

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *The Round House* opens with the quote: “Small trees had attacked my parents’ house at the foundation.” How does this statement relate to the story that unfolds?
2. In many ways, *The Round House* is a coming-of-age story. How does the novel fit that description? How does Joe’s relationship with his parents, his friends, and Sonja fit this theme?
3. Joe’s entire family is jolted by the violent assault of his mother, Geraldine. How does the attack change the nature of Joe’s relationship with his mother? How does it change the relationship between his parents?
4. Joe said, “My mother’s job was to know everybody’s secrets.” How does this knowledge empower Geraldine, and how does it make her life more difficult?
5. The round house is a sacred place to the Obijwe tribe and plays a critical role in the community. How would you characterize the significance of the round house? Why do you think that Erdrich placed the attack against Joe’s mother in the round house?
6. After the attack, Geraldine, is uncertain where it happened, whether it was technically on Reservation land or not. How does the legal relationship between the United States and the Ojibwe complicate the investigation?
7. Louise Erdrich said that she was inspired by the legacy of violence against American Indian women and the inability to prosecute non-natives on their own land. How might the story have been different if the Obijwe tribe had sovereignty to prosecute the attack against Joe’s mother?
8. When Joe makes his fateful decision concerning his mother’s attacker, he says it is about justice, not vengeance. What do you think? How does that decision change him? Does Joe’s decision change your perception of him?
9. The unique and rich cultures, traditions, beliefs, and histories of the Obijwe tribe are interwoven throughout the novel. How do you believe these traditions were valued by characters in the book, and how did other characters in the book denigrate the traditions? What role does prejudice against Obijwe tribe members play in the novel?
10. At the conclusion of the novel, when Joe’s parents are driving him home and they don’t stop at the roadside café, Erdrich writes “We passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into our small forever. We just kept going.” What do you think Erdrich meant by this statement?