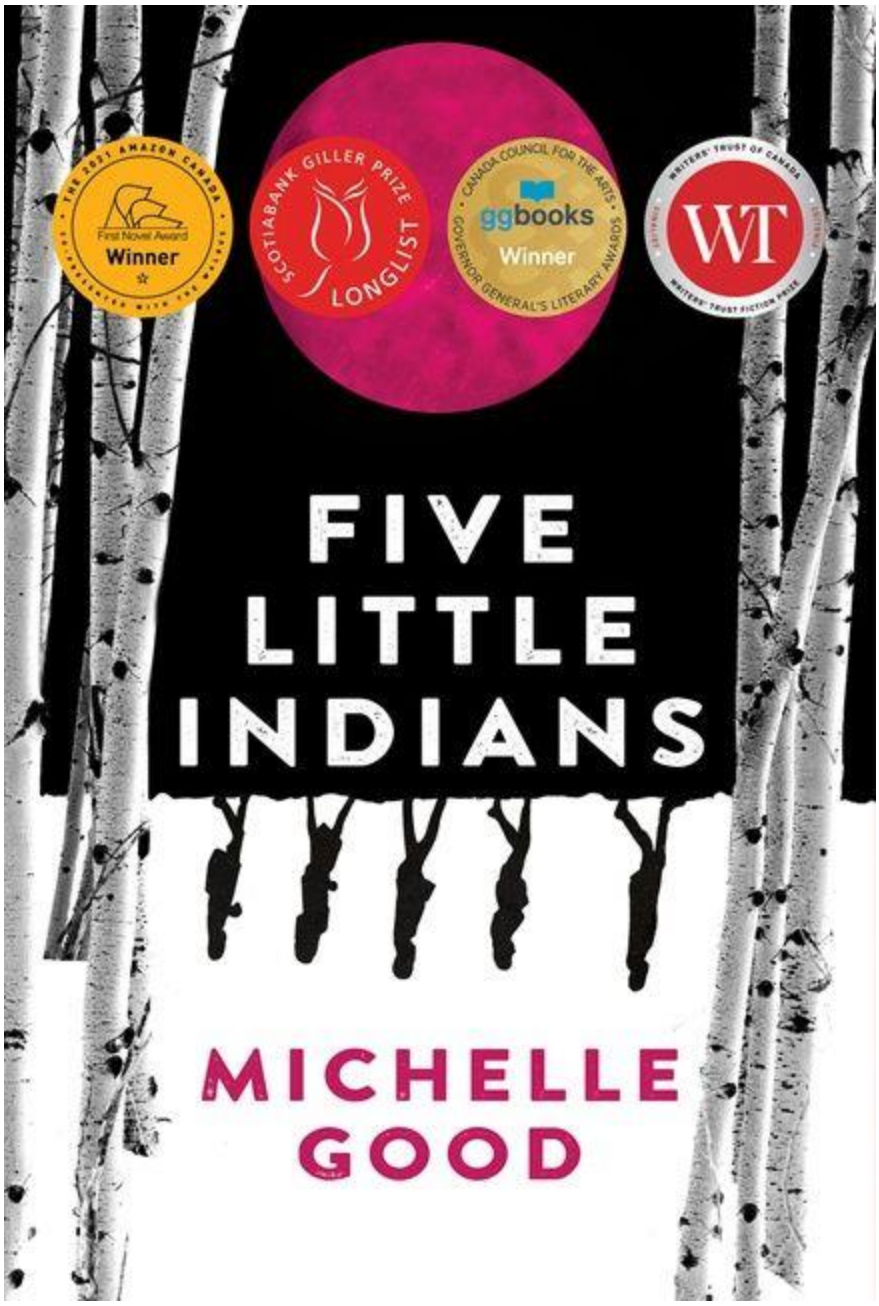

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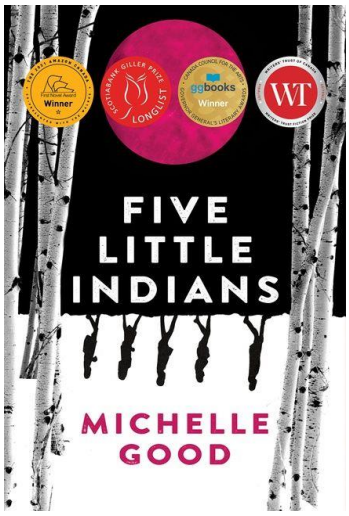
About Michelle Good

