart Fish Clan families and weakened the cultural ties that bind the tribe together. Thus, it's unsurprising that Saul should witness his family members being crushed to death—the scene is an apt metaphor for the way the Fish Clan has been weakened by a century of oppressive Canadian rule.

Chapter 11 Quotes

She smiled again with the same ghastly lack of feeling. "At St. Jerome's we work to remove the Indian from our children so that the blessings of the Lord may be evidenced upon them."

Related Characters: Sister Ignacia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46-47

Explanation and Analysis

In this grim passage, Wagamese introduces readers to Sister Ignacia, one of the nuns and instructors at St. Jerome's, the school where Saul is sent under Canadian law. Ignacia is typical of the faculty of St. Jerome's: she's cruel, humorless, and believes that she has a divine mandate to force her students to embrace Christianity, English, and white Canadian culture.

What Ignacia is describing in the passage could very well be termed cultural genocide, the deliberate elimination of an ethnic group's culture. Ignacia seems to think that all Indigenous culture is heathen by virtue of the fact that it's not Christian. As a result, she thinks that she's justified in beating and torturing her students until they abandon their Indigenous culture altogether.

Chapter 12 Quotes

We'd never seen anyone so composed, so assured, so peaceful. Something in her bearing reminded us about where we'd come from. We surrounded her like acolytes and that enraged the nuns. They thought Sheila was thumbing her nose at them and they set out to break her.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker), Sheila Jack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul recalls a young Indigenous girl who's kidnapped from her parents and sent to St. Jerome's school. Her name is Sheila, and she's very beautiful and confident in herself. In many ways, Sheila symbolizes the strength and pride of the Indigenous Canadian population. But by the same logic, Sheila's experience at St. Jerome's school symbolizes the policy of cultural genocide that the Canadian government enacted for more than a century. The teachers' goal, Saul strongly suggests, isn't to educate Sheila or prepare her for a life in Canadian society; rather, their only goal is to break Sheila's spirit. They beat her and abuse her until she becomes meek and submissive. This would suggest a disturbing truth: the Canadian government's policies were

designed to teach Indigenous Canadians that they were inferior to white Canadians in every way.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ I would not feel lonely or afraid, deserted or abandoned, but connected to something far bigger than myself. Then I'd climb back into bed and sleep until the dawn woke me and I could walk back out to the rink again.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul conveys his love for the game of hockey. At St. Jerome's, his life is lonely and miserable: he seems to have no friends, and he's terrified of his cruel, abusive teachers. However, he takes keen pleasure in skating on the ice rink, since doing so makes him feel free and liberated from his sorrows. For a couple minutes at a time, hockey allows Saul to forget his sadness altogether.

The passage also conveys the way that hockey nurtures Saul and gives him the strength to survive at St. Jerome's. While his classmates kill themselves or lose their minds, Saul maintains his composure and inner strength. This is because hockey has given him something to aspire to: although it might sound grandiose, it has given his life meaning.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ Sometimes three or four boys would be visited like that. Sometimes only one. Other times boys would be led from the dorms. Where they went and what happened to them was never spoken of. In the daylight we would look at each other blankly, so that we would not cause any further shame. It was the same for the girls.
"God's love," Angelique Lynx Leg whispered one day.

Related Characters: Angelique Lynx Leg, Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81-82

Explanation and Analysis

In this disturbing passage, Saul describes the sexual abuse that his classmates endure at St. Jerome's. The teachers have total power over their students (who are hundreds of miles away from their parents, after all). Therefore, they can abuse and rape the children without any fear of reprisal. Disgustingly, it's likely that the crimes Saul describes in this passage weren't uncommon at Indigenous schools for most of the 20th century: the schools were magnets for pedophiles, who could abuse young children under the guise of being good, righteous Christians. (Hence Angelique's heartbreaking claim, which an abusive priest has surely told her, that she's experiencing "God's love").

One notable ambiguity in the passage is that it's unclear if Saul is the victim of sexual abuse or not. This will be an important plot point later in the book. Many victims of sexual abuse repress, or seem to forget about, their experiences for many years.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ "Hockey is like the universe, Saul," he said one day. "When you stand in the dark and look up at it, you see the placid fire of stars. But if we were right in the heart of it, we'd see chaos. Comets churning by. Meteorites. Star explosions. Things being born, things dying. Chaos, Saul. But that chaos is organized. It's harnessed. It's controlled.

Related Characters: Father Gaston Leboutilier (speaker), Saul Indian Horse

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Father Gaston Leboutilier, Saul's teacher and hockey coach at St. Jerome's, tells Saul about why he loves the sport of hockey. Hockey, he claims, is like life itself: it may seem chaotic and destructive at first, but there's a method to the madness. If one hangs back and studies the sport for a while, it's possible to develop the talent and flexibility to succeed on the ice.

This isn't the only passage in the book in which hockey is analogized to life. As the book goes on, indeed, hockey becomes a microcosm for Saul's life: the racism and bullying that he experiences in the rink parallel his experiences at all times. Nevertheless, Leboutilier's point about hockey is

optimistic: he thinks that one can succeed at hockey, and in life, with confidence, a good strategy, and careful training.

Chapter 23 Quotes

"Do they hate me?"
"They don't hate you, Saul." 'Well, what, then?"
"They think it's their game."

Related Characters: Father Gaston Leboutilier, Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91-92

Explanation and Analysis

This passage represents one of Saul's first encounters with direct, face-to-face racism. While playing a hockey match against a white Canadian team, Saul and his teammates endure some racist insults. Saul is hurt by these insults, as anyone would be, and he naturally looks to Father Leboutilier, his closest ally on the St. Jerome's faculty, for advice. Leboutilier explains that the white Canadian team is embarrassed to have been defeated by an Indigenous team. In part, this is because hockey is seen as a symbol of white Canadian culture, stretching back to its antecedents in Europe (hockey was probably invented in England at some point in the 17th century). Therefore, to lose to an Indigenous team was seen as all the more humiliating. Sadly, this isn't the last time in the book that Saul will experience racism from bitter opponents.

Chapter 24 Quotes

I looked around at all those adult faces, lingering on Father Leboutilier's. I'd never been offered choice before.
'All right," I said. "I'll go."

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker), Father Gaston Leboutilier

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

In this crucial scene, Saul Indian Horse is offered a choice: he can either remain at St. Jerome's, or he can leave and live with a mysterious man named Fred Kelly, who coaches a hockey team far away. This is one of the first major choices Saul has been offered in his entire life, since at St. Jerome's, the teachers control every aspect of his existence, and in his own family, his parents or grandmother called the shots.

The fact that Saul says "Yes" to Kelly's offer speaks volumes about his experience at St. Jerome's. Even though Saul has never met Kelly before, and knows essentially nothing about him, he reasons that life with Kelly couldn't be any worse than his life at St. Jerome's, where he's beaten, tortured, and (we later learn) sexually abused by Father Leboutilier. So the passage is important not only because it shows Saul taking control over the direction of his own life, but because it confirms how miserable Saul really is.

Chapter 25 Quotes

No one said a word. They didn't have to. I stripped off my jersey and sat there breathing in the atmosphere of that small wooden shack. I was a Moose.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Saul has just distinguished himself as a key player on his new hockey team, the Moose. Although Saul is smaller and less experienced than his teammates (some of whom mock and tease him for his size), he succeeds because of his natural talent, and because he's motivated to do well. Afterwards, Saul sits with his new teammates and drinks soda with them. The message is very clear: Saul has found himself a new community, far warmer and friendlier than the one at St. Jerome's.

This is one of the most optimistic passages in the book, because it shows Saul using his innate talent to improve his own life. Because he's such a brilliant hockey player, he's whisked away from St. Jerome's to a new town, where he wins over his peers, again through sheer ability. If only the rest of his life were so straightforward.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ When we walked into the lobby the first thing we saw were glass cabinets along the walls filled with trophies and photographs. It was like a shrine to their home team. We stood there with our gear bags in our hands, studying the display. There were no awards in our bush league. The winners were celebrated with feasts and parties but there was no money for trophies.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul and his teammates have traveled across the country to compete in a hockey game against a talented team of white Canadian players. The white Canadian team's arena, where the game will take place, is big and expensive, and inside there are many trophies, which the white Canadian team has won. In short, the contrast between the two teams, one white and one Indigenous, couldn't be clearer: the former is confident and well-funded, while the latter is the scrappy underdog, without a lot of money. Unfortunately, the difference between the two teams corresponds to the general difference between white and Indigenous Canadian people at the time.

Chapter 31 Quotes

❝ There were moments when you'd catch another boy's eye and know that you were both thinking about it. Everything was contained in that glance.
All the hurt. All the shame. All the rage. The white people thought it was their game. They thought it was their world.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul thinks back on an ugly incident during which his hockey team encounters racism at its most aggressive. Saul and his teammates have just won a great victory against a white team. But afterwards, aggressive, racist townspeople beat up Saul's teammates and urinate on them. Saul's teammates are furious, but they have no way of seeking revenge, since the entire town is against them. They have no choice but to swallow their pride and move on. But of course, it's impossible to "move on" after such a frightening and damaging incident. Saul knows that his teammates can't forget the humiliation of being forced to submit to racist bullies. After this scene, Saul begins to become more aware of the racism he and his teammates face as a result of being indigenous hockey players in a predominantly white country.

Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ "My dad never talks about the school," he said. "Mom neither. And they don't say anything about what happened before that. Maybe someone just gave you a chance to rub the shit off the board once and for all."

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul has accepted an offer to train with a professional hockey team, with the goal of eventually playing in the NHL (the National Hockey League of Canada). Saul says a quick but emotional goodbye to his adopted brother Virgil Kelly. Virgil has always been able to tell that Saul is harboring some dark secrets, but he's always had the restraint and respect to refrain from prying. Here, however, Virgil alludes to the fact that Saul has experienced some horrific things at St. Jerome's. Virgil seems to know about this because of his own parents' experience—they both attended St. Jerome's, too. Virgil suggests that Saul's time in the NHL could help him clear his mind and move past the traumas he experienced early in life.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ The press would not let me be. When I hit someone, it wasn't just a bodycheck; I was counting coup.
When I made a dash down the ice and brought the crowd to their feet, I was on a raid. If I inadvertently high-sticked someone during a tussle in the corner, I was taking scalps.
When I did not react to getting a penalty, I was the stoic Indian.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Saul's experience playing with a professional hockey team is highly disappointing. He's as good as he's ever been, and he scores many goals. However, Saul becomes upset when he realizes that the sports journalists treat him as a token indigenous player on a predominantly white team. Whenever the journalists talk about Saul, they use offensive language that alludes to stereotypes about Indigenous Canadians. Even when they're praising Saul, they present him as a crude stereotype—a "rampaging redskin," a savage "Indian," etc. The result is that Saul feels like an outcast on the ice, even when he's one of the best players in the league. The cumulative effect of so much bullying, teasing, and stereotyping is to discourage Saul from the success that he has rightfully earned.

When I hit the ice I was effective. I scored twenty-three points in nine games. But the taunting from the stands continued, and I fumed and smoldered and racked up one hundred and twenty minutes in the penalty box. I caused the Marlies to play short-handed a lot of the time, and we lost seven of those games. Finally, they benched me completely. After one night of sitting in the stands, I packed my bag and got on a bus back to Manitouwadge.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul's time with the professional hockey team comes to a tragic end. Saul is a talented player, but he allows his frustration with the racism that seems to be everywhere in the sport to impact his performance. He fights with the opposing players who call him names, and as a result his team doesn't do very well. Eventually, Saul is permanently benched, and shortly afterwards is off the team altogether.

The passage is especially sad because Saul has already made it clear that he *should* be a star NHL player—he's that good. But instead, Saul is the victim of a never-ending stream of racist language and bullying behavior. Over time, he becomes so sick of racism and bullying that he begins to fight back, and eventually leaves the sport with his tail between his legs. In short, Saul gives the racists exactly what they want.

Chapter 41 Quotes

I punched him in the head with everything I had, and he crumpled onto the floorboards. I turned to face the rest of them. I was frigid blackness inside, like water under a berg. I wanted another one to stand, wanted another one to swing at me, invite me to erupt. But they stayed seated, and nobody spoke as I walked slowly over to the table and picked up Jorgenson's discarded hand of cards. I studied the cards, then smirked and tossed the hand back on the table.
"Game over," I said. They never bothered me again.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker), Jorgenson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

By this point in the novel, Saul has given up on becoming a professional hockey player. Instead, he works a series of menial jobs that he seems to have chosen in order to place as much distance between himself and the rest of society as possible. But even when he's working these menial jobs, Saul is forced to put up with his coworkers' racism. Instead of ignoring his bullies, or moving past them, he fights back, on one occasion beating up a large, bullying white man named Jorgenson.

