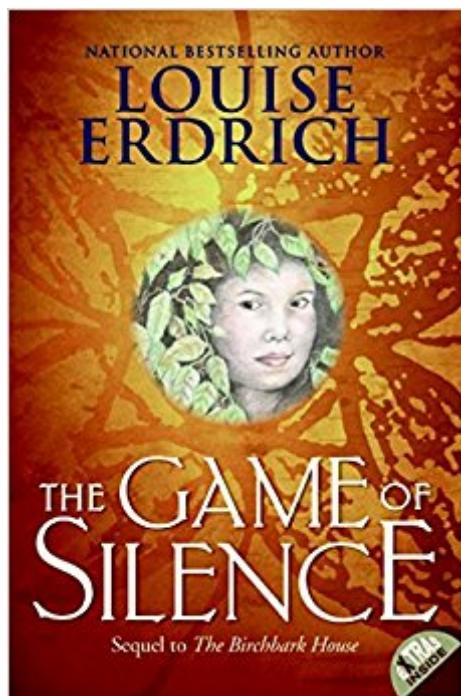


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# The Game Of Silence (Birchbark House)



## **Synopsis**

Her name is Omakayas, or Little Frog, because her first step was a hop, and she lives on an island in Lake Superior. One day in 1850, Omakayas's island is visited by a group of mysterious people. From them, she learns that the chimookomanag, or white people, want Omakayas and her people to leave their island and move farther west. That day, Omakayas realizes that something so valuable, so important that she never knew she had it in the first place, could be in danger: Her way of life. Her home.

## **Book Information**

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Multigenerational

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## **Customer Reviews**

Grade 5-8 -Omakayas's tale, begun in The Birchbark House (Hyperion, 1999), continues in this book. Older and more insightful, Omakayas begins to understand the elements of life more fully as she accepts her gift of telling dreams. Changes are coming to the Ojibwa people and she struggles to deal with all that she is experiencing and her dreams foretell. Her sister falls in love with a warrior, strange and lost members of her tribe come to rely on her, and her people are threatened with certain eviction from their homes and food supply. But traditions are strong, and after Omakayas is sent off into nature to face the spirits and her dreams, she learns to accept the fate of her people

and comes to see it as an adventure, "the next life they would live together on this earth." Although the story is set on an island in Lake Superior in 1850, readers will identify with the everyday activities of the Ojibwa, from snowball fights to fishing excursions, providing a parallel to their own lives while encouraging an appreciation for one that is very different. The action is somewhat slow, but Erdrich's captivating tale of four seasons portrays a deep appreciation of our environment, our history, and our Native American sisters and brothers.-Kimberly Monaghan, formerly at Vernon Area Public Library, IL Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** Gr. 5-8. Like its predecessor *The Birchbark House* (1999), this long-awaited sequel is framed by catastrophe, but the core of the story, which is set in 1850, is white settlers' threats to the traditional Ojibwe way of life. Omakayas is now nine and living at her beautiful island home in Lake Superior. But whites want Ojibwe off the island: Where will they go? In addition to an abundance of details about life through the seasons, Erdrich deals with the wider meaning of family and Omakayas' coming-of-age on a vision quest. Just on the edge of the child's daily life and coming ever closer are the whites--among them, a Catholic "soul-stealer" priest and a friendly teacher who helps the children learn to read and write both Ojibwe and English so that they can confront cheating white agents. Readers familiar with the first book will welcome the return of several richly drawn nonreverential characters, including Omakayas' pesky brother, her irritable mom, and her bold, tough mentor, Old Tallow. As Erdrich said in the Booklist Story Behind the Story, "Little House on the Lake" [BKL Ap 1 99], about *The Birchbark House*, her research into her ancestors revealed the horrifying history and also a culture rich, funny, and warm. In this heartrending novel the sense of what was lost is overwhelming. Hazel RochmanCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

*The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich is a National Book Award nominee, and perhaps this is one of the many reasons Erdrich chooses to continue the story of Omakayas. *The Game of Silence*, published in 2005 by HarperCollins Publishers Inc., is the second installment upholding the valuable culture of the Ojibwa in the same prestige as Erdrich's previous novel. Erdrich seamlessly entwines themes of community and language preservation as two aspects to teach readers about of Ojibwa culture. The opening of this juvenile fiction novel begins with Omakayas observing the arrival of strangers, strangers carrying the biggest threat Omakayas and her family have faced. The