Michelle Good is a Cree writer and a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. After working for Indigenous organizations for twenty-five years she obtained a law degree and advocated for residential school survivors for over fourteen years. Good earned a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia while still practising law and managing her own law firm. Her poems, short stories, and essays have been published in magazines and anthologies across Canada, and her poetry was included on two lists of the best Canadian poetry in 2016 and 2017. *Five Little Indians*, her first novel, won the HarperCollins/UBC Best New Fiction Prize. Michelle Good now lives and writes in the southern interior British Columbia.

https://www.harpercollins.com/blogs/authors/michelle-good

Synopsis – Five Little Indians



Taken from their families when they are very small and sent to a remote, church-run residential school, Kenny, Lucy, Clara, Howie and Maisie are barely out of childhood when they are finally released after years of detention.

Alone and without any skills, support or families, the teens find their way to the seedy and foreign world of Downtown Eastside Vancouver, where they cling together, striving to find a place of safety and belonging in a world that doesn't want them. The paths of the five friends cross and crisscross over the decades as they struggle to overcome, or at least forget, the trauma they endured during their years at the Mission.

Fuelled by rage and furious with God, Clara finds her way into the dangerous, highly charged world of the American Indian Movement. Maisie internalizes her pain and continually places herself in dangerous situations. Famous for his daring escapes from the school, Kenny can't stop running and moves restlessly from job to job—through fishing grounds, orchards and logging camps—trying to outrun his memories and his addiction. Lucy finds peace in motherhood and nurtures a secret compulsive disorder as she waits for Kenny to return to the life they once hoped to share together. After almost beating one of his tormentors to death, Howie serves time in prison, then tries once again to re-enter society and begin life anew.

With compassion and insight, *Five Little Indians* chronicles the desperate quest of these residential school survivors to come to terms with their past and, ultimately, find a way forward. (Publisher)

Interview

Michelle Good on why Indigenous people can't 'get over' residential school trauma

Adina Bresge, The Canadian Press
Published Friday, May 28, 2021 5:43AM EDT

Michelle Good says her book “Five Little Indians” is her response to a frustrating question that often comes up in discussions about Indigenous people and Canada's residential schools: “Why can't they just get over it?”

As an advocate, lawyer and daughter of a residential school survivor, Good says the devastating long-term impacts of the government-run system are woven into the fabric of her life.

Good, a member of Red Pheasant Cree Nation west of Saskatoon, says she drew from these experiences in crafting her acclaimed debut novel, “Five Little Indians,” with a braided narrative that shifts focus from the historic infliction of harm to how Indigenous people carry that trauma with them into the present day.

“The question, why can't they just get over it? The answer isn't in the horror of the abuse,” says Good, 64, from Savona, west of Kamloops, B.C. “The answer is in how that continues to play out, both with the survivor directly and intergenerationally and at a community level.”

“Five Little Indians,” from HarperCollins Publishers, traces the intersecting journeys of a group residential school survivors in east Vancouver as they work to rebuild their lives and come to grips with their pasts.

The book won the Amazon Canada First Novel Award on Thursday and is up for a Governor General's prize this coming Tuesday, earning Good the rare distinction of being a sexagenarian up-and-coming author.

Now an adjudicator, Good says she first began working on the novel about a decade ago while juggling her law practice and her studies at University of British Columbia's creative writing program.

While she may have come to writing later in life, Good says fiction has given her the freedom to explore truths that transcend the evidentiary rigours of the legal process.

“A thing need not be factual to be true,” says Good, who used to run a small law firm and has represented residential school survivors.

“One of the reasons people respond to this book is that it's true, if not factual, on a very, very visceral level.”