Saul is able to intimidate his coworkers into leaving him alone—seemingly a victory. But in the long-term, this victory takes a heavy toll on Saul. Reacting to his bullies' cruelty, Saul has become an angry person. As a result, he not only alienates his racist coworkers—he alienates his friends and adopted family, too.

Chapter 44 Quotes

I was an alchemist, mixing solutions I packed in my lunch kit to assuage the strychnine feel of rot in my guts. It was a dim world. Things glimmered, never shone.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

As the book reaches an end, the pace becomes faster. Saul describes how he spends his twenties: drinking, working simple, low-paying jobs, and getting into fights. His life isn't exactly miserable, but it's never particularly happy. As Saul puts it, the world glitters but never shines.

It's worth thinking more closely about what Saul means by using this figurative language. In one sense, he's saying that the happiness he finds in life is always short-lived or not particularly strong—as fleeting as a dim, glimmering light. While he is living with the Kelly family, by contrast, Saul's life has shone with happiness, surrounded by love and friendship and brotherhood. In short, by abandoning his community and drinking heavily, Saul has traded the shining light of a real community for the dull pleasures of alcoholism.

Chapter 49 Quotes

He'd told me I could play when I was big enough. I loved the idea so much that I kept quiet. I loved the idea of being loved so much that I did what he asked. When I found myself liking it, I felt dirty, repulsive, sick. The secret morning practices that moved me closer to the game also moved me further away from the horror. I used the game to shelter me from seeing the truth, from having to face it every day. Later, after I was gone, the game kept me from remembering. As long as I could escape into it, I could fly away. Fly away and never have to land on the scorched earth of my boyhood.

Related Characters: Saul Indian Horse (speaker), Father Gaston Leboutilier

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

In this shocking passage, Saul reveals the truth about Father Gaston Leboutilier. Leboutilier was never a true friend to Saul: although he pretended to be kind to Saul, he was really abusing Saul. Furthermore, Leboutilier only treated Saul well in order to ensure that Saul would keep quiet about being raped.

The passage does a masterful job of conveying the guilt, confusion, and resentment that victims of sexual abuse often feel. Saul feels guilty for enjoying parts of his abuse, an all-too common experience among abuse victims. Second, Saul suggests that he has repressed the memory of being abused by Father Leboutilier. Again, many people who were abused as children repress all memory of their experience, and only remember the truth years later. Finally, the passage reveals why Saul has reacted so strongly to his opponents' bullying. For years, Saul thought of hockey as a way of escaping the pain of sexual abuse. But as he grows older, Saul realizes that, in fact, hockey is just the source for a different kind of abuse: racist verbal and physical abuse. Put differently, hockey, the greatest source of joy in Saul's life, has become another source of pain. Quite understandably, this proves unbearable for Saul.

Chapter 51 Quotes

"The journey you make is good." "What am I to learn here?" He swept his arm to take in the lake, the shore and the cliff behind us. "You've come to learn to carry this place within you. This place of beginnings and endings."

Related Characters: Slanting Sky, Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul has a vision—the first he's had in many years—of his ancestors, including his great-grandfather, Slanting Sky. Slanting Sky gives Saul an explicit lesson: Saul must learn how to carry Gods Lake within himself. Gods Lake, the beautiful, placid lake where Saul and his family journeyed years before, could be considered a symbol of Saul's Indigenous heritage. Thus, Saul must learn to honor his family and his Indigenous roots.

Saul's vision this time is a little different from the visions he's experienced in the past. This time, Saul doesn't simply experience an episode from his family's history. Rather, his family gives him advice for how to live his own life. For many years, Saul seems to have forgotten about his early life in the Fish Clan community. The memories are so sad that he can't bear to think about them. But now, Saul is ready to embrace his indigenous heritage and honor his Indigenous culture. Interestingly, the passage suggests that this may be

the last of Saul's visions. Going forward, his ancestors will reveal themselves to him "from within," instead of appearing before him in brief, transcendent visions.

Chapter 52 Quotes

"Did they rape everyone?" I asked.
There was a long silence. In the distance I could hear the sounds of the mill and a train. I waited and they both looked at the floor.
"It doesn't have to be sexual to be rape, Saul," Martha said.
"When they invade your spirit, it's rape too," Fred said.

Related Characters: Fred Kelly, Martha Kelly, Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saul discusses his sexual abuse with Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly. Saul has never spoken about his abuse with anyone lese—indeed, he says that he didn't realize he'd been abused until very recently (a common experience among people who were abused as children). However, Saul feels comfortable talking about his traumas with Fred and Kelly, both of whom were abused during their own time at St. Jerome's.

It's therapeutic for Saul to discuss his abuse with calm, understanding people who know what he's been through. In the past, Saul has repressed all memory of his rape, but the consequences of this defense mechanism have been severe. Saul has become a bitter, resentful person, who takes out his frustration on anyone who gets in his way. By speaking honestly about his feelings, Saul paves the way for a healthier and happier life.

Finally, the passage is notable because of Martha's point. Her remark might suggest that the European colonization of Indigenous Canada was itself an act of rape: it violated the Indigenous lands and broke the spirits of many Indigenous Canadian people. (There are many novels that use rape symbolism to characterize the Western colonization of Indigenous peoples—*A People in the Trees* by Hanya Yanagihara is just one example.)

"They scooped out our insides, Saul. We're not responsible for that. We're not responsible for what happened to us. None of us are." Fred said. "But our healing-that's up to us. That's what saved me. Knowing it was my game."
"Could be a long game," I said.
"So what if it is?" he said. "Just keep your stick on the ice and your feet moving. Time will take care of itself."

Related Characters: Fred Kelly, Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of this chapter, Fred Kelly offers Saul some important advice. Saul has endured a lot of pain and frustration in his life: he's been kidnapped, separated from his family, abused by his teachers, and bullied by racist hockey opponents. Instead of allowing his rage to consume him, Fred advises, Saul should concentrate on his own life. He shouldn't try to enact revenge on other people—instead, he should concentrate on the small, local things that he *can* control: his friends, his job, his love for hockey, etc. Only by focusing on these things will Saul ever be able to live with the pain of abuse and abandonment. Fred also advises Saul to claim hockey as "his own" game. Previously, Saul has given white racists exactly what they want by abandoning his dreams of playing for the NHL. Instead, Fred encourages Saul to be bold and continue playing hockey, reminding his racist opponents that they don't "own" hockey simply by virtue of being white.

Chapter 55 Quotes

"Did you want to hunt that fucker down? Make him feel some of the same pain?" Virgil asked. He still couldn't turn away from looking at the ice.
'At first, yeah. Then, the more we got into it at the centre the more I realized it was more than just him. I'd be hunting a long time if I lashed out at everyone. In the end, I learned the only one I could take care of was me."

Related Characters: Virgil, Saul Indian Horse (speaker), Father Gaston Leboutilier

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Saul reunites with his friend and adopted brother, Virgil Kelly. Virgil is a hockey coach now, and it's been years since he's seen Saul. He is understandably upset with Saul for leaving him so suddenly and unexpectedly. However, he's also willing to forgive Saul, because he's a good friend and a compassionate, understanding person.

As the scene unfolds, Saul and Virgil talk about Saul's traumatic experiences at St. Jerome's. Virgil seems to understand what Saul experienced, even though he's doesn't talk about it explicitly. (Perhaps Virgil is able to deduce as much because his own parents went to St Jerome's, and endured sexual abuse, too.) Virgil asks Saul if he wants to seek revenge on Father Leboutilier, his abuser. Saul's reply demonstrates how much Saul has grown in the past few chapters: he has come to see that there would be no point in seeking revenge, and that doing so would only make him feel angrier, and further alienate him from his loved ones. Following Fred Kelly's advice, Saul makes the mature, intelligent choice to focus on his own life and his own behavior, rather than allowing his own desire for revenge to torment him.

Chapter 56 Quotes

"Even up here in the sticks, we like to use a hockey puck to play hockey," Virgil said and pushed out onto the ice.
"Old habits," I said when he reached me. "New days," he said.
"The guys here?"
"Them and more," he said.

Related Characters: Virgil, Saul Indian Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Saul has returned to the community of his adolescence. He's reunited with the Kelly family, and shows every sign of settling down, surrounded by his friends and adopted family. Furthermore, he shows every sign of still wanting to play hockey. This is an encouraging sign, because it shows that he hasn't allowed the bullying of white racists to deter him from his love for the game. Thus, the novel ends with an image of brotherhood and happiness. Saul prepares to play hockey with his adopted community of Indigenous Canadians. Notice that the scene encapsulates both the "old" and the "new." Saul is among other Indigenous people, just as he was as a child. But he's also playing a traditionally white, Canadian game—in fact, he even says that he's claimed the game for himself. In this way, the passage reflects Saul's promise to his great-grandfather that he'll honor his heritage (or "carry Gods Lake inside him"), while also reflecting his passion for "the new" (above all, the sport of hockey). By balancing the old and the new and surrounding himself with loving people who share and understand his experiences, Saul finally summons the courage to face his pain head-on, and begin to live a happy, fulfilling life.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The narrator introduces himself as Saul Indian Horse. He's a descendant of the Fish Clan, a tribe of Indigenous people from northern Ojibway, a region of North America. The Fish Clan lives near the Winnipeg River in Canada. For centuries, they've lived in places that the white man, or "Zhaunagush," doesn't go. The people of the Fish Clan have long, straight hair and deep brown eyes. Their legends describe how they emerged from Mother Earth's womb. When Saul was still a child, the Fish Clan still talked in terms of legends like this. Nowadays, however, they don't.

Saul Indian Horse, the protagonist and narrator of the book, is a member of an Indigenous Canadian tribe. He emphasizes his pride in his people, but he suggests that the Fish Clan aren't what they used to be. During Saul's lifetime, the Canadian government's systematic mistreatment of tribes like the Fish Clan has led to the deterioration of their once rich and vibrant culture. This is the tragedy to which Saul subtly alludes in this passage.

Saul admits that he's a "hardcore drunk." He lives in the New Dawn Center, a treatment facility run by other members of the Fish Clan. Saul dislikes the communal nature of the center, describing how the patients are always being made to sit in a circle and talk about their feelings. These patients are of many different ages, and Saul doesn't like listening to their life stories. In private, Saul talks to his personal counselor, Moses. He's been sober for more than two months—the longest he's been sober in years.

Like a disproportionately large number of Indigenous Canadians, Saul struggles with alcoholism. His time in the treatment center gives him an opportunity to reflect on his life, which sets the stage for the story Saul is about to tell. Although this passage makes it clear that Saul feels like an outsider at the treatment center, he hasn't yet made it clear why that is.

Saul refuses to tell his life story when he's sitting in a circle with his fellow patients, feeling that it is too complicated. So instead, he'll write down his story—and as soon as he's done, he'll "get on with life." The Fish Clan, he claims, would consider him a seer: he has been "lifted" out of the physical world, an experience which allowed him to glimpse the true nature of things. And yet Saul hasn't had such an experience for a long, long time. Sometimes, he writes, "it feels as though I have spent my entire life on a trek to rediscover it."

Saul laments his lost ability to "see" in a mystical, supernatural way, echoing his earlier lamentation of the lost glories of his tribe and their miserable present state. In this way, Wagamese connects Saul's personal experiences with the overall experience of the Indigenous Canadian population during the 20th century.

CHAPTER 2

Saul's tribe has a story about how the first Indian horse arrived. The Fish Clan knew nothing about horses. They had no boats or bridges or maps. They lived surrounded by "untamed" nature. Saul's great-grandfather, Slanting Sky, was a shaman—a healer and religious leader of the Fish Clan. One day, Slanting Sky came through the land leading a strange creature. He led the creature back to his people and told them its name: horse. Slanting Sky showed his people how to ride the horse and use it to haul heavy logs.

The story reveals that Saul comes from an important family within his tribe, since his great-grandfather was Slanting Sky. It also helps show that the Fish Clan practices a way of life in which the natural world plays a dominant role. Members of the Fish Clan lack many technologies that Westerners take for granted (like boats or bridges), but Saul depicts them as a wise and proud people.

