***The Painted Drum***

By Louise Erdrich

**Study Guide**



Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_

***The Painted Drum* by Louise Erdrich**

**Summary of Part I**

Part 1 – Revival Road

**Chapter 1 – Revival Road Narrator Faye Travers**

Faye is leaving a child cemetery in New Hampshire. She is confused by the fork in the road as a metaphor for life’s direction. “No right way. No true path.” She describes the road in summer/winter.

Winter day, Faye and her mother, Elsie, are doing house chores. Knock on the door. A neighbor, Davan Eyke, had slid his father’s new car into a ditch. Faye, and eventually others, tried to pull out the car, but it was damaged by the time they did.

Cut to description of another neighbor, Kurt Krahe, 56, a sculpture. Faye loves him, but suspects another woman and can’t fully give herself to him/trust him. Kurt hired Davan to work for him and Davan lives in a cottage on the property. Davan is bothered by the ravens laughing at him. Kurt’s wife is dead, killed in a freak car accident. He has a daughter, Kendra, in college at Sara Lawrence. Faye is a “local” but spent several years studying in London. Davan’s family is very religious. They kept a part German shepherd dog tied to the trunk of a tree for years. Krahe has a key to the back screened porch of Faye’s house and he comes to sleep with Faye. She does not discuss this with her mother. Incident with Davan shooting a crow with a bow and arrow. Krahe took it from him, shot at Davan, then broke the bow.

Davan bought an old Toyota. He started seeing Kendra. Krahe got upset and forbid Davan to see her. The Eyke’s dog has escaped and his terrorizing the local animals. Police are out looking for it. One police officer sees Davan’s car and runs the plate number. It is stolen and when Davan and Kendra drive by, the police try to stop him. A chase ensues, Davan hits an old man walking on the road, then skids on ice and the car sails over an embankment and into the river. Faye does not know how to feel for Kurt as he mourns the loss of his daughter.

**Chapter 2 – The Painted Drum Narrator, Faye**

The man that was hit and killed by Davan, was John Jewett Tatro, from one of the older, richer families in the area. Tatro’s niece, Sarah, is the nearest relative handling the estate. Faye and her mother have an estate business and are called to go through the house and handle the sale. Faye is curiously hopeful of finding some Indian artifacts since she knows Tatro’s grandfather, Jewett Parker Tatro was an Indian agent on the Ojibwe reservation where Faye’s grandmother was born. At the age of ten, her grandmother was sent to the Carlisle Indian School. She later married a white teacher from the school and stayed in the East. Faye recalls a box of handkerchiefs she found at one estate labeled by a woman who had used them on special occasions. L.M.B.’s sorrows and joys and tears. In the Tatro collection, she finds an Ojibwe doll, and then other items including a large drum. She hears the drum beat. She removes the blanket and the drum is 3 feet across, moose hide, white beaded figures around it – girl, hand, cross, running wolf. The face of the drum is painted with a center, yellow stripe. Something about the drum is speaking to her and she takes the drum out to her car and puts it in her trunk. When she gets home, Faye tells her mother about what she found, but not the fact that she stole the drum. Good explanation of significance of the drum on page 43.

**Chapter 3 – The Orchard Narrator, Faye**

Kurt comes to Faye each night for comfort. She asks and he admits that he had someone else he was seeing, but it’s over. She fears that Kurt is getting too much of a hold on her – “His grief is sucking me into an old persona, one I have forced myself to leave behind. …I am reduced, but I need him, too” (48).

A new neighbor is introduced, Everett “Kit” or “Squaw Man” Tatro. He is a wannabe and tans hides, makes tools, researches his genealogy. Faye hires him to cut the grass, because Krahe has started doing it and she doesn’t want him to. Krahe calls Faye and she feels uncomfortable. He invites her to dinner on a “date.” They go to the Sweet Mansion restaurant and when things start to get too personal and Kurt asks about working in the orchard, Faye has to leave the table. When she returns the intimacy is gone. When she gets home, Elsie confronts Faye about stealing the drum. Faye reaffirms her intentions of keeping it. The next morning Elsie brings up the idea of taking the drum back to the Ojibwe reservation and trying to find the origin/owner of the drum.

Faye runs into Davan’s mom and they talk briefly. Faye goes to the orchard and sits to enjoy the “cold, sleeping, wrecked, and still mine” feeling before the new growth of spring starts. That night she remembers her sister and envisions her running and playing in the orchard. (73-74) The next morning Kit Tatro is there mowing the lawn and she asks him to change the lock on door to the back staircase that Kurt uses.

**Chapter 4 – Jewelweed Narrator, Faye**

Faye is dreaming of her sister again. She goes out to the orchard to collect blackberries to make jam. When she returns, 3 things happen to disturb her home routine: Her mother sings to her, they are raided by the town police, and her blackberries boil over. She describes her father for the first time (81-82). He is dead, but she does not reveal any details.

The police have found a marijuana crop on their property. Apparently Kit Tatro planted it. More memories of Faye’s father come out. He was very volatile. Faye eventually retells the day in the orchard when she fell from an apple tree and her father below did not catch her. Her sister then stepped off the branch, landed next to her father, and died. He picked her up and ran, telling Faye to stay where she was. Elsie was away from home with the car. Faye eventually got up, and sat among the jewelweed and spiders, realizing she was all alone.