As part of her writing process, Good says she studied hundreds of psychological assessments of survivors of childhood physical and sexual abuse to better understand how these injuries can shape a person's trajectory.

She says this research informed how the central characters of “Five Little Indians” cope with the life-altering aftershocks of being torn away from their families and communities and forced into a system designed “take the Indian out of the child.”

“The whole point of the book is how difficult it is to live with those impacts from the harm of walking out of those schools just burdened with psychological injury, and facing lack of support, lack of resources (and) racism,” says Good.

“It's something that went directly to the fabric of Indigenous community and did profound damage.”

Since its 2020 publication, “Five Little Indians” has been making the rounds on the literary prize circuit, securing spots on the Giller long list and Writers' Trust short list last fall.

Good also achieved the unusual feat of scoring three major awards nods in a single day in early May.

“Five Little Indians” won the $60,000 First Novel Award this week, is in the running for the Rakuten Kobo Emerging Writer Prize next month, and is among several heavyweight finalists for the Governor General's Literary Awards, to be announced Tuesday.

Others vying for the $25,000 prize in the Governor General's fiction category are Guelph, Ont.-based Thomas King for “Indians on Vacation,” from HarperCollins Canada; Halifax's Francesca Ekwuyasi with “Butter Honey Pig Bread,” from Arsenal Pulp Press; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson for “Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies,” from House of Anansi Press; and Toronto-born Lisa Robertson for “The Baudelaire Fractal,” from Coach House Books.

Good says the awards acclaim has been “tremendously satisfying.” But most meaningful of all is the reception the book has received from residential school survivors and their families who recognize their own stories in the characters Good created, she says.

“It's my love letter to survivors,” says Good. “I feel like that's something I can be proud of till the day I move on.”
This report by The Canadian Press was first published May 28, 2021.

https://www.cp24.com/entertainment-news/michelle-good-on-why-indigenous-people-can-t-get-over-residential-school-trauma-1.5446358?cache=xtabqcsnlq%3FclipId%3D68597%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue

https://quillandquire.com/omni/gg-winners-circle-michelle-good-english-language-fiction/

GG Winners Circle: Michelle Good (English-language fiction)

Days after winning the Amazon Canada First Novel Award, Michelle Good has won the General's Literary Award for English-language fiction.

Her debut novel, *Five Little Indians* (Harper Perennial/HarperCollins), follows the lives of five residential school survivors over decades as they try to move past their trauma and find their place in the world.

Good, a member of Saskatchewan's Red Pheasant Cree Nation and the daughter of a residential school survivor, worked for Indigenous organizations for many years before getting a law degree and advocating for survivors. She graduated from UBC with an MFA in Creative Writing in 2014 – a degree she earned while continuing to practise law and manage her own firm. The first draft of the novel, her thesis project, won the HarperCollins/UBC Prize for Best New Fiction.

Good spoke to *Q&Q* from her home in British Columbia about her latest win.

Congratulations! What does winning the Governor General's award mean for *Five Little Indians* – and for you?

It's a tremendous honour to have this bestowed upon me. Any time there's this kind of nomination or a win, it elevates the book in the public eye. To me, that's the most important thing about it, because the more elevated it is, the more readers there will be, and more hearts and minds will have the opportunity to consider what I'm trying to say in this book.

Why is it important that people read the book?

It's really important that people read about this because it was written to respond to a question I heard so many times, and that's people saying, "Why can't they just get over it?" This is just reflective of a real lack of understanding, a lack of knowledge, about the true impact of these schools. They're asking us to forget 150 years of taking our children away. It's 150 years of children between the age of 6 and 16 being raised by institutions, taken from their family, taken

from their community and raised by institutions, under great threat of psychological and physical harm. How could anybody forget that? So that's what I hope that people will take from this book. Every time the book is elevated by a nomination, it inspires more people to read it, more people to reach out.

The book has been elevated by quite a few nominations.