Shortly afterwards, Slanting Sky told his people that the horse represented a great change—a change that would "scorch" the life of every Fish Clan man, woman, and child. The people were frightened and confused by this speech. But they decided to take care of the horse, anyway. Eventually, "Indian Horse" became Saul's family name.

Saul's family name is a constant reminder of his proud heritage. But it is also a symbol of the demise of his people and their culture, as this passage foreshadows. (The arrival of horses in Indigenous communities in Canada did *symbolize the end of an era, since it marked the arrival of European colonizers who wiped out much of Indigenous Canadian society.)*

CHAPTER 3

In 1961, Saul is just a boy. His grandmother, Naomi, is the matriarch of Saul's community. Even as a child, Saul can sense that Naomi is worried about something. She whispers, "The school," and Saul knows that she is referring to the school that turned his mother, whose name is Mary Mandamin, "inward." Naomi has watched her own children being abducted and then corrupted at this school.

During the 20th century, the Canadian government enforced a law that required Indigenous children to attend Christian, English-speaking schools. This involved thousands of young children effectively being kidnapped from their families and communities—a crime that, as evidenced by Mary's depression, left a painful mark on Indigenous society.

Saul has a brother named Benjamin and a sister named Rachel. Saul never met Rachel, since she disappeared at the age of six. Naomi tells Saul and Benjamin about how, one day, the white man, or "Zhaunagush," came to their community and abducted Rachel, taking her away by boat. Benjamin and Saul learned early on in their lives how to hide from white men: whenever they come to the community, the boys run and hide in the trees. Saul and Benjamin grow up learning to read Zhaunagush books. But they also learn to be terrified of the white man.

Saul's family learns to be frightened of white Canadian society, since they associate it with the enforcement of the cruel Indian Act (the legislation that led to the creation of Indigenous schools). But Saul and Benjamin learn to read English, anyway—suggesting that European influences have infiltrated their community, and that some of these influences perhaps aren't so bad.

In 1957, when Saul was four years old, the Zhaunagush kidnapped his brother, Benjamin. Had the white men not come armed with guns, Saul's family would have fought them to the death to keep their son. After Benjamin was taken away, Mary collapsed in misery. Saul's father, whose name is John Indian Horse, began selling berries to white men, in exchange for "spirits." When Saul's family drank these spirits, they became wild and frightening.

Historically, alcoholism has been a major problem in Indigenous Canadian communities. As Wagamese sees it, alcoholism was in part a reaction to the tragedies of Indigenous life in the wake of European colonization. Families like Saul's, for instance, drank in part because they were miserable about losing their children.

At night, Saul is scared. But Naomi comforts him by telling him stories about the old days—the days when Saul's grandfather used his medicines to cure disease, and when the people sang proud songs.

Naomi is the matriarch of Saul's family, and in many ways the person Saul loves most in the world. She symbolizes the strength and glory of Indigenous tradition and culture.

CHAPTER 4

After Benjamin is taken away, Saul and his family leave and move further away from the river where the Fish Clan people live. John seems calm and quiet, but Saul knows that he's furious.

The Indian Act rips apart entire communities. Saul's family is forced to uproot itself to protect Saul from kidnapping.

Both of Saul's parents begin drinking more spirits. To support themselves, they take on dangerous, miserable work cutting down trees for white businessmen. Through the years, Saul's parents move the family from one white village to the next in search of work. In 1960, they settle in the town of Redditt, where there is plenty of work. John seems happier, and begins drinking less. The family catches fish and enjoys cooking them together, though Saul still sees the quiet sadness in Mary's face.

Saul's parents' alcoholism pushes them to work harder so they can make enough money to be able to support their drinking habit. (Moreover, their addiction foreshadows Saul's own struggles with alcoholism in the 1970s.) The family manages to get by and find some happiness, but the loss of two children leaves an indelible mark.

CHAPTER 5

One day, while Saul and his family are living in Redditt, Benjamin reunites with them. He's run away from the school and, following rumors, tracked down the rest of his family. There's a great celebration when Benjamin returns, but soon, it becomes clear that he's contracted a "coughing sickness" during his time in school.

Benjamin's sickness (which appears to be tuberculosis, or another similar disease of the lungs) could be said to symbolize the lasting damage Canadian-European culture caused to the Indigenous community. Benjamin escapes from school, but the harm has already been done.

Naomi argues that the family needs to move again because the white men will come looking for Benjamin soon. She adds that Saul and Benjamin should begin dancing the *manoomin*, the Fish Clan's traditional dance. With this in mind, the family heads toward Gods Lake.

Naomi asserts her authority over the rest of the family: She's the eldest and is therefore seen as the wisest and most competent leader of the group. It is her duty to uphold her clan's traditions, such as the manoomin.

The family leaves Redditt and journeys to Gods Lake. They canoe past beautiful forests and mountains. During the journey, Naomi tells her grandchildren about the "Long Ago Time," when Fish Clan hunters tried to catch the moose. The hunters trusted their intuition and followed the moose all the way to Gods Lake. There, the hunters heard frightening laughter, and retreated. But years later, Saul's grandfather journeyed to Gods Lake. He had a vision in which he and his family settled by the lake and harvested rice in peace. Ever since this time, it's known that only the Indian Horse family can live in Gods Lake. Saul wonders if he and his family will be able to flourish in "this land that was ours alone."

Saul's family, and Saul's family alone, has a claim to Gods Lake. The Fish Clan tribe, like others, assigns meaning to natural phenomena, interpreting them to apply to their own lives. In general, the passage emphasizes the importance of tradition and storytelling in the Fish Clan, as stories are shown to have similar importance to laws in European-Canadian society.

CHAPTER 6

Saul and his family arrive at Gods Lake in the late summer. Gods Lake is a beautiful, round lake, with fresh air and tall trees in all directions. They pitch tents and fish from the waters. Everything seems to be perfect. Even Benjamin seems to be getting better.

The chapter begins on a happy note, with the family flourishing and enjoying its time in Gods Lake.

One afternoon, Saul is walking by himself along Gods Lake when he hears the sound of his own name. He's astounded to see a group of men and women sitting by the lake. The women laugh, and children play in the water. Some of the elders of the community nod at Saul. Then, suddenly, night falls over Gods Lake.

The irregular passage of time and abrupt appearance of the men and women (when, supposedly, nobody else is allowed by Gods Lake) suggest that this is a dream or vision, of the kind Saul described in the first chapter.

Suddenly, Saul feels a great hunger. In the distance, he can hear drums and the sound of dancing. Then, just as abruptly, Saul realizes that it's the dead of night—all is still. In the distance, Saul notices a man singing. The man finishes his song and then bows his head. A moment later, a wolf calls out.

Saul's vision encapsulates many important aspects of Fish Clan culture, from dance and song to the tribe's harmonious relationship with the natural world. In short, the vision marks Saul's introduction to the totality of Fish Clan tradition, presented here as a living, breathing thing, rather than an abstract concept or a metaphor.

Suddenly, it is morning. Saul hears the sound of falling rocks. To his horror, he sees that the community of people living by the lake has disappeared, crushed beneath heavy boulders. Saul hears his name again, and he turns to find Naomi staring at him. Saul begins to weep.

Saul's vision ends on a tragic note, with the destruction of his ancestors by a landslide. The scene suggests that tragic destruction is a pattern in the history of Saul's clan, played out repeatedly through the generations. At the time when this vision takes place, the Indigenous population of Canada has already been ravaged by disease and genocide, and is now undergoing cultural *genocide—or the systematic destruction of their land, traditions, and values.*

CHAPTER 7

Naomi never explains Saul's vision to him explicitly, but it's perfectly clear what it means: Saul has had a vision of the deaths of his ancestors, long ago.

Saul's visions put him in contact with his ancestors, and give him a sense for the destruction his tribe has endured.

Benjamin and Saul learn how to make braids using tree bark. Braids are important in Saul's tribe, because each family has its own unique braid. The purpose of the braid is to honor the importance of rice, "a gift of Creator."

In this chapter, Wagamese will describe the importance of rice in Fish Clan society. The significance of rice to Fish Clan culture is another strong concrete example of the harmonious relationship between the Fish Clan and the natural world.

Naomi and Saul's mother sometimes argue about how to worship Creator. In school, Mary learned to be "God-fearing," but Naomi insists that there's no need for this. Saul doesn't really understand what his mother and grandmother are arguing about, but he enjoys his life by Gods Lake, which is full of simple chores.

Naomi subscribes to a traditional, Fish Clan form of spirituality while her daughter, who was educated in a state-sponsored, Christian school, subscribes to Christian views of divinity, in which God is something to be feared. The Canadian laws requiring Indigenous children to attend Christian schools, though they were officially designed to facilitate the assimilation of Indigenous people into white Canadian culture, had the effect of sowing discord within Indigenous communities, and gradually eroding Indigenous culture.

The rice moon comes to Gods Lake, meaning that it's time for the family to prepare for the upcoming harvest. They then journey by canoe to the rice beds. There, Naomi explains, they'll harvest the wild rice by bending down the big "heads" of rice, and beating them with a stick. Then, Benjamin and Saul will crush the rice into small bits by walking over it "with careful, steady steps."

Harvesting wild rice is a difficult process, but many Indigenous Canadian communities depend on the grain for subsistence. Wild rice grows on tall, thin plants. The grains can be harvested by bending the plants and giving them a hard shake.

At the rice beds, Saul sees men and women collecting rice, and even filling entire canoes with rice. As he watches, Naomi explains that rice is a sacred part of their society. Creator, she explains, blessed the Fish Clan with a "country of rice," where the rice is easy to find and collect.

As Saul learns about harvesting rice, Naomi impresses upon him the point that the Fish Clan is lucky to have been blessed with an abundance of rice, further emphasizing the gratitude and respect that the tribe has for the natural world.

For the rest of the day, John uses a long stick to bend down the wild rice plants, and Mary loads the rice into big baskets. Saul and Benjamin follow Naomi's directions by stepping on the rice to break it up into pieces. In the middle of the day, however, Benjamin begins coughing up blood. The family tries to help Benjamin by giving him water, but by the next morning, Benjamin is dead.

The family's idyllic time together comes to a shocking and sudden end, reiterating the point that the Indigenous schools policy has some far-reaching, harmful effects. (Saul makes it clear that Benjamin contracted his disease during his time in school.)

CHAPTER 8

Following Benjamin's death, the family gathers to honor his memory. Naomi says that they'll carry him to "a high point," so that his spirit will soar away toward the sun. However, Mary angrily tells Naomi that they'll be taking Benjamin's body to a priest. The two women argue over the proper way to honor the child, each one defending their own religious tradition. Mary accuses Naomi of killing her son by forcing him to work hard.

In the aftermath of Benjamin's death, Naomi and Mary begin to argue. This shows how family tragedies can tear a family apart instead of bringing it together. Mary's accusation seems misplaced, a product of her understandable grief and frustration.

John tells Naomi that they'll be taking Benjamin to a priest. Naomi refuses to accompany Saul's parents. She agrees to wait with Saul. Saul watches as his parents leave, carrying their child's body. Strangely, Saul senses that his parents are becoming "strangers" to him. Thinking back on this scene from his childhood, he can vividly recall the way his parents look as they disappear into the distance and leave him "forever."

Unbeknownst to Saul, this is the last time he'll ever see his parents. However, he senses that something is about to go wrong, perhaps suggesting that he really does have the gift of "vision."

CHAPTER 9

Saul's parents never come back from their journey to find a priest. Weeks go by, and Saul and Naomi become worried. Eventually, Naomi tells Saul that they can't wait any longer: they'll have to canoe down the river, where it's warmer, to stay with Naomi's nephew, Minoose. Saul asks Naomi where his parents have gone, but she says she doesn't know.

It is never explained what happens to Saul's parents after they leave Saul and Naomi, but Saul and Naomi have no choice but to move on, or risk freezing to death in the cold of winter.

CHAPTER 10

Naomi and Saul canoe away from Gods Lake. It's becoming very cold, but Naomi makes warm shawls for Saul and herself by cutting up their tent. In the coming days, Naomi and Saul move down the river. They stop and to cook and eat the geese they've caught that summer, and as they eat they're utterly silent.

Saul and Naomi are understandably shaken by the death of Benjamin and the disappearance of John and Mary—hence their eating in silence.

While Saul and Naomi paddle down the river, Naomi sings songs. Saul can't tell what the songs mean, but he thinks they sound like prayers. The weather gets colder—so cold that Saul fears he'll freeze to death. Soon, there's no more food left to eat, and the water is too cold to swallow. Naomi cuts up some buckskin and tells Saul to suck on it. This way, Saul manages to get "a little moisture."

