

#NATIVE READS

GREAT BOOKS from INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Lakota Way

by JOSEPH M. MARSHALL III

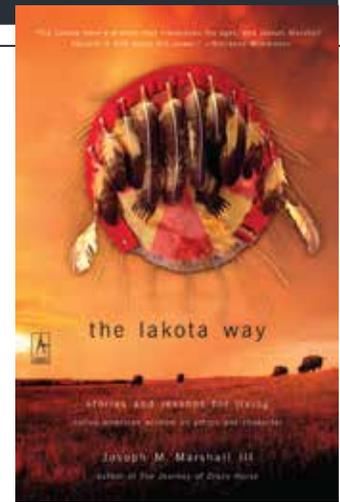
Author Biography

Joseph M. Marshall III is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota. He was reared by his maternal grandparents, and Lakota is his first language. In his traditional upbringing, he learned the art of Lakota oral storytelling. Marshall was taught by his grandfather the skill of crafting the traditional bow and arrow of the Lakota.

Marshall was a Charter Board Member of Sinte Gleska University, a tribal college in Rosebud, South Dakota. He was also a longtime high school and college educator. He currently writes full time.

Among his many accomplishments, Marshall has published 15 nonfiction works, three novels, a collection of short stories, plus essays and children's books. His work has been published in 11 languages. He is also a contributing author to five publications. He has written screenplays, appeared in television documentaries, and provided technical advice for films.

Marshall was recognized in 2016 by the American Indian Library Association. His most recent work is *Crazy Horse Weeps*



Book Summary

The Lakota Way is written in the oral storytelling style that is traditional to Oceti Sakowin. Traditional oral storytelling is handed down from one generation to the next to preserve the history and culture. This rich and beautiful technique is skillfully demonstrated throughout the narrative. The author weaves the story of his People as told to him by his grandparents through the 12 virtues that are the foundation of Oceti Sakowin cultural ways. These 12 virtues are Humility, Perseverance, Respect, Honor, Love, Sacrifice, Truth, Compassion, Bravery, Fortitude, Generosity and Wisdom. Each chapter gives an account of these virtues that are deeply rooted in Oceti Sakowin history and spirituality. These virtues define who the Oceti Sakowin Oyate are and connect the past to the future. The narrative speaks to the heart of a child to teach a lesson and, at the same time, speaks to the adult with deep wisdom.

The traditional values of the Oceti Sakowin Oyate are enduring life lessons that are relevant to the issues of current times. Each chapter of the *The Lakota Way* tells the story of the virtues by which the Oceti Sakowin leadership govern their people. These stories demonstrate how to live as a society with honor and respect. In the present day, society is in need of this kind of message that speaks about mutual respect as human beings. *The Lakota Way* gives voice to the value of who Indigenous people are, and the success of Native culture remaining intact calls for the 12 virtues that are embedded in Oceti Sakowin DNA. Following these 12 virtues creates a practical way of life that adds to the well-being of society.

Discussion Guide

This discussion guide was created by Oak Lake Writers' Society member Patty Bordeaux Nelson (*Sicangu Lakota*).

PRESENTED BY



FIRST NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



- 1 In the introduction of the *The Lakota Way*, Marshall states: "To the Lakota, virtues such as humility, respect, sacrifice, and honesty carry a different weight and substance than they do in Western culture." How does Western culture differ from Lakota culture? Provide examples of the differences. How does Western culture justify colonization?
- 2 Marshall uses the oral tradition of storytelling that has kept Native history and culture alive. After reading *The Lakota Way*, what stories returned to your memory that were told to you by someone? Share this story. Why do you think this method of storytelling is important to preserving and perpetuating culture?
- 3 Each Lakota virtue is introduced with the English word and translated into Lakota. Carefully examine Marshall's use and definitions of the Lakota language. What are the differences between English and Lakota?
- 4 In the Lakota language, *Unsiiciyapi* (un-shee-ee-cee-yah-pee) translates to humility. According to Marshall, it is the one virtue that enhances all the other virtues (p. 9). Crazy Horse, a renowned and highly respected leader/warrior of the Oceti Sakowin, possessed this virtue. Explain why this virtue is central to the Lakota way of life. Why is this virtue necessary to be a leader? What can be gained in our lives when humility is learned?
- 5 What is the lesson to be learned from Iktomi, the Trickster? (p. 13) How is Iktomi a lesson in our current political environment? What can be learned personally from Iktomi?
- 6 In the Lakota language, *Wayuonihan* (wah-you-o-knee-han) means to have integrity and to have an honest and upright character. Simply put, this translates to honor. What lesson was learned about honor in the story of the snake (p. 56)? How is humility also a central virtue promoted in this story?
- 7 Marshall states: "Like individuals, nations can be kind, generous, truthful, honest and courageous. To be honorable is to have integrity – to be honest – and to do what is morally correct." (p. 67) Discuss examples of honor in today's culture.
- 8 There are 12 Lakota virtues: Humility, Perseverance, Respect, Honor, Love, Sacrifice, Truth, Compassion, Bravery, Fortitude, Generosity, Wisdom. As a reader, which of these virtues had the most powerful impact on you? Do any of these lessons compel you to do something different in your personal life, workplace or community?
- 9 In the final chapter about wisdom, Marshall summarizes eloquently in a brief but sweeping statement that brings us full circle to who the Oceti Sakowin are. He says: "We have a life we can look back on, not because it's ending but because we have walked far and that journey is now our reward and our strength. We have acquired wisdom. Wisdom is life's gift to us, but it is also our gift to life." (p. 204-205) Discuss this statement. How have the adversities that the Lakota faced given us strength and wisdom? How can this wisdom help strengthen and improve America?
- 10 In the Afterword/Wicoiye Ihanke (p. 211), Marshall discusses the Lakota philosophy: *Mitakuye oyasin*, which translates to "All my relatives." He also tells of *kaohomni* (ga-oh-ho-mnee) or "the circle" (p. 223-26). How do these Lakota words encapsulate the 12 virtues?