I know! It's just stunning in a literal sense. I'm sort of walking around pinching myself: is this really happening? The fact that it's happening in a pandemic as well, you get the notification and then it's like, okay, now time to feed the dog. If it wasn't the pandemic, there would be galas, there would be time celebrating with friends. All that stuff isn't happening and there's that feeling of, if a tree falls in the forest and nobody sees it, did it happen? It's a little odd, but it's great.

After working on the novel for nine years and sitting with the idea for even longer, what is it like to have it out in the world, nominated for all these awards?

It's astonishing. I really had some doubts about going ahead with (publishing) it, but obviously I did. It just couldn't possibly have been a better outcome, and it's an outcome that I really didn't expect. I thought this would be a niche book, that it would have a respectable performance with a niche audience that is interested in these kinds of things. This kind of broad-based response to it was not even in my consciousness.

What is it like to have met with such success with your first book at the age of 64?

It's almost an oxymoron, debut novelist at 64. My attitude about living is that this life that we have is not a dress rehearsal. This is it. If you have things that are important to you, things that you feel driven to do, then you must do them. In fact, it probably brings a maturity to the writing that I wouldn't have had if I had written this book at 30, or 25, or even 40.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Reader response is so meaningful to me. People reach out to me through my webpage and I get emails from readers who just have the most incredible things to say. One that really grabbed me was, "I just didn't know, but after reading your book I'll never forget." [I hear from] people from all

walks of life: I got this tremendous response from a judge, from survivors themselves who say that it's a reflection of their experience, from the children of survivors. That reader response just means the world to me.

Michelle Good says celebrating fiction win feels 'petty and selfish' after residential school discovery

The Canadian PressStaff
Contact

Published Tuesday, June 1, 2021 5:57AM EDT

Volume 11

OTTAWA -- Michelle Good should be celebrating back-to-back awards wins for her debut novel about residential school survivors, but instead, she's mourning the children whose deaths in the system are only now being accounted for.

Good, a member of Red Pheasant Cree Nation west of Saskatoon, was awarded the $25,000 Governor General's Literary Award for fiction on Tuesday for "Five Little Indians," from HarperCollins Publishers.

The book, which won the Amazon Canada First Novel Award last week, traces the intersecting paths of five residential school survivors as they try to forge new lives in east Vancouver.

Good, whose mother went to residential school, says she shares the honours with the survivors who carry the ongoing trauma of the government-run system.

However, the lawyer-turned-author says it feels "petty and selfish" to think about literary prizes in light of the outpouring of grief over the 215 children who were found buried on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, not far from her home in Savona, B.C.

Good says the atrocities of the residential school system are well-documented, and it shouldn't take such a grisly discovery for the rest of Canada to recognize the incalculable loss that Indigenous people live with.

"Why has this not been addressed before this time? Why does it take this kind of a devastating discovery?" Good said by phone Monday, noting that the disappearance of children was "anecdotal knowledge" among Kamloops residential school survivors.

"Here is this trauma playing itself out again, and again and again, right now. It's not in the past. Why can't people see that? This is something that is piercing the hearts of Indigenous people right across the country."

Good said she hopes the Governor General's award will bring attention to "Five Little Indians," which many readers have described as an entry point to their education about Canada's residential school system.

The 2020 awards, which are administered by the Canada Council for the Arts, doled out honours across seven categories in both English and French on Tuesday.

Toronto-born, Ann Arbor, Mich.-based wordsmith Anne Carson won the poetry prize for "Norma Jeane Baker of Troy," from New Directions Publishing.

The non-fiction prize went to Madhur Anand of Guelph, Ont., for "This Red Line Goes Straight to Your Heart," from Strange Light.

Kim Senklip Harvey in Vancouver prevailed in the drama category for the play "Kamloopa: An Indigenous Matriarch Story," from Talonbooks.

In young people's literature, the Fan Brothers of Toronto won for the illustrated book "The Barnabus Project," from Tundra Books, while Eric Walters of Guelph, Ont., won the text prize for "The King of Jam Sandwiches," from Orca Book Publishers.

The award for French-to-English translation went to Montreal's Lazer Lederhendler for "If You Hear Me," from Biblioasis, based on "Si tu m'entends" by Pascale Quiviger.