Naomi is a wise, experienced older woman, and she takes good care of Saul in this time of crisis. She has tricks up her sleeve for staying alive in times of cold and hunger.

After four days of travel, Saul and Naomi hit some rough water, and they're forced to swim away from the boat. They swim through the icy water and make it to land, where they continue their journey on foot. Snow falls, and their progress is slow and agonizing. At night, however, Naomi calms Saul by telling him stories about the Long Ago Time. She tells him that Saul's great-grandfather carved out a trail through the wilderness, and that they'll walk along this trail to find their way to safety.

Naomi isn't just resourceful; she's the guardian of her family's traditions, stretching back many generations. The passage is a good example of how, in times of danger, tradition and family history can be important sources of guidance and inspiration.

Saul and Naomi continue through the wilderness. Naomi claims that they're close to Saul's great-grandfather's trail, though Saul himself can't see it. She points into the distance, where she can make out railroad tracks. By the time they reach the tracks, they're both extremely tired and cold, but they have finally arrived just outside of the small town of Minaki, where Naomi's nephew is living.

It is perhaps symbolic that Saul can't see his great-grandfather's trail; it may foreshadow Saul's impending alienation from his own cultural roots. As readers are about to learn, Saul goes on to lead a very different life from the traditional way of life observed by his ancestors.

Saul and Naomi rest for a moment by the railway platform in the freezing cold. As Saul rests, he hears voices. Men pull him to his feet and carry him away to a car. Saul can see Naomi, raising her hands as if to hold him for a little longer. But she's silent, and her face is blank.

Naomi seems to be coming to the end of her life. She's risked her own safety to take good care of her grandson, and yet her grandson is taken away from her. The men who take Saul away don't seem to pay any attention to Naomi, even though she clearly needs attention—their only concern is pulling Saul away from his family. The scene echoes the earlier scene in which Benjamin is stolen away from his family.

Had the canoe not capsized, Saul sometimes thinks, he and Naomi would have reached Minoose. But instead, Naomi froze to death, and Saul was "cast adrift on a strange new river."

With this, Saul is separated from his family, and embarks on a frightening new chapter in his life.

CHAPTER 11

Saul is taken to live at St. Jerome's Indian Residential School—a place that takes "all the light" from him. The school is an ugly building, around which there are no trees, only shrubs. Saul misses the big trees and open spaces of his childhood. Inside, the building smells of disinfectant.

St. Jerome's school is a nightmarish place. With its grim atmosphere and claustrophobic, impersonal spaces, it stands in contrast to almost everything Saul loved about his old home.

When Saul arrives at the school, some gruff old priests take him to be washed and cleaned along with other Indigenous Canadian children. Then, he's given a uniform, which doesn't fit him very well. Then he's taken downstairs to meet the two heads of the school, Father Quinney and Sister Ignacia. Quinney and Ignacia are impressed that Saul already has a Biblical name. However, the other children are all given new names. One child, who says his name is Lonnie Rabbit, is given the new name Aaron Rabbit. Sister Ignacia claims that Lonnie's father is a "heathen" and "impure." Saul notices that even when Ignacia smiles, her face looks cold and cruel.

The teachers at St. Jerome's school are supposedly pious Christians, but as Saul describes them they don't seem interested in the Christian virtues of charity, mercy, or compassion. Rather, they're focused on one thing: teaching small Indigenous children that their culture is worthless and evil. One could easily argue (and plenty of people have) that the Canadian government's policy of sending Indigenous children to schools like this constituted cultural genocide.

Father Quinney and Sister Ignacia continue to instruct Saul and the other children how to behave at the school. Ignacia claims that "obedience is the measure of our worthiness" and that the purpose of school is to "remove the Indian from our children." Quinney explains that the boys will be working hard every day. Saul feels as if the world is being replaced by "an ominous black cloud."

Notice that Ignacia doesn't say a word about learning Christianity, English, or any field of knowledge. Her job is to teach Indigenous children that they're second-class citizens and that "Indians" are inferior human beings, fit only to follow orders.

CHAPTER 12

At school, Saul quickly acquires a reputation for being Zhaunagush because he already knows how to speak and read English. Most of his classmates come from Indigenous Canadian communities far away from the river, meaning that they've had no contact with the white man.

Because the river where Fish Clan people lived was an important thoroughfare for trade and travel, Saul had contact with white settlers earlier on in life than his classmates.

The children at school are beaten for infractions as simple as uttering Indigenous Canadian words. One ten-year-old boy is punished for speaking his own language by having his mouth washed out with lye—he chokes on the lye and dies. Saul doesn't receive as many beatings as his peers receive, since he's good at English.

Children endure grotesque, sadistic punishments that seem designed to hurt them and instill fear in them rather than to educate them.


Saul is miserable at school. Instead of talking to his peers, he stays by himself at all times. His only comfort is reading. Even though the books are written in Zhaunagush, they allow him to temporarily escape from the confines of the school into the world of his books. His teachers interpret his reading as a sign of studiousness, and encourage him to keep it up.

Saul begins to take comfort in reading because it helps him transcend his miserable environment. His love for reading is also perhaps an early indication of his own penchant for storytelling, an important tradition in his own culture.

One of Saul's classmates is a boy named Arden Little Light, who always has a runny nose and wipes it with his sleeve. To break him of this "bad habit," Arden's teachers tie his hands behind his back, so that he sits in class with snot running down his face. He's six years old. One cold morning, the teachers find his dead body: he has hanged himself. Arden is then buried in a graveyard outside the school.

Many of Saul's classmates die at school, often because of the teachers' horrific punishments. In this sense, the school system is not just a part of the cultural *genocide being wrought against Indigenous Canadians—it's a part of the actual, ongoing genocide of Saul's people.*

Sheila Jack is another one of Saul's classmates. Sheila was trained by her family to become a great shaman, and she's a beautiful, proud girl. But after a couple months in school, she becomes quiet and frightened. Her teachers beat her for failing to memorize the Christian catechism. One day, the nuns find Sheila sitting in a bog, giggling. She's later taken away to an insane asylum.

Sheila's story is yet another example of an Indigenous person with a strong and proud tradition being broken by the imperialist white Christians who claim to be "saving" her and others like her.

Shane Big Canoe, another one of Saul's classmates, is desperate to run away from school. To prevent him from doing so, the staff lock him in a basement for ten days. When he's released, he's not the same, and he can't stand to sleep in the dark. In all, Saul concludes, school "scraped away at us, leaving holes in our beings."

Saul's account of life at St. Jerome's paints a miserable picture of the impact of the Indian Act on the Indigenous people of Canada: it had the effect of breaking the community's spirit and undermining the cohesion of their culture and traditions (in fact, many have argued that it was intended to do exactly this).

CHAPTER 13

One day, Saul and his classmates sneak away from school and make it to the bottom of the ridge on which the school is built. There, they arrive at a small creek. The sight of the creek, which is teeming with fish, is exhilarating. They proceed to catch some fish, but have no tools for cutting them up to cook. Instead, they throw the fish on the grass by the creek, and watch as the fish slowly die. Like the fish, Saul senses, Saul and his classmates are "fighting for air."

Even though life at St. Jerome's is terrible, the children find small ways of being happy. Yet even little adventures, like running to the creek, remind Saul and his friends of their tragic situation: torn away from their families and thrown into such a foreign and hostile environment, they are "suffocating" like fish out of water.

That night, Saul and his classmates sneak back to the school with the smell of fish still on their hands. They spend the night with their heads pressed to their hands, inhaling the smell. The priests and nuns assume the children are praying, and smile.

Saul has nothing but contempt for the priests and nuns at the school. He ridicules them for their foolishness at thinking he and the other children are really praying. At best, Saul suggests, the teachers are fools; but at worst, they're sadists.

CHAPTER 14

Saul's classmates die of many diseases during their time in school. He witnesses children commit suicide by cutting their wrists and by drowning themselves. The experience is so horrifying that Saul only survives by isolating himself from others and doing his best to become "void of feeling." He makes himself a promise: to never let the nuns and priests see him cry.

Although Saul is surrounded by misery, he makes a promise to himself to remain proud and strong, perhaps sensing that, on some level, the school is intended to break him down and make him weak, servile, and without a sense of identity.

CHAPTER 15

The same year Saul arrives at St. Jerome's, a priest named Father Gaston Leboutilier begins teaching there. He's unusually cheerful and kind, and he takes the children on long hikes outside. He also starts a **hockey** team at the school.

Immediately, Saul portrays Leboutilier as everything the other teachers are not: happy, warm-hearted, and genuinely concerned about his children's happiness.

Father Leboutilier urges Saul to join the **hockey** team, insisting that hockey is "the greatest game" there is. Saul agrees to attend a hockey game with Father Leboutilier, and ends up loving it: the energy and unpredictability of the game make it thrilling to watch. However, Leboutilier tells Saul that there's secretly "an order to the game," and that Saul just has to be patient and wait to understand it.

From the beginning, Wagamese suggests that hockey is a metaphor for the world itself. Saul has experienced life as a chaotic jumble, but now, at the moment when he's beginning to make sense of his life, he begins to make sense of the game of hockey, too.

To his own amazement, Saul finds that he understands **hockey** almost immediately. He's good at seeing the ebb and flow of the game and understanding how players have to fight to gain an advantage on the ice. Much like his great-grandfather, who had the gift of sensing exactly where a particular moose was, Saul seems to be able to understand hockey without trying.

The way Wagamese describes it, Saul's talent for hockey is both a reflection of his assimilation into White Canadian culture and of his Indigenous Canadian heritage.

Saul begs Father Leboutilier to teach him how to play **hockey**. Father Leboutilier sadly explains that only older boys are allowed to play—Saul's going to have to wait. However, when Saul begs to be allowed to shovel the snow in the hockey rink, Father Leboutilier agrees.

Saul is so desperate to learn how to play hockey that he'll take on any job, no matter how onerous, to get close to the game.

CHAPTER 16

Saul has a new chore: cleaning the **hockey** rink before practice. He has to wake up very early to do so, but he never needs an alarm clock to get up. Saul loves breathing the crisp morning air. In secret, when nobody is watching, he'll sometimes practice moving "frozen horse turds" across the rink with a stick. Late at night, before he falls asleep, he imagines himself becoming a great hockey player one day. In these moments, Saul no longer feels so lonely or frightened.

Saul slowly, secretly teaches himself how to play hockey. The game gives him a sense of purpose that he's never felt before, and symbolizes his attempts to make sense of his life. Finally, hockey gives Saul something to aspire to, and keeps him from being consumed by despair, as many of his classmates seem to have been.

CHAPTER 17

By his second winter at St. Jerome's, Saul has found an important ally in Father Leboutilier. Leboutilier defends Saul from teachers when they're too cruel to him. Emboldened by Father Leboutilier's kindness and support, Saul takes greater risks. He practices skating in secret, stashing a pair of skates in his bag for when he cleans the **hockey** rink every morning. After a couple months of this, he's become "a bird" on the rink, gliding elegantly from side to side.

Saul again paints a picture of Leboutilier as a good man—one who's willing to take care of the children and protect them from cruelty of any kind. Saul also characterizes hockey as a way of transcending his misery. While he's skating, he seems to fly away from his earthly troubles.

Saul "senses" how to skate long before he knows how to do it. He intuitively understands how his body needs to move to change speed and direction. Saul can never put into words how he understands these things, but he's grateful for being able to do so. Without ever playing a game of **hockey**, he gradually assembles all the skills required for doing so. Moreover, he's careful to keep his practicing a secret from the rest of the school. He can't wait for the day he'll be old enough to join the hockey team.

Saul seems to intuit the game of hockey in the same way that he intuited his parent's disappearance. Working hard, he uses this sense of intuition, combined with a solid work ethic, to become a great hockey player before anyone even knows it.

CHAPTER 18

In **hockey** practice, Father Leboutilier is a tough coach. He knows exactly what he wants his boys to learn to do, and spends long hours teaching them.

Leboutilier comes across as a devoted teacher who wants to see his kids succeed.

The **hockey** team practices for its first game, in which they'll play against a team from White River. During one practice, a boy injures himself, meaning that he'll be unable to play. Saul volunteers to replace the boy, explaining that he's been practicing every morning. Even though Saul is still too young, Father Leboutilier decides to allow him to fill in during the scrimmage that day.

When a boy is forced to sit out of the game, Saul seizes the opportunity. Father Leboutilier, who seems invested in Saul's success at St. Jerome's, gives him a chance to succeed.

