

Study Questions for "The Power of Horses" by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and "American Horse" by Louise Erdrich

For "The Power of Horses":

- Read carefully the italicized introduction to the story and consider how Paula Gunn Allen's comments in that passage direct us once more to the functions of storytelling in native traditions: to illuminate the ritual tradition of the storyteller's people, make pertinent points to some listener who is about to make a mistake...experience a sense of belonging to the tribe" [*Spider Woman's Granddaughters* 1]. How does this story enact these principles of storytelling in a modern setting?
- What is the point of the horse story that the mother tells her daughter, Marleen?
- How does this story engage what Joy Harjo and Leslie Marmon Silko referenced as "time immemorial" as well as Harjo's concept of a "landscape of timelessness"?
- What does Gunn Allen mean by "soul theft" [first line of her italicized comments] and how is this concept relevant to the story? Perhaps re-considering Harjo's poem, "Autobiography," would help here.

For "American Horse":

- While this story does not come from *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, consider how it, like "The Power of Horses," evokes concepts of soul theft and even connections to the natural world, or the severing of those connections. Do you see any imagery or descriptive passages that suggest a loss of traditional values or connections to the sacredness of the land and its creatures?
- While the story is presented by an omniscient narrator, that narrator's comments early in the story are presented through young Buddy's eyes. How does this perspective affect us as readers? Why, in your view, does Erdrich make this choice at the story's opening?
- How do you respond to Erdrich's characterization of Buddy's mother, Albertine American Horse? Do you sympathize with her? Just as Harjo's "Autobiography" might provide perspective on some of the issues in "The Power of Horses," does that poem--particularly in its address to alcoholism on the reservation and in its depiction of the speaker's relation to "that man from Jemez"--provide a perspective that might help us to understand Albertine American Horse?
- Why does Erdrich name the mother "American Horse"?