There are separate French-language categories for francophone writing.

Each winner receives $25,000, while the publisher of each winning book receives $3,000 to support promotional activities. Finalists each receive $1,000.

Founded in 1936, the Governor General's Literary Awards give out a total of $450,000 annually.

Organizers say the 2021 awards will return to the usual fall schedule after the COVID-19 crisis delayed the 2020 competition.

-- By Adina Bresge in Toronto

https://www.ctvnews.ca/entertainment/michelle-good-says-celebrating-fiction-win-feels-petty-and-selfish-after-residential-school-discovery-1.5450932

Reviews

Michelle Good's debut novel, Five Little Indians, chronicles the aftermath of residential school

MARSHA LEDERMAN
VANCOUVER
PUBLISHED MAY 28, 2021UPDATED MAY 31, 2021

KENT WONG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

It's tempting to call Michelle Good a late bloomer. She obtained her law degree in her 40s, an MFA in her 50s and published her first book in her 60s. As a lawyer, she has been a tireless advocate for Indigenous people – in particular, survivors of residential schools. And as an author, she has found the kind of success with her debut novel that few would dare to even contemplate.

Five Little Indians won the $60,000 Amazon Canada First Novel Award on Thursday and is nominated for the Governor-General's Award for Fiction, to be awarded on Tuesday. It is also nominated for the Kobo Emerging Writer Prize, and is also on two BC and Yukon Book Prize shortlists: the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and the Jim Deva Prize for Writing that Provokes. Last year, it was a finalist for the Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and made the Scotiabank Giller Prize longlist. And the novel previously won the Harper Collins/UBC Best New Fiction Prize. Three of those nominations – the GG, Amazon and Kobo – landed on the same day this month.

Even one of these would be a feat for a first-time author – or for any author.

"It's heart-stopping. It's so beyond any of my wildest imaginations about how this book would perform and how people would respond to it," says Good, in an interview from her home in Kamloops, where she lives with her two rescue dogs, Iggy and The Dude (yes, named after that The Dude).

The "late bloomer" moniker isn't quite right, however. More accurate would be to point to Good's lifelong growth – fed by, and in spite of, the calamities suffered by her family before she was born – and the devastation in her own life.

Behind Good's very great year is also a deep grief: one that has helped fuel her – and one that has been helped, in some ways, by writing the book and witnessing so many people connect with it.

"To hear people speak about their reading experience is just phenomenal to me," says Good, who is of Cree ancestry and is a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. "So many readers that have initiated a learning experience of their own – that is the icing on the cake."

Good was born in 1956 in Kitimat, B.C., one of five children of a Cree mother and French and English father, both from Saskatchewan. Summers were spent with her maternal grandparents on the Red Pheasant reserve, north of Biggar, Sask.

Growing up, Good knew her mother, Martha Eliza Soonias Stiff, had been sent away to school as a child. But, as an avid reader, Good had pictured her mother having the kind of boarding-school experience she read about in British novels.

When her mother started telling stories about what the school was actually like, Good, then a preteen, was shocked.

"I experienced an extreme case of cognitive dissonance," Good says. "It was … this sense of, 'How could this possibly happen to my mother?' And it just became a really living part of my consciousness at a very early age."

At 13, Good went into foster care. She describes the experience as oppressive and abusive. She did not finish high school, but did find a calling in working with Indigenous organizations.

When she went back to school in Vancouver to get her high-school equivalency, she was introduced to Canadian literature and fell deeply in love. One novel in particular led to what Good calls her "a-ha" moment: she admired Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel so much that she read it twice.

"So it means a great deal to me that I'm a finalist for the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize," Good says. "The resonance and the full-circle feel of that was so great."

At 39, Good took some courses at the University of British Columbia and at 40 began law school there, graduating at 43. The racism she experienced there – both systemic and from individuals – was an eye-opener, and further motivated Good's work in Indigenous communities.

While articling, she was asked to take on the cases of five residential-school survivors. Her path was set – between 2006 and 2014, her full-time practice involved almost exclusively representing survivors.