The scrimmage begins. While Saul is confused at first, he quickly comes to understand the patterns of the game. Skating quickly, Saul scoops the puck, skates as fast as he can down the rink, and scores a goal. Everyone is impressed, especially Father Leboutilier. He decides to let Saul play center in the scrimmage. Saul has a great time throughout the game, and afterwards he and his fellow players stand together, "like stallions home from the range."

Again, Wagamese characterizes Saul's experience in the hockey rink in transcendent, lyrical language. Saul seems to savor the exhilarating freedom of hockey, a sense of freedom that life at St. Jerome's doesn't otherwise give him.

CHAPTER 19

Although Father Quinney and Sister Ignacia protest, Father Leboutilier is able to convince them to allow Saul to join the **hockey** team. He insists that Saul has a "God-given gift."

Leboutilier again stands up for Saul, arguing that the other teachers have a Christian duty to encourage their pupil's gifts.

Years have gone by since Saul has heard from his parents. But he no longer feels so lonely. The game of **hockey** has filled him with hope and energy.

Saul is still nursing some deep emotional wounds. But the game of hockey seems to help him forget, or move past, his family traumas. Whether hockey will continue to bring him happiness, however, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 20

A couple weeks after Saul is officially allowed onto the **hockey** team, the boys face their first opponent: the "town team." Saul looks small in his uniform, and some of his teammates laugh at him. At the arena, some of the audience and members from the opposing team also laugh at Saul and shout, "The Indian school brought their mascot!" Father Leboutilier warns his team that the opposing team is very good, recommending that the boys should probably just "play for fun."

Right away, Saul is belittled and made fun of, not just for his race but for his size. All of a sudden, the hockey rink isn't just a site of transcendence and freedom; it's an ugly, harsh place—in fact, just the kind of environment Saul was trying to escape by joining the hockey team.

The game begins, and Saul gains control of the puck. He skates past members of the opposing team, going exceptionally fast. Using the skill he has developed by practicing on his own every morning, he takes a shot and scores. The crowd goes "crazy," and Father Leboutilier shouts, "You were beautiful." For the rest of the game, Saul excels, scoring goal after goal. Leboutilier tells him, "The game loves you."

Just as he did while practicing on his own, Saul intuitively adjusts to the tempo of the game of hockey, and as a result he's able to tune out the bullies and nay-sayers, and score lots of points.

CHAPTER 21

St. Jerome's, Saul remembers, "was hell on earth." Even though St. Jerome's is supposed to be a school, it's really a place where the children—even the youngest—are forced to "do labor." Children sometimes die by their own hand, or in horrific accidents. There's never a funeral when this happens. Rather, the priests simply never mention the children's names again, and life goes on.

Even though hockey brings Saul a lot of happiness, it can't entirely make up for the misery of life at St. Jerome's. The children are worked until their spirits are utterly broken. The fact that the children who die are never given a proper funeral (something a pious Christian would consider a religious duty) suggests that the teachers don't have any respect for the students, and don't embody the true spirit of the religion they are supposed to teach.

Year after year, Saul endures beatings, threats, and other forms of cruelty from the faculty at St. Jerome's. Most terrifying of all are the nighttime visits, when the priests sneak into the dormitories and lead students out of the room with them. "Where they went," Saul writes, "was never spoken of." However, one little girl, Angelique Lynx Leg, describes her experiences at night with the priests as "God's love." As she says this to Saul, she begins to weep.

The passage introduces a tragic but important theme: sexual abuse. The clear implication of the passage is that the children of St. Jerome's are sexually abused by their hypocritical, contemptible teachers. It is unclear from the passage whether Saul himself is abused as many of his classmates are.

CHAPTER 22

When Saul plays **hockey**, he leaves his misery and frustration behind. Father Leboutilier continues to take an interest in Saul's development as a hockey player, and sometimes comes to watch Saul practice in the morning. He tells Saul that hockey is like the universe itself—it's full of chaos and pain, but it's possible to "harness" this chaos and control it with careful practice.

Saul continues to regard hockey as an escape from the miseries of his life at school. This passage reiterates the idea that hockey is a metaphor for life: a big, complicated, chaotic "game" that can be practiced, learned, and even enjoyed with the right training.

For the rest of the **hockey** season, Saul and his team do well in competitions against opposing teams. Even after the season is over, Saul continues training: he jogs every morning, knowing that he needs to strengthen his legs. He also practices his aim, with Father Leboutilier's help. He becomes a celebrity at St. Jerome's—the champion hockey player.

Halfway through the book, Saul already seems to be headed for a happy ending: his talents on the ice seem to bring him great happiness. But of course, Wagamese has yet to explain how Saul becomes the lonely, unhappy drunk readers met at the book's start.

CHAPTER 23

Saul is now almost thirteen years old, and ready to begin the new **hockey** season. Shortly after the season begins, some men from the nearest town approach Father Leboutilier and ask him about Saul. Saul is so talented, they explain, that they want him to play for their team. After some thought, Father Leboutilier agrees to let Saul play for the other team.

Leboutilier seems to want the best for Saul—that's why he agrees to let Saul play for a more challenging team that'll encourage Saul to improve his game.

Saul begins practicing with the town team, the White River Falcons, coached by a man named Levi Dieter. However, Father Leboutilier continues coaching Saul in the mornings. As Saul begins playing for the Falcons, he does well, but he overhears nasty or condescending comments from the crowd, such as, "he's good for an Indian."

Although Saul relishes hockey, he encounters racial prejudice during his games, just as he has in virtually every other area of life at St. Jerome's. Many white people in the crowd are racists, who resent Indigenous Canadians (especially if they outshine white athletes at a traditionally European game, as Saul has been doing).

One day, Levi Dieter has a talk with Father Leboutilier, and delivers some bad news which Leboutilier has to pass on to Saul: other teams have been refusing to play against the White River Falcons because Saul, their star player, is Indigenous Canadian. Saul is outraged. Leboutilier explains that the other teams "think it's *their* game," when in fact it's "God's game."

Saul's talent causes other teams to refuse to play with him—not simply because the other teams don't want to play *against an Indigenous Canadian, but because they can't stand being* beaten *by one. As Leboutilier suggests, white Canadians think of hockey as a distinctly white, Canadian game, meaning that it's humiliating to be beaten by an Indigenous athlete.*

CHAPTER 24

For the rest of **hockey** season, Saul competes in scrimmages with his teammates. Father Leboutilier continues to work one-on-one with Saul, inspiring him to improve his game.

Leboutilier seems to take a special interest in Saul, recognizing that Saul is a talented hockey player who'd benefit from extra instruction.

One day, a man named Fred Kelly comes to watch Saul and the other players practice. Father Leboutilier explains that Kelly coaches a big tournament team, The Moose. Tournament teams, he elaborates, compete in "Native Tournaments," since many of the teams from big towns don't like competing against Indigenous Canadians. Kelly tells Saul, "What I seen here, it's no wonder they're scared to play you."

Fred Kelly is a hockey coach, and seems to understand, as Saul has already learned, that the world of hockey is a microcosm of racial tension. White hockey teams dislike playing against (and especially losing to) Indigenous Canadian teams. As a result, Kelly's team of Indigenous Canadians only competes against other Indigenous Canadian teams.

Father Leboutilier explains that Fred Kelly has come to make Saul an incredible offer. Saul will live with Kelly and his wife, Martha, who'll become his legal guardians. Saul will play with Kelly's Tournament Team and learn more about **hockey** than he ever could while playing with St. Jerome's. Furthermore, Fred and Martha are former students of St. Jerome's.

It's unnerving for Saul to have to make such a big decision before he knows Fred Kelly well at all. However, Saul's life at St Jerome's is so miserable that almost anything, it would seem, would be an improvement.

When Father Leboutilier mentions Fred Kelly's idea to Sister Ignacia, Ignacia is disgusted. She claims that **hockey** is a "soulless game," even after Father Leboutilier points out that it will give Saul "a chance at a better life." Despite Ignacia's resistance, Father Quinney agrees to let Saul move in with the Kelly family. He says that Saul is clearly a bright kid and a great hockey player, and that to hold him back from a better life would be a sin.

For the last time, Leboutilier stands up for Saul, defending Fred Kelly's offer when the other teachers dismiss it immediately. Leboutilier is unique among the faculty members insofar as he seems to embody the virtues of his Christian faith: he really believes, for example, that he has a duty to educate Saul and enrich his talents because they're God-given.

Having spoken amongst themselves, the priests of St. Jerome's ask Saul if he wants to move in with the Kelly family. Saul hesitates, and then says, "I'll go." It's one of the first big choices he's ever made in his life.

Saul's decision to live with Fred Kelly marks his coming-of-age. By making an independent, autonomous decision in favor of a better life, he assert his maturity and takes control over the direction of his own life, though he does so with some hesitation.

Saul prepares to leave St. Jerome's. He gathers his few belongings and then walks outside to where Fred Kelly is waiting. Before he leaves, he embraces Father Leboutilier, who whispers, "Go with God."

Leboutilier seems to be the ideal priest: he's sincerely interested in helping his students, and he's motivated by a strong religious faith. In their time together at St. Jerome's, he and Saul have built a strong relationship.

CHAPTER 25

Saul and Fred Kelly arrive in Manitouwadge, a mining town. The community where Saul lives is informally known as "the Rez," meaning that it's an Indigenous Canadian reservation. The "town proper," however, is populated by white people, some of whom bully the Indigenous Canadians. But when he first arrives in Manitouwadge in 1966, Saul doesn't know any of this.

Saul uses subtle foreshadowing to contrast his initial naiveté about "the Rez" with his eventual, more cynical position. This suggests that Saul still has a lot of growing up to do—and that his new home may not be as nice as it appears.

Fred introduces Saul to his family. He has three children: Garrett, Howard, and Virgil. Virgil is captain of the Moose. Soon after meeting Saul, he tells him that the other Moose players aren't going to like him, at least not at first—he's a "runt," and he's taking someone else's spot on the team. Virgil advises Saul to make a point of proving himself and showing that he can fight his own battles.

Virgil is a blunt young man who always says what's on his mind. Instead of dancing around the truth, he makes it known to Saul that he's up against some considerable odds, and will have to prove himself to his teammates.

Preparing for his first scrimmage with the Moose, Saul notices that his teammates are very serious and mature. Nobody talks to him. Fred Kelly pulls Saul aside and encourages him to take it easy during his first scrimmage.

Leading up to Saul's first game with the Moose, the tension builds: will Saul be able to prove himself and win the respect of his teammates?

The scrimmage begins, and Saul hangs back from the action, studying the way the other players move. Quickly, he learns how to "read the flow" of the game, and heads for the center of the action. The other players push and shove him, using their superior size and strength. Nobody passes him the puck, so Saul intercepts it and passes it to Virgil, who scores a goal. Virgil tells Saul, "Nice pass."

Just as he's done before, Saul is able to familiarize himself with the rhythm and spatial dynamics of the game, and then play brilliantly, earning Virgil's respect.

As the scrimmage goes on, it becomes clear that Saul is one of the finest players on the team. The opposing players shove him with all their might, and Saul is forced to adjust his style of play—an experience that makes him a better player, he writes. By the end of the scrimmage, Saul has scored several goals and learned how to "whirl and dance" away from the other players. He's thrilled to feel "the magic of the game."

Saul is small, but he uses his size to his advantage, moving around his bigger, slower opponents. Again, Saul seems to think of skating as a transcendent activity that frees him from his woes and puts him in touch with an almost spiritual realm.

After practice, Fred Kelly smiles and tells Saul, "Welcome to the Moose." Virgil hands him a soda, and he drinks it, proudly thinking, "I was a Moose."

By the end of the scrimmage it is clear that Saul's skill on the ice has quickly earned him the team's respect.

CHAPTER 26

In the coming weeks, Saul familiarizes himself with the rituals of playing **hockey** for the Moose. He and the other players pile into Virgil's van and drive to other towns. In every one of these towns, to Saul's delight, the Moose are welcomed like family. Their hosts give them a place to sleep and serve them delicious food.

Saul enjoys playing in the tournament league, because it seems to be like a new family for him. His talent as an athlete earns him the respect not only of his team, but of strangers in other towns.

Saul's **hockey** games with the Moose are challenging, but also exhilarating. He and his teammates play for incredibly loyal fans, and every point they score feels like a major victory. The games are intense, but they always end civilly, with both sides shaking hands. Saul's presence is often greeted with laughter since he's so much smaller than the other boys. But his teammates know how talented he is, and call him their "secret weapon."

