

History of Wolves (Fridlund)

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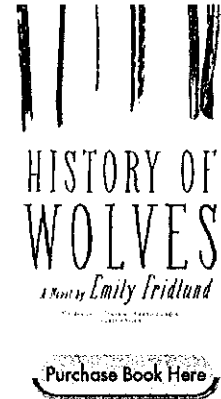
History of Wolves

Emily Fridlund, 2017

Atlantic/Grove

288 pp.

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Summary

Fourteen-year-old Linda lives with her parents in the beautiful, austere woods of northern Minnesota, where their nearly abandoned commune stands as a last vestige of a lost counter-culture world.

Isolated at home and an outlander at school, Linda is drawn to the enigmatic, attractive Lily and new history teacher Mr. Grierson. When Mr. Grierson is charged with possessing child pornography, the implications of his arrest deeply affect Linda as she wrestles with her own fledgling desires and craving to belong.

And then the young Gardner family moves in across the lake and Linda finds herself welcomed into their home as a babysitter for their little boy, Paul. It seems that her life finally has purpose but with this new sense of belonging she is also drawn into secrets she doesn't understand.

Over the course of a few days, Linda makes a set of choices that reverberate throughout her life. As she struggles to find a way out of the sequestered world into which she was born, Linda confronts the life-and-death consequences of the things people do—and fail to do—for the people they love.

Winner of the McGinnis-Ritchie award for its first chapter, Emily Fridlund's propulsive and gorgeously written *History of Wolves* introduces a new writer of enormous range and talent. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—N/A
- Where—Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
- Education—M.F.A., Washington University; Ph.D., University of Southern California
- Awards—Mary McCarthy Prize; McGinnis-Ritchie Award
- Currently—lives in Ithaca, New York

Emily Fridlund grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She earned an M.F.A. from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and holds a Ph.D. in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Southern California.

Fridlund's fiction has appeared in a variety of journals, including *Boston Review*, *Five Chapters*, *New Orleans Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Chariton Review*, *Portland Review*, and *Painted Bride Quarterly*.

Her collection of stories, *Catapult*, was a finalist for the Noemi Book Award for Fiction and the Tartts First Fiction Award. It won the Mary McCarthy Prize and was published in 2017. The opening chapter of *History of Wolves* was published in *Southwest Review* and won the 2013 McGinnis-Ritchie Award for Fiction.

Fridlund teaches at Cornell University in Ithaca, part of the Finger Lakes region of New York State. (*From the publisher.*)

Book Reviews

Few images in contemporary fiction have struck me as forcefully as that of Patra bent over in the driveway in anguish.... Fridlund has a tendency to...use two adjectives where one would do. But she is masterly when she lets more scraped-down prose push a series of elemental questions to the fore: Do intentions matter? What price will you pay to feel wanted?... The result is a novel of ideas that reads like smart pulp, a page-turner of craft and calibration.

Megan Hustad - New York Times Book Review

(*Starred review.*) [A] stellar debut.... [Fridlund's] wordsmithing is fantastic, rife with vivid turns of phrase. Fridlund has elegantly crafted a striking protagonist whose dark leanings cap off the tragedy at the heart of this book, which is moving and disturbing, and which will stay with the reader.

Publishers Weekly

Fridlund is a fine writer who excels at getting inside the head of an unhappy youth and revealing how neglect and isolation scar a child for life. Yet this first novel, as cold and bleak as a Minnesota winter, may be too dark for some readers. —*Leslie Patterson, Rehoboth, MA*

Library Journal

The writing is beautiful....a triumph of tone and attitude. Lovers of character-driven literary fiction will embrace this.

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) An atmospheric, near-gothic coming-of-age novel turns on the dance between predator and prey.... Fridlund is an assured writer.... The novel has a tinge of fairy tale, wavering on the blur between good and evil, thought and action. But the sharp consequences for its characters make it sing and sing—a literary tour de force.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, use our LitLovers talking points to help start a discussion for History of Wolves...then take off on your own:

1. How would you describe young Linda, not as a narrator of 37 but as she was in her teenage years? Do you consider her a sociopath, a narcissist, or simply a self-protective teenager?
2. *Follow-up to Question 1:* Is there a difference between Linda's adult voice as narrator and her younger self? Has she acquired wisdom since that fateful time in the woods?
3. What creates the bond between Linda and Patra and Paul—what draws them to one another?
4. Talk about Linda's parents and the way in which the author sets the two families up in contrast to one another.
5. *Follow-up to Questions 3 and 4:* One of the themes within *History of Wolves* is what constitutes family: is it flesh and blood...or is it something else? Talk about the nature of being a family.
6. How do the household dynamics change when Leo returns home to Patra and Paul?
7. Do a bit of research into Christian Science—consider its history and some of its tenets.
8. What do you think about the tragedy at the heart of this novel? To what extent does a family have the right to follow its own deeply-held religious beliefs?
9. In what way could you say that Linda's comment—"It's not what you think but what you do"—represents one of the moral lessons of the novel?
10. Mr. Grierson appears in the opening of the book, then disappears from the action, only to reappear again. His story can be seen as a parallel to Patra's, yet they are treated differently under the law. Are their respective treatments just?

11. In what way does the novel's setting, the frigid winter conditions of northern Minnesota, contribute to the story. Consider, for instance, that the weather deprives humans of warmth or comfort. Does the cold, perhaps, mirror human contact?

12. Consider the title, "History of Wolves." What is its significance to the book's thematic concerns?

13. Do the shifting time frames make this book confusing...or do they add to its propulsive nature?

(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

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