**Part 2 – North of Hoopdance**

**Chapter 1**

1. What do you learn about Bernard, the narrator of Part 2?
2. Why is it important for Bernard to go to the judge’s house?
3. How do the people there explain the fact that Faye and Elsie are descendants of the Pillagers when those people mostly died out?

**Chapter 2**

1. In this flashback, what has happened to Anaquot that make her want to leave her husband, Shaawano?
2. Explain what happens to Anaquot’s 9 year old daughter.
3. Anaquot’s son, whom she left behind, later becomes father to Bernard, Doris, and Raymond. What kind of father is he?
4. What is significant about the frayed piece of blanket Bernard’s father has kept?
5. What has happened to Bernard’s family?
6. What significant question did Bernard ask his father?

**Chapter 3**

1. Bernard relates a story of a man who went to the wolves. What does the man learn from the wolves?
2. From Fleur Pillager, Bernard learned that Anaquot was taken to Simon Jack’s house. What did she find there?
3. Who is the “helpful spirit”? What are the signs that it is there with Anaquot?
4. How did Ziigwan’aage treat Anaquot?
5. How does Simon Jack react to Anaquot and her child?
6. How and why do Ziigwan’aage and Anaquot become allies?
7. What is significant about the wolf that Ziigwan’aage shoots and brings home?

**Chapter 4**

1. After Shaawano is left by Anaquot, how does he react?
2. What does his dead daughter tell him in a dream?
3. With what is Shaawano supposed to make the drum?
4. What advice does Geeshik give him?
5. How does Albert help Shaawano?
6. What do you think Shaawano means when he says, “The body of a drum is a container for the spirit, just as if it were flesh and bone. And although love between a man and woman can change and fail, overreach itself, fall prey to suspicions, yet the drum lives on. The drum waits with the patience of unloving things and yet it heals with life itself” (172).

**Chapter 5**

1. Bernard says that as his father got older, the “ishkode wabo already had its hooks in my father’s gut” (173). What does that mean?
2. Describe how Shaawano put the drum together.
3. What did Shaawano put in the drum before he placed the hide on?
4. Describe Simon Jack’s clothing, made for him by his wives.
5. The drum became a powerful healer; however, one day it all went wrong for Simon Jack. Explain.
6. What happened to the drum after Old Shaawano put it away?
7. Bernard was told that the drum was to be restored. When?

**Part 3 – The Little Girl Drum**

Chapter 1

1. Describe Shawnee’s home.
2. Why are the children alone?
3. What does Shawnee devise to keep them warm?

Chapter 2

1. Why is Ira in a bar when her children are at home alone?
2. How does the man help Ira?
3. Who is Ma’iingan izhinikaazo?

Chapter 3

1. What does Shawnee decide to do after the fire?
2. Do you think she will make it? Why or why not?

Chapter 4

1. What is unusual about Morris?
2. What does Ira do for income?
3. What happens when Morris stops the truck on the way to Ira’s?

Chapter 5

1. Describe what Shawnee experiences while her body lies in the snow.
2. How are she and her siblings saved?

Chapter 6

1. Describe the scene Ira finds at Bernard’s place.
2. What does Ira tell Bernard about her whereabouts the previous night?
3. What does Bernard share with Ira?

Chapter 7

1. Where are the children being kept?
2. Who is the tribal social worker?
3. At this point, describe Shawnee’s demeanor, especially toward her mom.
4. When Ira goes to visit Morris, what happens?
5. How did Morris’s eyes get to be the way they are?
6. Why is Aptichi in a critical period of recovery?
7. When Ira awakes in Apitchi’s room and Bernard is there, what do they discuss?
8. Morris has resolved something in his mind and calls his brother to tell him. What is it?
9. How did Seraphine get the scar on her lip?
10. What does Ira still have of her father’s that survived the fire?
11. What is about to happen at the end of this chapter? Explain the significance.

**Part 4 – The Last Chapter**

1. Explain the significance of the following: “…the music of all the broken and hunted creatures who survive and persist and will not be eliminated. For there they are, along with the ravens, destroyed and returned” (258).
2. When Kurt returns to Faye’s house, how does she explain her actions to him?
3. Describe what Faye learns from her mother about the day her sister died.
4. What does Faye realize after she hears this?
5. In what humorous way has Kit Tatro “discovered” his Indian heritage?
6. What do you learn through Bernard’s letter to Faye about Ira’s family and the drum?
7. When Faye takes a walk through the woods, what does she discover?
8. Kurt’s studio has been vandalized. Who does Faye think might have done it?
9. What advice does Faye give herself? (274)
10. Why has Faye gone to the cemetery?
11. Explain what Faye is thinking about the ravens in the following quote: “-then aren’t they the spirits of the people, the children, the girls who sacrificed themselves, buried here? And isn’t their delight a form of the consciousness we share above and below the ground and in between, where I stand , right here?” (276).
12. Do you think Faye has resolved her issues around her sister’s death by the end of the book? Why/why not?
13. Looking back on the novel as a whole, in what ways did the drum fulfill its purpose?

The Painted Drum Family Trees

Daughter who fell to the wolves

Apitchi

Alice

Shawnee

Ira

Man who talked to the wolves

Raymond

Doris

Bernard

Fleur

Bernard’s father

Faye’s sister

Faye

Prof. Travers

Elsie

White Teacher

Anaquot

 (The Cloud)

Niibin’aage

Ziigwan’aage

Simon Jack Pillager

Shaawano