

# Waterlily



Ella Cara Deloria

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**Waterlily** Ella Cara Deloria , Raymond J. Demallie (Afterword)

This novel of the Dakota Sioux written by Sioux ethnologist Deloria takes protagonist Waterlily through the everyday and the extraordinary events of a Sioux woman's life.

## Waterlily Details

Date : Published August 1st 1990 by Bison Books (first published 1988)

ISBN : 9780803265790

Author : Ella Cara Deloria , Raymond J. Demallie (Afterword)

Format : Paperback 244 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Academic, School, Read For School

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## From Reader Review Waterlily for online ebook

### **Jay says**

This is a great showcase of Dakota culture at the turn of the century. So much culture is expressed in the story of a young woman - it is calculated to capture as much of the culture as possible in the story of Waterlily from birth up to her second marriage. Just a great book; I wanted to live inside its world more than any book I've read in a long time. (March 16, 2012)

On a second reading, I am again struck by the careful construction Deloria had to exert in order to seamlessly integrate a reader completely unfamiliar with Dakota culture into their ways of life. The book focuses much on how children are raised, and indeed this is a good way to communicate a culture, since so much revolves around how children are raised, and what they grow up to be, within their cultures. Blue Bird and Waterlily's stories twist together with the other characters in the book so well that one understands what it is like to not only grow up as a privileged and beloved female, but also as an abandoned one, and as a male in all aspects, communicated through Waterlily's interactions with her brothers, cousins, and husbands. The single Waterlily character represents growing up as a woman in Dakota culture: it is clear that she is not a person, she is a living, breathing, metaphor who takes shape as a person because that is the best way to communicate the culture in which she lives. I would recommend this book for anyone middle school and older. The language itself would be challenging to a younger middle school reader, but easily handled by a high school reader. There is no foul language, sex scenes, or graphic violent scenes. Any death or violence (which must exist because it exists among the plains people and leaving it out would be leaving out a significant part of their culture) is artfully addressed and focuses more on the repercussions than on the events themselves.

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### **Maura W. says**

This is a simple, placid read. It's more of a fictional biography than a novel, with no obvious ongoing conflict and no grandiose swoops of plot and arcs of character. Rather, the book is a subtle explanation and clarification of Dakota (Sioux) culture through the coming-of-age story of the main character, Waterlily. It's not a quick and easy read, but it is peaceful and satisfying. Even the bits about smallpox, in a weird sort of way.

*Waterlily* is a very dignified book. If you like that sort of thing, check it out.

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### **Will Waller says**

This book was read in preparation of my upcoming trip to South Dakota in January for an immersion to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Reading this book on Lakota life really opened up new doors for me. I don't think I've ever read anything about Native Americans, much less such a lucid novel about one woman in the tribe. The writing is clear and to the point without much fluff. It's written by 1/4 Indian in the 20th century who had done significant ethnography on Lakotas and their language. It's something I certainly never would have picked up unless I had been assigned it for my trip. What I'm struck by is that they are (to most readers of Indian literature this will be a no-brainer) quite known for their artwork and for their spiritual nature, although this doesn't come across as strongly for the women in the tipospaye (the tipi circle). For the women,

they are very industrious in keeping and storing the meat and provide a safe haven for their men. Many of the women are laconic, which I did not know, but care deeply for their kinsmen.

A good read but because I'm a 21st century male, who has been deeply affected by Michael Bay and Steven Spielberg this book was a tough slog.

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### **Gina says**

I wouldn't read this primarily for its literary merits, I would read it to learn about the Dakota way of life through an anthropological lens. That said, I did come to genuinely believe in and care about the characters, so the book is not \*without\* literary merit. I never got bored. Ella Deloria stops at least once a page to explain the customs of the characters, which interrupts the narrative, but because I actually wanted to learn about these customs, I didn't mind that. I loved it. And I am now totally obsessed with the very different outlook presented in this novel. I think she does a good job of showing a very different way of life without editorializing. She doesn't put Dakota values up on a pedestal, nor does she seem in any way judgmental of them. She leaves that to her readers. I came away wishing my own culture possessed the wisdom and beauty of many Dakota practices, while at the same time being able to recognize the things that would make growing up in that culture frustrating. There is no such thing as a perfect culture, but it is nice to be exposed to alternatives.

