

The Seed Keeper by Diane Wilson

Diane Wilson is a Dakota writer and educator who has published four award-winning books as well as essays in numerous publications. In her writing, she uses personal experience to illustrate broader social and historical context. Her novel *The Seed Keeper* received the 2022 Minnesota Book Award for Fiction. Wilson is a Mdewakanton descendent, enrolled on the Rosebud Reservation. *The Seed Keeper* was a Lake Forest Reads title.

1. The cover of *The Seed Keeper* brings together two forms of art with uniquely Dakota legacies: keeping seeds and Dakota floral beadwork, created by Holly Young. Interestingly, the type of beads used are actually called seed beads. How do you think this cover ties in with the novel? Does it connect with and reflect the themes of the story?
2. Diane Wilson starts her novel in the winter, which may not be the most obvious season to open with. There are a few hints in the first chapter about how to understand the importance of winter for seeds, when Rosalie's father describes the season as a time of rest. What role does winter play in starting this narrative? What does winter perhaps unexpectedly reveal about seeds?
3. Rosalie and Ida's friendship is a powerful reminder that while we inherit a past legacy from those who come before us, we each get to choose the way we allow that legacy to influence how we conduct our lives. Can we glean lessons on reconciliation, with others and with the earth, from the way this friendship is portrayed in the novel? If so, what might they be? If not, why do you think that is?
4. Rosalie and Gaby are frequently portrayed as opposites—Rosalie calls them “the mouth and the ears.” Compare and contrast their approaches to activism and their relationships to identity and community. What does their friendship tell us about the different roles we can play in social movements? What do you think Rosalie and Gaby learn from each other?
5. How does Wilson feature storytelling within Rosalie's community and personal story (in both linear and non-linear ways) to enrich the history and legacy within the characters?
6. *The Seed Keeper* grapples directly with themes of environmental degradation, specifically at the hands of corporate agriculture and genetically modified seeds that are protected by copyright. Ultimately, this corporate agricultural industry impacts the entire community in which Rosalie and her family are living. What elements of this conflict struck you? What impacts are industries like this having on communities today?

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7. *The Seed Keeper* also highlights the tension between viewing seeds through a lens of reciprocity as opposed to regarding seeds solely as commodities. How does Wilson illustrate this tension in the ways Rosalie and her husband John communicate and interact?
8. Consider the way the various timelines and characters are tied together in the conclusion of the novel. Why was it important for the author to show these experiences across time? In what ways do these interwoven stories allow readers to reflect on intergenerational trauma, and more broadly, the role the past plays in the present and future, particularly in Indigenous communities?
9. The closing epigraph of this book is a prayer: “Love the seeds as you love your children, and the people will survive. Wačhékiye.” Consider this prayer and Rosalie’s connection with her son. What is the significance of this parallel between Wakpa/Tommy and the seeds? What do you think happens after the novel ends? How might the seeds act as a bridge for Tommy to find his way back to his own Dakhóta heritage?
10. In the Author’s Note, Wilson tells us that this story was inspired by the true story of Dakhóta women hiding seeds in their skirts while being forcibly removed from their homelands, noting that they are “the reason why we have Dakhóta corn today.” Were you aware of this history before reading this novel? What does this suggest about the nature of sacrifice?
11. One of the major themes of this novel is the idea of seeds as knowledge holders, story keepers, and a way to connect with our heritage and past generations. What did you think of the author’s choice to represent seeds this way? Was it an effective way to tell the story? Did this make you reconsider your relationship with the food that you eat?
12. When she isn’t writing, Wilson works with the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance. This nonprofit organization works to support Native communities in reclaiming their sovereign food systems. Share an example of a food item, a meal, or a method of gathering, cooking, or sharing food that has taught you something meaningful about your identity and connection to your ancestors.
13. Which tribes and Indigenous communities live near your home? Which crops and harvests do they hold sacred, and are they still able to grow them? Have you eaten these foods?