She decided to go back to school again, beginning her creative writing MFA at UBC in 2011 while still working full-time as a lawyer. Five Little Indians began to take shape during that program.

"I went there specifically to write this book. I didn't know what it was going to look like," says Good, now 64. "But I knew I was going to write this book because it's a book that has been asking me to write it for many years."

Published in April, 2020 – nine years after Good wrote the first paragraph – Five Little Indians is the story of five Indigenous people, all of whom attended residential school in British Columbia. The book does not concentrate on their school years, but the aftermath, demonstrating how their lives are affected by the abuse they experienced. The novel is compelling and devastating – a beautiful work of fiction about an ugly Canadian truth.

It is also personal. Good's mother experienced her own horrors at residential school. For instance, when she refused to eat contaminated food, she was forced to sit with it for hours and hours, and finally hauled into the principal's office. He told her, Good says, that "she was nothing but an Indian slut and would never be anything but an Indian slut." She was 11 years old.

Good herself was spared being sent away to school; her mother had lost her status when she married her non-Indigenous husband. But Good was very conscious as she wrote that her characters' experiences could have been hers. "I've been picturing myself in their shoes my whole life, basically," she says.

Still, writing the novel was a positive experience, one that gave her strength, Good says. "I felt like I was a scribe more than a creator. And I think that these stories were so deeply entrenched in me that it just felt good to speak them – to give them voice, to contemplate the idea of that story being in the world, in the way that I expressed it," she explains.

But there was also another facet to her personal connection to the work. Good wrote much of Five Little Indians while in the throes of her own devastating, complex grief. Her son, Jay Good, died suddenly in 2013 at the age of 31, the cause unknown. Mother and son were extremely

close. “He was my person. I was his person,” says Good, who was shattered by the loss. “He was my only child – so there will be no grandchildren.”

After his death, Good retired from law, but managed to graduate from the MFA program – and complete her novel.

“His spirit was a driving force in me finishing this book,” she says. “His expectations of me, his perception of me – I would have let him down if I had given up. So I couldn’t. I couldn’t give up.”

In her acceptance speech for the First Novel Award Thursday evening, Good talked about the guidance she received from her ancestors as she wrote the book: “I feel that their fingerprints are all over this.”

Good, who turns 65 in October, is working on a second book – a historical novel reaching back to the late 19th century. It has meant taking on a pile of research – which has been challenging but rewarding, she says.

“Time is of the essence, and I am such a firm believer that this is the life we’re given. This is not a dress rehearsal, and if there are things that you feel deeply moved to do, then you must do them – you must,” she says.

“Otherwise when the time comes for you to leap off this mortal coil, you will be filled with regret.”

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-drawing-on-her-familys-story-for-her-debut-novel-five-little-indians/

Michelle Good's "Five Little Indians" a fictional exploration of life after residential school

By **Marcia Kaye**Special to the Star
Thu., April 16,

Michelle Good never went to a residential school. But as the daughter and granddaughter of people who did, the long-time advocate for residential school survivors says a certain question often comes up. As she explains in a note to reviewers of her new book, it's a question that those who never attended such schools — the last of which closed almost a quarter-century ago — have for those who did: *Why can't they just get over it and move on?*

"I choose to believe that this response arises from a lack of awareness," she wrote. And as one who straddles both worlds — she didn't go to such a school but her life has been surrounded by survivors — she's well positioned to heighten that awareness. To that end, Good, a member of Saskatchewan's Red Pheasant Cree Nation, has written the novel "Five Little Indians."

Despite its glib title — a nod to the classic Agatha Christie mystery "Ten Little Indians," whose title in turn comes from an offensive 19th-century minstrel-show ditty — the novel is an intense depiction of how life unfolds for five likeable young people once they're out of residential school.

Good, who is also a lawyer, has certainly been political in her life as an advocate. But here, in "Five Little Indians," she's a storyteller. With her economical prose, she draws her characters with enormous compassion and without judgment.

While Good makes it clear these five young people suffered horrors during their years at an "Indian school" on Vancouver Island, she doesn't dwell on that. Instead, she follows their individual and interwoven lives after they were released — or escaped — from the school in the 1970s.