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### **Brandie Larkin says**

Read this many years ago, but I remember I absolutely loved it. I felt like I was in the lives and culture of the characters. Deloria has extensive knowledge of Sioux culture and translated it beautifully into what I believe to be (and sadly) her only novel

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### **Sarah says**

The first Native American(another powerful Sioux woman) to become a linguist and to scientifically put Sioux language on the map. Her family is still strong within both the Dakota and the academic community.(one of her descendants, Vine DeLoria headed the American Indian Law Dept at Berkeley). This is a coming of age novel set in the Dakota community around the time when the first western settlers were coming to what we now call the US.

What is beautiful and endearing about this book is that it is through the eyes of a young woman becoming an adult and it centers on the Lakota community-not on the conflict between European settlers and the Natives. It is a peek inside the native world before it would be changed forever.

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### **Julie Fischer says**

An excellent historical fiction story, "Waterlily" By Ella Cara Deloria, amazed me at how these people lived in such a harsh environment. The manners they taught their children led to good people who were family oriented and respected both man and their environment. The young males dedicated themselves to their tribe

by doing the Sun Dance where they lived through torturous acts. Females dedicated themselves to caring for their family as well as those in the tribe who needed their help also. There were many rituals which included their entire community, making them more dedicated to their society rules.

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### **Mel McDaniel says**

A simple, yet insightful, look at Sioux life. Struck yet again by the beauty, restraint and complex social rules of the Sioux way. The hospitality, the responsibility, the strong sense of community is all portrayed in rich detail. A way of life that disappeared so our way could come - what shame and sadness.

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### **Judy says**

This is a "must read" for anyone interested in plains history. An authentic picture of Native American Life, written by a Native American with a ph.d

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### **Libby says**

I really enjoyed reading this book. Ella Cara Deloria's character development of Waterlily allows the reader to see what her culture is like. I laughed when Waterlily and her family cheered on Lawanla as he was very brave and went through the agonies of his first Sun Dance, and I was very sad for Sacred Horse when he faced the very long and cold night alone. I only have one complaint: this book should have been longer. There are so many other things about the Dakota Indians that I would still like to find out about. I'm very sorry that Ella Cara Deloria didn't write a sequel to Waterlily. I recommend the book Waterlily to anyone that wants to find out more about the Dakota culture. My favorite character in this book is Waterlily. Because, even though she has to face tragedy throughout the book Waterlily goes forward with her life.

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### **Melanie says**

I'm reading this for a book discussion. It was not one that I would normally have chosen. However, I quickly got drawn into Blue Bird and Waterlily's story. I saw other reviews say that this was slow moving, and I can only think this is because it is about an ordinary life. I found Waterlily beautifully written, and I gained much appreciation for the Sioux way of life.

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### **Michelle says**

I thought that because it was an assigned reading for my native american history class that this book was going to be dry. I found it to be quite the opposite and really enjoyed learning about the family dynamics found in the Dakota tribe. I would highly recommend this story to anyone interested in learning more about Native Americans.

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### **Maria Catherino says**

Waterlily is an important and complex book. It isn't quite historical record nor does it read like most historical fiction. Deloria vividly recreates everyday life for the Dakotas in the nineteenth-century from field research and interviews. She tells the story of Blue Bird, her daughter Waterlily, and, their society built of kinship rules.

A difficult read the point lies less in development of characters and more in the development of the time period. This is further complicated by the fact the Deloria herself never saw publication of this book. Constant criticism to cut down the length and cut scenes that would not interest white audiences led her to many rewrites never coming together in a "publishable" version in her lifetime. Deloria faced significant challenges completing her work. Being both a woman and a Sioux Indian never received the credit she deserved for her invaluable contributions to ethnology.

Waterlily is a triumph. It is the masterwork of Ella Deloria. What it lacks in modern readability it more than makes up in its invaluable historical significance and in the harrowing history of the manuscript itself.

Waterlily: New Edition

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### **Jenni says**

It is very interesting to read a story from the Native American point of view during the start of the "Manifest Destiny" era. While the writing style is not my favorite, it is written in a way that anyone can understand. The severe lack of comparable novels makes this a must read, especially for anyone interested in the other side of Native American history which is not usually taught in k-12.

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### **devin strauch says**

I learned so much from this book! It gives such a good view into the workings of a Dakota family.

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