Saul's teammates no longer make fun of him for his size—they recognize just how talented he is, and brag about his abilities to their opponents.

CHAPTER 27

Hockey is a big deal in the Indigenous Canadian community. Every community has a hockey team, and kids grow up aspiring to play for their team one day. Saul is proud to play with the Moose, and he also enjoys traveling to other Indigenous Canadian reservations for games.

Although hockey is a traditionally European game, Indigenous Canadians love it and excel at it. This emphasizes the point that not all forms of cultural exchange between European Canadians and Indigenous Canadians are necessarily harmful.

Saul also likes his adopted parents, Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly. He gets along with his brother, Virgil, who becomes his "closest ally." Virgil helps Saul study for school, and encourages him to work hard and succeed.

Saul's life seems to be moving in the right direction: he's excelling at his sport, and he also seems to have found a surrogate family in the Kellys.

During his second winter in his new community, Saul begins waking up early and practicing **hockey** with Virgil. Nearly everyone Saul plays hockey with is bigger than he is, but this makes Saul a better player in the long run. He continues to feel a "purity of motion" when he skates along the ice—a sense of freedom that he doesn't experience at any other time.

Saul embraces every challenge he comes across on the rink, knowing that it will strengthen him. Hockey remains one of the greatest sources of pleasure in his life.

CHAPTER 28

In his second year with the Moose, Saul and his teammates win most of their games. Saul maintains his teammates' respect, and gets a lot of play. Sometimes, Father Leboutilier comes to watch his games. Once, Leboutilier tells Saul, "You make the other players better." He also tells Saul that he's proud—proud that Saul is now "free to let the game take [him] where it will." That day, Leboutilier says goodbye to Saul—and the two of them never see each other again.

Again and again, Leboutilier characterizes the game of hockey as "free"—emphasizing the way that hockey makes Saul feel alive, energetic, and happy. Wagamese gives readers the impression that Leboutilier is genuinely proud of his former student, and that he knew Saul would succeed all along.

CHAPTER 29

One day, while Saul and his teammates are playing a game, they notice a group of "white guys" watching. After the game, Virgil tells Saul that the white people want to play the Moose. Virgil has even agreed to a match, even though the challengers were league champions last year. Saul is very reluctant to play against a white team, but eventually agrees to the game.

Saul is wary of the "white guys" because of the bullying and discrimination he has faced from white opponents in the past. However, his love for the game of hockey outweighs his reservations.

Saul makes the resolution to "bring his best game" to the upcoming match with the team of White Canadians. He's reluctant to play, but he knows the match is important to his teammates, and he vows not to let them down.

Saul is motivated not only by his love for hockey but by his loyalty to his teammates. In some ways, the Moose have become like a surrogate family, or even a surrogate tribe, for Saul.

CHAPTER 30

The Moose travel to Kapaskasing, the hometown of their challengers. The arena is very new and full of the team's trophies from previous years. Saul can sense that his teammates are intimidated by the arena. Furthermore, Fred Kelly was unable to make the trip. Shortly before the game starts, a man comes into the locker room and asks for the Moose "lineup card." Virgil, who's never been asked for this before, is forced to quickly jot down his teammates' names. When the man reads the names, he snorts and says, "You got some pretty weird names here."

Wagamese emphasizes the contrast between the white team's wealth, evidenced by their flashy arena, and the Indigenous team's relative modesty. Right away, the Moose feel out of place. The white team has a different way of doing things, and because they're playing at the white team's arena, they're teased in various small ways.

The Moose players prepare for the game. The crowd laughs at the sight of Saul and yells that he must be the Moose team's mascot. Virgil tells his teammates to play "Just like [they] always do. No matter what."

Although a lot is different about this game—the location, the atmosphere, the opponents—Virgil wants his players to concentrate on their game instead of allowing themselves to be intimidated.

The game begins, and Saul is immediately stunned by the opposing team's talent. After only a couple minutes, the score is 5-0, and the Moose are badly behind. But during this time, Saul begins to understand the opposing team's strategy. He intercepts the puck, skates down the rink, and scores a goal. Within a couple more minutes, the score is 5-4. However, Saul is exhausted from playing so hard.

Saul likes to hang back at first and get a feel for his opponents' strategy. Once he has a sense for the opposing team's use of space, he's able to come from behind and score back-to-back goals.

With seven minutes left in the game, the Moose call for a timeout. Saul can see the fear in his teammates' eyes. The game resumes, and he pushes himself hard. He passes the puck to Virgil, who scores a goal, tying up the game. In the final minute, Saul manages to skate past an older, bigger opponent and end the game with a Moose victory, 6-5. To Saul's amazement, the crowd cheers for him—he's won them over with his talent.

Saul pushes himself, not only because he wants to win but also because he doesn't want to disappoint his competitive teammates. Saul is so talented that the predominately white crowd cheers for him—showing that, at least sometimes in the world of sports, skill can win out over prejudice.

CHAPTER 31

The Moose's victory changes their **hockey** schedule for the rest of the year. Everyone hears about how a little-known Indigenous Canadian team defeated the reigning champions, and soon enough, every hockey team in the area wants to play against the Moose. The team travels all over Canada, winning far more games than they lose.

Saul's talents lead his team to compete in other matches around the country—against white teams that previously refused to play against an Indigenous team. This suggests that the spirit of competition allows people to look past their racial prejudices momentarily.


The Moose's **hockey** games become more violent, especially when they play against white teams. Sometimes, Saul encounters white players who try to "rough him up" on the rink by playing more aggressively than is necessary, but he's usually able to outmaneuver them on the ice. Other times, big fights break out between the players. This only encourages Saul to become a better player.

As before, Saul is able to bounce back from adversity and use the experience to become a better athlete.

When the Moose play in Northern Ontario, they encounter hatred unlike anything they've ever experienced before. The opposing team, and its many fans, see the Moose as "brown faces," nothing more. Once, after winning a game, Saul and his teammates go to a local café to celebrate their victory. A group of big, tough-looking white men approach the team and declare, "We don't eat with Indians." Virgil boldly asks the men to step outside. A couple minutes later, Virgil staggers inside, his face covered in blood. Then, the white men order other players to step outside with them. Each time a player steps outside, he comes back horribly injured. The white men sneer at Saul and tell him he gets a pass tonight.

In this painful passage, it's implied that the reason for the aggression of the white Ontarians is that Saul and his teammates win their game. Thus, the racist townspeople's behavior isn't simply a reflection of their racism—it's a reflection of their embarrassment at having been beaten by people they regard as inferior in every way. The townspeople are so committed to this viewpoint that, rather than taking their defeat as an opportunity to reevaluate their prejudices, they instead resort to brutal violence to assert their dominance.

Later, Saul learns that the white men beat up the Moose players and urinated on them. Virgil tells Saul, "They hate us because we're skins." The teammates never mention the incident again, but every now and then, Saul can feel his friends thinking about it, bottling up "all the hurt, all the shame, all the rage."

As Wagamese describes it, the aftermath of the racist incident is almost as painful as the incident itself: Saul's teammates seem to have been traumatized by the experience, and continue thinking about it long after the physical injuries have healed. There is the implication that the event will have negative repercussions on the team's performance, as well.

CHAPTER 32

After the events of the previous chapter, Saul starts to notice small things about the Moose team's games with white opponents—for example, many white **hockey** players refuse to take off their gloves to shake hands with Indigenous Canadian players.

As Saul gets older, he begins to see just how openly prejudiced the rest of the country is: in ways both big and small, white Canadians treat Indigenous people as second-class citizens.

The Moose are invited to play in a tournament in a remote town that's home to a supposedly excellent team, the Lumber Kings. When the Moose arrives, white players from other teams laugh at them and whisper, "We're taking your scalps!"

The Moose have to put up with offensive, stereotyping insults on a regular basis. It adds a psychic and emotional dimension to their gameplay that makes it all the more challenging to be at peak performance.

The first game of the tournament is against a team called the Nuggets. When it begins, the Moose take an early lead. But whenever Saul scores a goal, fans of the Nuggets throw trash at him. The game ends with a Moose victory, 7-4. Many of the Nuggets players refuse to shake hands with the Moose players.

The Moose triumph in their hockey game, but unlike in previous chapters, their talent doesn't win over the racist crowd.

In their next game, the Moose players face a team called the Clippers. One of the Clippers players tells Saul, "Watch your head," just before the game begins. During the game, Clipper players slash Saul's skates, push him, and call him "squaw hopper." Some of Saul's teammates tell him, "Hit the fuckers back," but Saul insists, "That ain't my game." The Moose end up losing the game. After the game, Saul complains to Virgil that the Moose deserved to win—the Clippers kept on making illegal, aggressive plays, and the referees looked the other way. Virgil tells Saul that the team's upcoming games won't be any easier.

As Saul gets older, his opponents begin treating him more brutally. In hockey, referees are supposed to prevent outright riots from breaking out—but because of the racism of the referees themselves, it's suggested, Saul has to put up with unfair aggression from other teams. For the time being, however, Saul refuses to sink to the level of his bullies and tormentors: he loves hockey too much to allow himself to become another punk who fights on the ice.

In the next game, players push and shove Saul, and even the fans spit at him. The fans throw so much trash into the rink that the referee is forced to call a timeout. In the dressing room with his teammates, Saul is quiet but furious. He knows that his teammates want him to fight back, but he refuses. When it's time for the Moose to return to the rink, Saul is ready to win. He recalls, "There wasn't one of those players who could skate with me."

As Saul experiences more racism from his opponents, he becomes an angrier person. At first, Saul refuses to fight, but compensates with pride and even arrogance. Instead of celebrating the beauty of the game of hockey itself, Saul is now celebrating himself—a way of coping with the racism of the other team.

CHAPTER 33

The chapter begins after the tournament is over. Saul and the Moose have won the tournament, despite the bullying of the crowd. They've won an astounding victory, one that they'll always remember, and which sports journalists later write about in the Canadian papers.

Wagamese doesn't describe the games Saul plays immediately following the events of the last chapter. Instead, he cuts ahead to after the tournament.

The Moose team gets so much press from its victory in the tournament that a sports scout named Jack Lanahan shows up at Saul's practices, claiming that he wants to recruit Saul for professional play in the NHL.

The passage is a reminder of how far Saul has come. Instead of allowing prejudice to steal away his confidence, Saul has been able to use the racism of his opponents as a motivating force to become a better player, and he ends up getting recruited for the NHL.

CHAPTER 34

Immediately following the events of the previous chapter, Saul goes to speak with Jack Lanahan, the NHL scout. Lanahan greets Saul and praises him for his talent, telling Saul that he could play at a professional level. He offers to put Saul in touch with a team called the Toronto Marlboros, a "feeder club" for the Maple Leafs. Saul is reluctant. He tells Lanahan, "We've tried higher levels. It sucks," referring to his negative experience at the most recent tournament.

The Marlboros are a "minor league" team from which the Maple Leafs—probably the biggest and most popular team in the country—recruit heavily. But Saul is understandably reluctant to give so many racist people the chance to jeer at him, and his response to Lanahan suggests he's become cynical about what it's like to play hockey at "the higher levels."

Lanahan can sees that Saul is wary about moving to a higher level. He tells Saul a little about why he works as a talent scout. Although he's never been good at **hockey**, he's always loved the game, calling it "perfect." He says that Saul is wasting his time and talent playing at this level. He assures Saul that he'll fit in with his new teammates—that "they love the game too."

Notice that Lanahan never tries to refute the idea that some people will jeer at Saul because he's Indigenous. Rather, Lanahan argues that Saul loves the game too much to turn down an opportunity play for the NHL.

CHAPTER 35

Saul takes three full weeks to decide whether to accept Jack Lanahan's offer. His teammates encourage him to go, pointing out that any one of them would be thrilled to get such an offer. Saul asks, "What if I don't make it?" but his teammates insist, "You will." Virgil is most persuasive: he tells Saul, "You owe me," referring to the initial encouragement he gave Saul to play well for the Moose team.

In the past, Saul has performed well on the ice in part because of his loyalty to his fellow players and his desire to impress them. Similarly, and somewhat counter-intuitively, Virgil and the other Moose players suggest that the best way for Saul to express his loyalty to the team would be to accept Lanahan's offer.

CHAPTER 36

In the end, Saul finishes up his season with the Moose and then accepts Jack Lanahan's offer to train in Marlboro. In his final days with the Moose, Virgil pushes Saul especially hard in his training to prepare him for the rigors of big-league play.

