

## The Birchbark House by Louise Erdrich

This is a great story by a local author. Many items mentioned within the story belong to our collection. Universal themes allow our to extend beyond the Americas galleries.

**Summary: The Birchbark House** transports the reader to an island in Lake Superior, in 1847, to live a full cycle of seasons through the eyes and voice of 7 year old Omakayas, a Anishinabe or Ojibwe Native American girl. As the family makes their annual move from their winter cedar cabin to the summer birchbark house near the water's edge we learn about Omakayas' family and community through her interactions with her siblings, parents, grandparents, neighbors, dreams and wildlife. Following the cycle of seasons, Erdrich richly details the Ojibwa traditions, customs, spiritual and daily life. Young readers will be mesmerized by Omakayas' struggles and triumphs as she tells them her secrets, her joys and her fears. The respect for nature, the family love, the labors of survival, the clash of the Ojibwa civilization with the chimookomanug, the white people or foreigners, combine to bring Omakayas' story to life. (Taken from <http://faculty.salisbury.edu/~elbond/birch.htm>.)

More on the book:

[http://www.trumpetclub.com/intermediate/activities/birchbark\\_house.htm](http://www.trumpetclub.com/intermediate/activities/birchbark_house.htm)

The Minnesota History Center/Minnesota Humanities Center exhibit, *Why Treaties Matter*, <http://treatiesmatter.org/exhibit/>, includes information on Ojibwe and Dakota from local experts

Louise Erdrich:

- PBS *Faces Of America* program:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/facesofamerica/profiles/louise-erdrich/10/>

- Louise Erdrich's Store: <http://birchbarkbooks.com>

### **Themes/Concepts**

- Thanks and blessing with tobacco
- Relationships with animals (pests, pets, protectors, respected food source)/importance of how you treat them
- Seasons – how they affect life
- Food - gathering, storing, feasts, starvation
- Clans/totems/dodems
- Creation story
- Teaching through stories
- Family, sibling love and conflict
- Wisdom of elders
- Love
- Adaptation (learn new ways, but remain Anishinabe)
- Making clothing (tanning, beading)
- Spirits/visions/dreams
- Shelter/home (birchbark, cabin)
- Finding your life's work/role in community, Learning Who you Are
- Mother/Grandmother Love

- Sacred spaces
- Bears - “they are a different kind of people from us”, healers
- Drums – calling people to a good way of life – love kindness, respect
- Disease, quarantine, death
- Import of Names - “Little Frog”, Fourth
- Trade between cultures
- Literacy
- Healing - medicine and laughter
- Crossing gender barrier (Two Strides)

**General and specific potential works in random order**

- Bandolier Bags
- Quill Work
- Cradleboard
- American Indian Clothing (AAGDress) – moccasins, bead work, wedding blanket, feathered fan, honor shirt, jingle dress, mirror case
- Yoruba Crown, N'Kisi N'Kondi – medicine bundles
- Ivory Tusk – stories
- Butterfly Maiden Kachina – teaching tool
- Nayarit House – spirit world
- M'ing Chi objects and Spirit Jar (hun ping) – spirit world
- Japanese Boys' Coats – totems/inspiring objects
- Crows and Cryptomeria, Japan - companion crow, Andeg
- Chessboards
- Wenzel Fredrich Stool - composite like Old Tallow's coat
- Senofo Fire Mask - instill fear of wild, try to guide behavior
- Tobacco Jar by Florence Willets
- Frog ring, pendant, more - relate to main character and creation story (little one can do much)
- Scissors (precious shared commodity) is in same case as Chinese frog jewelry