We know from the prologue that while not all the characters make it, some do, going beyond all expectations. It's that shimmering light that propels us through even the darkest scenes.

We first follow the sweetly rebellious Kenny, who successfully flees the school at age 13. He makes it home to his mother, who has missed him desperately. But after seven years without him, she no longer knows how to be a mother. "Aren't you glad I'm home?" he asks, confused when she continues to withdraw. She replies helplessly, "It's like most of me is gone and I can't get it back."

Adrift without skills, money or parenting, Kenny slides into the sordid life of Vancouver's Downtown East Side. He's hardworking and kind and tries to maintain steady jobs and tender relationships, but he's programmed to continually escape.

Meanwhile Lucy, released on her 16th birthday with nothing but a bus ticket to Vancouver, reconnects with a former schoolmate, Maisie. Lucy works as a cleaner in a fleabag hotel with an aim to saving money for a nursing program, but an unexpected romance threatens to derail her plans. Her friend Maisie, outwardly modest and conservative, has a secret and dangerous sex life, her deviant obsessions having been nurtured throughout her childhood by an abusive priest.

Another former schoolmate, Clara, channels her rage into the American Indian Movement at the time of the Wounded Knee occupation, risking her life by sneaking guns past National Guardsmen. When she's injured and sent to a remote Indigenous healer, she's torn between the spiritual mysteries of the sweat lodge and her remembered threats of eternal damnation from the school nuns.

The fifth young person, Howie, released from prison for almost killing his abuser, needs to learn to live in a world in which he has known nothing but institutions.

The dividing issue in the novel isn't race but rather the school experience itself. It's not just non-Indigenous people who don't understand what survivors went through or who try to minimize it. As one frustrated survivor says about her Indigenous boyfriend who was lucky enough to avoid living in such a school, "His parents told him about it, because they had gone to one of the Indian schools, but he didn't really understand. How could anyone?"

The braided stories of the five, whose lives connect and disconnect over the decades, help us see why they, striving to survive in a world for which they are woefully unprepared, make the choices they do.

In her author's note, Good wrote that her hope was to offer a safe space for readers to step into the survivors' world. She does just that. "Five Little Indians" opened my heart as well as my eyes.

Marcia Kaye is an award-winning journalist living in Aurora.

https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/04/16/michelle-goods-five-little-indians-a-fictional-exploration-of-life-after-residential-school.html

Discussion Questions

FIVE LITTLE INDIANS

There were no discussion questions out in the world for this book, but here are a few generic questions to get you thinking:

1. What was your favorite part of the book?
2. What was your least favorite?
3. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
4. Which scene has stuck with you the most?
5. What did you think of the writing? Are there any standout sentences?
6. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
7. Would you want to read another book by this author?
8. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
9. What surprised you most about the book?
10. How did your opinion of the book change as you read it?
11. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
12. How does the book's title work in relation to the book's contents? If you could give the book a new title, what would it be?
13. Is this book overrated or underrated?
14. Did this book remind you of any other books?
15. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
16. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
17. Who do you most want to read this book?
18. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?

https://www.theidesbookclub.com/2021-2022-books/five-little-indians/

Additional Information

Author website: https://www.michellegood.ca/

Video Interview:

Michelle Good on why she wrote Five Little Indians || TIFA 2020 (2:07 min.)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuvLDV1t4dw

Other Video Interviews:

https://www.google.com/search?q=michelle+good+&rlz=1C1GCEU_enCA834CA845&biw=1600&bih=789&tbm=vid&sxsrf=AOaemvLTtL8x3vtJF-1ljJri-8swchqPUg%3A1631739750274&ei=Zl9CYeKOEKCV0PEPhdm36AQ&oq=michelle+good+&gs_l=psy-ab-video.3..0i512i263i20k1j0i512k1l5j0i512i263i20k1j0i512k1l3.8508.8508.0.9737.1.1.0.0.0.0.172.172.0j1.1.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab-video..0.1.171....0.LVSOTO4F5BY