Even after he knows Saul is moving on, Virgil continues to work closely with Saul to prepare him for his future, suggesting that Virgil is a true friend to Saul.

A few months shy of seventeen, Saul says goodbye to his adopted family and boards a bus to Toronto, where he'll be training. At the bus station, he tells Virgil he'll miss Manitouwadge. Virgil smiles and says, "You worked damn hard, Saul. You'll do good down there."

Virgil and Saul's goodbye is simple but poignant. Virgil clearly has a lot of love and respect for his adopted brother, and Saul seems to have found a home in Manitouwadge.

Virgil tells Saul, "You're like a brother to me." Saul nods and explains that he used to have a brother. Virgil doesn't ask anything further, but he tells Saul, "Maybe someone just gave you a chance to rub the shit off the board once and for all." With this, Saul and Virgil say goodbye, and Saul boards the bus.

Virgil's parting words to Saul suggest that he can sense Saul's deep and hidden sadness. Virgil seems to think that the NHL will give Saul an opportunity to move on with his life, instead of ruminating on the past too much.

CHAPTER 37

As soon as Saul arrives in Toronto, he thinks that the city is a "chimera"—a mythological beast with a goat's body, a lion's head, and a serpent's tail.

Saul doesn't clarify what he means by "chimera," but it's clear enough that Toronto is a surreal, intimidating city, made up of parts that seemingly don't really go together.

Saul stays with an elderly couple, Elissa and Patrick Sheehan. Their family members have played **hockey** for generations, and their house is decorated with seemingly endless Toronto Maple Leafs posters and stickers. Patrick tells Saul that Indigenous Canadians have played in the NHL before. However, Saul is the only "brown face" in his particular rookie camp.

Saul isn't breaking the color barrier for the first time in history, but he's still very much the minority on his team, which leads to his feeling alienated and uncomfortable.

Saul trains hard with the other recruits. During scrimmages, many of the other players ignore Saul and refuse to pass the puck to him. The players are very talented, so Saul doesn't mind being excluded, since "It gave [him] time to read them." That year, the Marlboros are planning to accept only three rookies onto their team—but there are as many as thirty rookies in the training camp.

Saul's teammates look down on him because he's Indigenous. However, this suits Saul just fine, since it gives him time to study the game and the players more closely to figure out how he's going to succeed.

During one scrimmage, Saul begins to excel on the ice. His teammate pushes him and whispers not to make him look bad. Making use of the muscles he's built up with Virgil's help, Saul outskates his opponents and scores a goal. Gleefully, he approaches his teammate and says, "Like that, you mean?" His teammate doesn't say a word.

Saul appears to be off to a great start: he's dealt with bullying teammates before, and now, as in the past, he appears to be overcoming the odds with sheer talent on the ice. But his growing talent comes with a new display of arrogance—in this case, toward one of his teammates.

CHAPTER 38

As a rookie, Saul is appointed "center" on the Marlboro team—a much-desired position. During a press interview, Saul tells journalists that he learned how to play by pushing frozen turds around on the ice with a stick. His teammates regard him as "weird," and say things like, "I heard they're like that" (referring to Indigenous Canadians). Even so, Saul remarks, "They took my passes."

Continuing the themes of the previous chapter, Saul appears to be succeeding in his new division, thanks to his enormous talent. His teammates may not like Indigenous people, but Saul suggests he's too good for his teammates to ignore.

The Marlboros face many excellent teams during Saul's first season. The press regularly describes Saul's achievements on the ice using turns of phrase like "taking scalps" or "on a raid." In short, the journalists refuse to regard Saul as just a **hockey** player—rather, he "always had to be the Indian."

Even when sports journalists praise Saul's performance, they do so in a way that uses aggressive stereotyping. As a result, Saul begins to feel excluded, even when he's doing very well.

Saul becomes angry with journalists, fans, and other players who belittle him for being an Indigenous Canadian. He channels this anger into the game of **hockey**, sometimes fighting his opponents on the ice. On one occasion, he gets into a fight with three opponents after one of them hits his legs. After the game, Saul's coach tells him that he's being a "cheap goon." Saul replies, "I'm just giving them what they want," adding, "I'm the Rampaging Redskin." The coaches begin benching Saul. Before long, he's off the team.

Saul finds it harder and harder to control his anger. Eventually, he breaks down and begins fighting back. Deep down, Saul seems to know that his coach is right: he is *being a cheap goon. But he has so much pent-up anger and frustration that he can't seem to help himself from simply responding with violence to the violence that has, for years, been directed at him—and as a result, he's kicked off the team.*

CHAPTER 39

Saul remembers a girl from St. Jerome's, whose name was Rebecca Wolf. Rebecca was a beautiful, mature girl, but her little sister, Katherine Wolf, was very timid. The priests and nuns began punishing Katherine, and when Rebecca tried to protect her sister, Rebecca was punished as well. One night, Katherine died, but Saul never found out what happened.

In this short, surprising chapter, Saul disrupts the chronological flow of his story. But this sudden interruption with a story from the past mirrors the way that Saul himself keeps looking back, reliving his traumatic years at St. Jerome's.

The next morning, Rebecca Wolf walked outside and sang a traditional Indigenous Canadian song. Shortly afterwards, she stabbed herself with a knife and died. Saul and his classmates proceeded to sing the song Rebecca sang when she was mourning the death of her sister, refusing to make eye contact with the priests and nuns as they did so.

In this passage, the students of St. Jerome's use Rebecca's song as an expression of solidarity with one another, as well as with Rebecca and Katherine. It shows how resistance to oppressive circumstances can take many forms—a theme which ties this seemingly strangely-placed chapter into the themes of the previous chapter, in which Saul finally lashed out against his racist opponents and was punished for doing so. The implication is that resistance to abuse often, unfortunately, has to take subtle and indirect forms rather than overt and direct ones like lashing out at opponents on the ice.

CHAPTER 40

Saul arrives back in Manitouwadge and walks from the bus stop to the Kelly house. Virgil answers the door, and, surprised, invites Saul inside. "What happened?" he asks. He tells Saul that he has already read about Saul's career as "The Rampaging Redskin." Saul explains that he did well on the team, but was penalized for fighting. Virgil points out that, even with his bad record with the Marlboros, he has the stats to join the NHL. Saul shakes his head and says, "I just want to play the game … I can't do it with all that bullshit getting in the way."

As the passage makes clear, Saul is talented enough that he could play for the NHL, even with his record of bad behavior. Therefore, Saul is making a conscious decision not to try out for the NHL: he's so sick of putting up with racism that he refuses to put himself in a position where he'd be a target for racists. Tragically, Saul is so overcome with frustration that he backs down, giving the racists exactly what they want: for Indigenous Canadians to disappear from hockey.

Saul tells Virgil that he intends to work in the mines or the local mill. When Virgil tells Saul that he was born to do more, Saul replies, "Says you."

Saul has been putting up with bullying and cruelty for so many years that he's beginning to give up on the idea that he can play hockey without having to deal with the difficulties that come with being a minority on the ice.

CHAPTER 41

Saul begins working in the forest as a "deadfall bucker." This means that he's responsible for cutting fallen trees into small pieces. The work is hard, but Saul likes it. He also likes being outside and experiencing the natural world.

Saul has allowed pervasive racism to discourage him from pursuing a career as a professional hockey player. Instead, he takes a menial job where, it might seem, he's not as vulnerable to bullying.

Saul's coworkers are gruff white men. They drink heavily, and often call Saul insulting names like "Tonto" and "Geronimo." Even when Saul does a good job, his coworkers insult him and laugh at him.

Even though Saul has taken this job in order to avoid being bullied for his race, he continues to experience this kind of bullying and prejudice.

One night, a large coworker of Saul's named Jorgenson gets drunk and tries to punch Saul. Saul blocks the punch and grabs Jorgenson's throat, hard. Brutally, he hits Jorgenson in the head. The other men fall silent, and Saul walks out of the room. They never bother him again.

In the past, Saul has been careful to control his emotions. It was, in part, this quality that allowed him to become such a good hockey player. Now, Saul is so consumed with anger that he practically seems to be looking for a fight. While Saul's fighting does cut down on the amount of bullying he experiences, it seems to alienate him from all other people—not just racists.

CHAPTER 42

Saul is growing into an angry young man. He's only seventeen, but he has already experienced a huge amount of bullying and teasing. He continues playing **hockey** with the Moose, but he becomes aggressive and intimidating. His teammates stop talking to him.

As the previous chapter suggests, Saul's angry, aggressive behavior doesn't just alienate him from racists—it alienates him from his friends and teammates, too.

CHAPTER 43

Saul leaves the town of Manitouwadge at the age of eighteen. Fred Kelly warns Saul that it'll be hard for him to find work elsewhere, and suggests that he stick around, where he's surrounded by his friends. Virgil claims that Saul is running away from his troubles, but Saul denies this and prepares to leave, claiming that he just wants to be alone for a while.

Wagamese doesn't explain exactly why Saul wants to be alone, but the reason would seem to be much deeper than the racism and bullying he's been subjected to. Saul has had a tumultuous and in some ways tragic life so far, and he seems to want some time alone to collect his thoughts about his past.

CHAPTER 44

Saul takes one last walk through the Kelly house, and then drives away from it. In the coming months, he works in many different towns, never staying for long. He drives for long hours, stopping to drink heavily.

Like his parents before him, Saul becomes an alcoholic—partly, it's implied, as a reaction to the tragic turn his life has taken, and to numb the pain of having his dreams taken away from him.

Saul takes comfort in drinking. When he's drunk, he thinks he becomes funnier, and making it easier to make light of his deep unhappiness. At times, he plays the part of an entertainer with his new coworkers, regaling them with stories. But whenever he runs out of stories and jokes to tell, he moves on to a new town.

Like many alcoholics, Saul uses drinking as an escape from his sadness. Alcohol lessens his misery by making him less inhibited, louder and funnier. But of course, this isn't a real solution to the problem—in the long run, it just makes him sadder.

Saul's new life is dim—"Things glimmered," he recalls, but "never shone."

What's the different between glimmering and shining? Glimmering, one could argue, evokes a faint trace of light, somewhere in the distance. Shining, on the other hand, connotes a bright, direct light, very close by. In other words, Saul is trying to "see the light," but the light seems very, very far away.

CHAPTER 45

The year is 1978, and Saul has arrived in northern Ontario. He finds a place to stay and then goes to the nearest workingman's bar. At the bar, an older man buys him a drink and asks him to tell him a story. He adds that Ojibways are marvelous storytellers and that he's met many Ojibways in his lifetime. He introduces himself as Ervin Sift.

A lot of time passes between the last chapter and this one. Saul is now a bitter young man. Ervin treats Saul very differently than others have treated him lately: he makes a generalization about Ojibways, but it's not a derogatory one, and he's otherwise kind and respectful.

Ervin proceeds to order Saul drink and food. For the next couple of months, he is Saul's constant companion. Ervin, a local farmer, offers Saul work driving a truck and cutting firewood. He also helps Saul cut down on drinking. Finally, he offers Saul a room in his house. Saul learns that Ervin's wife is dead, and that he has no children. Saul is grateful to Erwin, but he's still restless for something new—something that will fulfill him.

Ervin clearly thinks of Saul as a kind of son. However, Saul has too many "inner demons" and repressed memories to settle down and accept Ervin's love and friendship.

CHAPTER 46

Saul and Ervin stay up late playing cards and listening to the radio. Ervin, Saul writes, "was an angel." Ervin recognizes that Saul has some "wounds," and he tries to help heal them without prying too much.

Saul is well-aware that Ervin is a good, kind man. But because of his "wounds," he's unable to really benefit from Ervin's generosity and the offer of a more stable life.


At first, Saul follows Ervin's encouragement and cuts down on drinking. But then, he begins drinking in secret, when he knows Ervin is asleep. One day, while Ervin is out of the house on business, Saul drinks heavily, and then becomes overcome with guilt. He can't stand the idea of Ervin seeing him like this, or the idea of betraying Erwin's trust. Frantic and deeply conflicted, Saul drinks even more, writes Erwin a note explaining where to pick up his truck, and then drives away. An hour later, Saul is on a bus to Winnipeg, drinking from yet another bottle of liquor.

Saul's behavior may seem odd, but it reflects his intense feelings of guilt and shame about what he perceives to be his failures in life. He drinks because he's angry and bitter, and doesn't seem to believe that he's worthy of Ervin's love. It is for this reason, ultimately, that Saul leaves Ervin's home. However, he heads back to Fish Clan territory, perhaps suggesting that he's trying to get to the root of his problem.