chimookomang, the white people, want the Ojibwa to leave their land near present day Lake Superior. Throughout the circular motion represented in the seasons the Ojibwa try to continue. Erdrich highlights the peaceful nature of the Ojibwa as well as their sense of importance in community reprising old relationships and creating new ones. With the new and the old Omakayas worries about the danger and threat of losing something she never thought about losing...her home. Erdrich includes pencil drawings to enhance the novel as well as a map to display the surroundings of the Ojibwa. The novel ends with a glossary of Ojibwa language translations to help readers. One of the most important themes within Erdrich's literature is the importance of community in the Ojibwa culture. Families depend on each other for support and strength to make it through all the seasons. There are multiple examples of this, but three stand out. First, when rumors fly about a possible breech in a treaty between the chimookomang and the Anishinabe (Ojibwa) there is a community meeting, including the children, where it is decided that scouts will travel to discover the true goals of the chimookomang. Instead of discussing a major event within the community as only white successful men like the chimookomang the entire community assembles to discuss, delegate, and attempt resolution. The second example comes from the adoption of another child into Omakayas's extended family. When the child is left without a family others within the community have no doubts about raising another child as their own, similar to Omakayas's own upbringing. Lastly there is the strength given to the members of the community in support and prayer for loved ones. There are several instances in the novel when community members leave to travel, and through tobacco offerings and prayers from others the families at home find the patience to wait for the safe return of their loved ones. These prayers and offerings also shed light onto the importance of spirituality by thanking spirits and ancestors for gifts of land and nature. Another prevalent theme is the way Erdrich laces the Ojibwa language with English language. Throughout the novel when there is a word or phrase that can be translated into Ojibwa it is done. What is amazing is the way it occurs as a conversation. Often times when a language is being translated within a novel it can feel forced, but there is a poetic flow to the way the words are peacefully placed within the sentences and conversations. For example, when there is word to be used first it is given in Ojibwa and next in English, similar to the following description about a thunderstorm, "Overhead, the sky had gone entirely blue-black and the binesiwag, or thunderbirds, were flashing their eyes and clapping their wings just over the trees of the mainland" (ch. 6). Other times the meaning of the language is given within the context of the sentence. An example of this is when Omakayas is relaying a story about her chimookomang friend, "She spoke very quickly to them, insistently, in zhaganashimowin, the language of her people, and Omakayas and Twilight nodded politely and smile back at her, as they

always did, and she was satisfied" (ch. 3). Whether it is a direct translation or an explanation through context the message of language preservation is clear. It is important to document a language in any form as it will help to preserve at least some of the language, which is very important to any culture, and is imperative to the Ojibwa. In the end I recommend reading *The Game of Silence* because Louise Erdrich focuses time on delivering an accurate portrayal of Ojibwa culture. While preserving the language and following more of Omakayas's adventures Erdrich dedicates most of the novel to illustrate the importance of community, especially for survival. After reading this novel I have decided to continue reading on the life of Omakayas and her community in *The Porcupine Year* and *Chickadee*.

I bought the first book in this series for my 10 year old daughter. One day she left it in the bathroom and I happened to pick it up. Once in hand, I could scarcely put it back down. I loved how true-to-life these stories are. Unlike many children's books about Native American life, the author doesn't portray it as one long camping trip. She doesn't tiptoe around the hardships they encountered. As much as I don't want to ache and cry over the ordeals they suffered, the realism of this story is part of its beauty. It is the perfect balance of history and fiction. It is a perfect glimpse into what life was like for them, seen through the eyes of a child's experiences and emotions.

I first learned of Louise Erdrich and *THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE* from an article in one of my parenting magazines. The book was compared to those of the *Little House* series, which I LOVE, so I quickly bought the book and read it. Its sequel, *THE GAME OF SILENCE*, is just as good if not better. The story picks up three years after the small pox winter of 1847 (in *THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE*). Omakayas's family and the rest of their Ojibwe tribe take in a tribe of friends and family members who have been displaced by the chimookomanag, or white men. This is just one of the many changes that Omakayas and her family will have to endure in this book. Word has reached the tribe that the white settlers are making all Native Americans move west even though a treaty concerning the land was put in place years before. Omakayas has also begun having important dreams and been feeling a strong push to go into the forest with a coal-blackened face for a four-day fast with the hope that the spirits will speak to her and give her guidance...something that she is not looking forward to doing. What I love about *THE GAME OF SILENCE* and Louise Erdrich's writing is that reading historical fiction can be enjoyable. The reader comes away from the book with a greater understanding of the way of life, hardships, and traditions of this Ojibwe tribe. Plus, you can't help but fall in love with Omakayas and her family, even her bothersome brother, Pinch. I can't

wait to start the next book in the series, THE PORCUPINE YEAR.

I read this, the middle of the Trilogy, and was transfixed. I have been telling people that it's the Native "Little House on the Prairie". Based in about the same era and in the midwest, it's a beautifully intimate story told from the perspective of an 8 or 9 year old Ashinabe girl. I learned so much about daily life might have been like for a Native American family, and the characters were interesting, multi dimensional. The story was dramatic and moving. I ordered this and the other two for my niece for her 8th birthday.

This is the sequel to The Birchbark House. Like its predecessor, it transpires in the Ojibwe tribe's mid 19th century home on one of the Great Lakes and on the family of Omakayas, the middle child of three 'siblings'. (Siblings is like that because of what happened in Birchbark House.) Also like Birchbark House, this one is a charming blend of historical fiction and clear, lovingly drawn, appealing characters. A young reader will benefit greatly from seeing the westward movement of white people through Native American eyes, and do that within the context of a most enjoyable story with endearing characters and emotionally accessible events, plus they'll get a smattering of Ojibwe language and its culture. Well worth giving to your middle school reader.

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