CHAPTER 47

After his time on Ervin's farm, Saul begins to drink even more. He understands that alcohol is killing him, even though he feels as if he needs it to survive.

Saul knows he's sick, but doesn't have the ability to help himself. This, of course, is what defines alcoholism: alcoholics have an addiction that they can't shake, not because of a lack of willpower or moral strength, but because their bodies have become dependent on alcohol.

Saul tries to stop drinking entirely. He winds up getting seizures—a symptom of withdrawal—and has to go to the hospital. In the hospital, he experiences vivid hallucinations, and is unable to eat any solid food for seven days. Some of the social workers in the hospital direct him to the New Dawn Center. They add that if Saul keeps drinking, he could die. Saul reluctantly agrees to give the facility a try.

At this point, the narrative has nearly come full-circle: this is about the point where readers met Saul at the beginning of the novel.

CHAPTER 48

Saul writes that he finds it difficult to write anything about his time in the New Dawn Center. His personal counselor, Moses, claims that writing down his thoughts will lead him to discover something important about himself—but Saul can't imagine what this could be.

Even though the book has come full-circle, Saul still hasn't had any epiphanies about himself. Rather, he seems just as angry and bitter as he ever was.

Saul spends much of his time at the New Dawn Center exploring the facility's grounds. One night, very late, he stares up at the stars. Suddenly, he sees a man—his own great-grandfather, Slanting Sky. The figure he sees is old and extremely thin. Then, Saul sees his other family members—his parents, grandparents, and siblings. Saul watches as his family walks away into the fog, and he begins to weep. Saul decides that he needs to leave—"only this time I knew exactly where I was going."

For the first time in many years, Saul experiences a vision like the one he had as a child. Whereas Saul's first vision (at least according to Naomi) served as an introduction to his family and tradition, this vision serves as a sobering reminder of how cut-off Saul is from his past. And yet the vision serves a positive purpose: it seems to give Saul an idea of how to address his problems.


CHAPTER 49

Saul prepares to leave the New Dawn Center. He tells Moses that he needs to go somewhere, but can't explain exactly why. Moses reluctantly agrees, telling Saul that he can return whenever he likes.

Following from the events of the last chapter, Saul appears to have a specific place in mind—one that has some personal significance.


Saul catches the bus back to White River, and takes a cab to St. Jerome's. There, he finds that the school is in ruins. The walls are covered in graffiti, and the windows have been smashed. An old man, who introduces himself as Jim Gibney, sees Saul walking by the school, and informs Saul that the school shut down in 1969, partly because so many of the children ran away. Saul explains that he attended St. Jerome's and played **hockey**, adding, "They couldn't keep me on the team."

St. Jerome's is in ruins, symbolizing the disintegration of the Indigenous school system (although in fact the last Indigenous schools didn't officially close until 1998). Even though St. Jerome's itself is in ruins, the pain and self-loathing that St. Jerome's fostered in Saul is as strong as it ever was. The passage also reminds readers of how Saul has lost out on the chance to be a great hockey player—Jim mistakenly thinks that Saul couldn't stay on the team because he was a bad player—not because he left for a better team.


Saul walks around the St. Jerome's campus and finds himself remembering his time with Father Leboutilier. When Leboutilier hugged Saul, Saul felt completely and totally loved. This makes him think of Naomi, who he still misses enormously. Saul remembers what Leboutilier used to tell him: "You are a glory, Saul." Then, he remembers how Leboutilier would kiss him and come into his room at night and put his head under the covers. He also remembers how Leboutilier gave him a job cleaning the ice as a way of ensuring that Saul would keep quiet about the abuse.

In this shocking passage, it's revealed that Father Leboutilier was sexually abusing Saul during his time at St. Jerome's. At the time, Leboutilier seemed like the only kind, moral teacher at the school—but now, it's clear that Leboutilier was perhaps the school's biggest hypocrite of all.

Saul begins to feel physically ill. He thinks about the racism and abuse that he experienced as a child, and about how angry it made him to be jeered at by **hockey** fans. Hockey was supposed to be an escape: a way of flying away from all his problems. But in the end, it was just another source of pain. Saul stands up, weeping. The sun is about to set, but Saul knows where he needs to go next.

It's starting to become clear why Saul is so filled with anger. For Saul, hockey was supposed to be an escape from the stresses of St. Jerome's—and, in particular, the sexual abuse he suffered at Father Leboutilier's hands. But in the end, hockey became another frustration for him. Saul seems to have repressed the truth about Father Leboutilier for many years—but now that he's consciously aware of it, there seems to be a chance that he'll be able to begin the process of recovery.

CHAPTER 50

Saul catches the bus to Kenora, and then takes a taxi out to Minaki. Then, he rents a boat and takes it down the river, toward to Gods Lake.

After visiting one important place from his childhood (St. Jerome's), Saul chooses to visit another, suggesting that he's going to continue uncovering details about his tragic past.


That night, Saul camps by the side of the river. He remembers Father Leboutilier's words, "You're free," and suddenly becomes angry. He realizes that Leboutilier was lying to him all along: **hockey** didn't free him at all. Furious, Saul picks up an axe he's taken with him and begins to hit a nearby tree. He whacks the tree again and again; then, he drinks heavily and falls asleep.

Saul comes to despise Father Leboutilier, remembering him now as a manipulative rapist rather than a loving father figure. Furthermore, the passage shows that Saul has, in some ways, been driven to alcoholism and hatred out of a desire to suppress the painful reality of Leboutilier's abuse rather than confronting it. Like so many victims of child abuse, Saul grows into an adult who has a hard time dealing with his pain and recognizing his own worth.

CHAPTER 51

The next afternoon, Saul reaches Gods Lake. He docks his boat and comes ashore. There, he begins to see a huge flotilla of canoes, carrying his family. Suddenly, Saul finds himself face-to-face with his great grandfather, Slanting Sky. Saul begs his great-grandfather, "What am I to learn here?" His great-grandfather replies that Saul must learn to carry Gods Lake within himself.

Saul experiences another vision. In this vision, he is given a clear message (even if it's unclear exactly what it means to carry Gods Lake within himself). Perhaps Slanting Sky is urging Saul to remember his Indigenous roots and honor the memories of his family members. By writing down his life's story, Saul has begun to do exactly this.

Saul begins to weep so profusely that he falls to his knees. After weeping for what feels like hours, he hears his name. Looking up, Saul sees only the moon. Suddenly calm, Saul offers thanks "aloud in an Ojibway prayer."

This experience is clearly cathartic for Saul—meaning that he experiences strong emotions in a way that effectively "purges" him of those emotions, pointing the way toward further growth and healing. Saul experiences a lot of pain in this scene, but afterwards he seems calm and optimistic for the future. He also lives up to his ancestors' command by honoring his Indigenous heritage when he says an Ojibway prayer.


CHAPTER 52

Saul returns to the New Dawn Center. He's not sure what he hopes to get out of returning to the facility, but he knows that he wants to talk about his experiences.

Where before Saul was quiet and standoffish, he's now eager to talk about his past—a sure sign that he's willing to work on some of his problems.


After talking with Moses, Saul decides to visit Fred Kelly and Martha Kelly. He drives to their town, and when he knocks on their door they greet him warmly and invite him inside. Saul confesses that he isn't sure what he wants to say, but Fred replies, "Sometimes it's better to just sit."

Instead of continuing to sit in therapy with Moses, Saul tries speaking to Fred and Martha—two kind and loving people who, crucially, know something of what Saul has been through (both because they know him personally and because they themselves attended St. Jerome's).

Saul admits to Fred and Martha that there are things about his past which he hadn't ever admitted to himself. Fred nods and quietly says, "About the school." Martha explains, "We always knew. Not specifically. But we were there too." Saul begins to ask, "Were you ...?" and Fred replies, "Many times." Saul asks, "Did they rape everyone?" and Martha replies, "It doesn't have to be sexual to be rape."

In this scene, a lot of information is conveyed indirectly. It is implied, for example, that Fred and Martha were both sexually abused by teachers during their time at St. Jerome's. It has been suggested that the Indigenous school system was a magnet for child rapists and pedophiles, who were able to act on their desires under the guise of piety and without the fear of anybody finding out, since the Indigenous children had been taken away from their families. Martha's words could be interpreted to mean that the colonization of Indigenous lands was itself a "rape" of Indigenous culture.

Fred gives Saul some advice: "Keep your stick on the ice and your feet moving. Time will take care of itself."

In essence, Fred's advice to Saul is that Saul will need to keep working on his mental health for a long, long time—maybe his entire life—but that healing will eventually come. Fred, who seems to have dealt with similar feelings of guilt and self-hatred as a result of abuse, speaks from experience.

CHAPTER 53

Fred Kelly informs Saul that Virgil now works in a mine and has three children. Saul and Fred have lunch, and Fred tells him that he could still play for a local tournament team. Saul is only thirty-three, after all. Saul replies, "Sounds perfect to me."

Saul shows a willingness to follow Fred's advice and take life one step at a time. He's still a fairly young man, with a long life ahead of him. It's clear that Saul is beginning to take an interest in rebuilding his life.

CHAPTER 54

Saul goes to the nearby ice rink, where he finds Virgil coaching the boys. Saul watches the boys playing, and realizes that Virgil must be an excellent coach. Saul greets Virgil by pointing out that one of the **hockey** players is a "natural center." Virgil turns, raises his eyebrow, and replies, humorously, that the boy is "a sawed-off little runt." They banter, and Virgil says, "You look good." Then, he adds, "I wanted to punch your lights out for leaving." The two men decide to talk more after practice.

Saul and Virgil reunite, and while Virgil is understandably upset with Saul for leaving town so abruptly, he also seems willing to forgive his old friend and adopted brother.

CHAPTER 55

After practice, Saul and Virgil sit on the bleachers and talk. Saul isn't sure where to begin, but Virgil interjects: "You're one of those kids … one of the ones the schools fucked up." Saul admits that he didn't know this about himself until last year. He proceeds to tell Virgil about Father Leboutilier, his family, and his early life with his family. Virgil asks Saul if he's ever wanted to track Father Leboutilier down. Saul shakes his head. If he went on seeking revenge, he'd be at it his entire life. Instead, he has come to accept that it is enough to "take care of" himself without worrying about others.

Virgil has always sensed that Saul was abused, or at least damaged in some way during his time at St. Jerome's. Saul's reply to Virgil conveys Saul's maturity: while it might be satisfying to try to punish Leboutilier for what he did, doing so would only make Saul angrier and more troubled. Just as Saul refused to fight back during his early hockey games, he now refuses to seek revenge on his abuser.

Virgil tells Saul that he should come back to town and get a job. He adds that Saul could still play **hockey** for the community's team, who regard Saul as something of a legend. There's a hockey game that night, and Virgil suggests that Saul stop by and play.

Virgil welcomes Saul back into the community eagerly, but whether or not Saul will accept the offer or not remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 56

That night, Saul goes to the **hockey** rink with a used pair of skates and a hockey stick. Although he hasn't skated in a long time, he gets back into the swing of it quickly enough. Before long, he's moving fast, laughing, and shouting with joy.

Saul shows up for the hockey match, signifying that he's willing to settle back into his old community again. Surrounded by friends, family, and the sport of hockey, Saul stands a better chance of living a happy life than he would as a lonely alcoholic.

In the midst of the game, Saul turns and sees that Virgil, Fred, and Martha have been watching him play. Behind Virgil stand several of the original Moose team members, some of whom have their wives and children with them. Virgil and his old teammates get out on the ice, along with a large group of other people that Saul doesn't recognize. There are so many people in the rink that Saul asks "How are we gonna play the game?" Virgil laughs and says, "Together. Like we shoulda all along." Saul smiles. He loses the first faceoff to Virgil, but doesn't care.

Saul has found a new community for himself. This community is very different from the one he grew up in, but it, too, is composed of Indigenous Canadians. As Saul begins to move on with his life, he seems to balance his tribal traditions with the realities of contemporary Canadian life (or put another way, he keeps Gods Lake within himself, even while he plays hockey). Moreover, Saul shows every sign of embracing his new community, recognizing that he's at his happiest when he's with friends and family.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Arn, Jackson. "*Indian Horse*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 6 Sep 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Arn, Jackson. "*Indian Horse*." LitCharts LLC, September 6, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/indian-horse.

To cite any of the quotes from *Indian Horse* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Wagamese, Richard. Indian Horse. Douglas & McIntyre. 2012.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Wagamese, Richard. Indian Horse. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre. 2012.